



Helping Your Cat Adjust to a New Home



Adjusting to a new home can be a tense and frightening experience for a cat. Your patience and understanding during the initial adjustment period can do a lot to help your new cat feel at home.

THE RIDE HOME

Riding in a car can be traumatic for cats. Your cat or kitten should be confined to a carrier during the ride home as well as during subsequent trips to the veterinarian. Do not let your new cat loose in a moving car.

THE NEW HOME

Consider your companion's past experiences. Your kitten may have been recently separated from his mother and litter mates. The kitten or cat has had to cope with the transition of a shelter and the stress of surgery. The adult cat may have been separated from a familiar home and forced to break a bond with human companions or other animals. Now he must adjust again to totally new surroundings.

Allow your cat several weeks to adapt. It's not uncommon for cats to display behavior problems during the first days in a new home, but these usually disappear over time. New cats and kittens often bolt under furniture. Some may spend hours or even days hiding. Sit and talk quietly to the cat. If you must take the cat out of his hiding place, carry him gently to a quiet protected area where he will feel secure.

THE FIRST DAY

Introduce your cat to his new home gradually, restricting him to one room at first where there is a litter box, food and water.

Isolate other animals from your new cat during this time. Supervise children, advising them to always be gentle with the cat. Have the litter box ready when you remove the cat from the carrier. Show him the location of the litter box. If you have 2 floors, place a litter box on each floor. Your cat may be bewildered, fearful or curious. Do not overwhelm him with attention or demands. It is not unusual for cats to leap on top of very high furniture in order to explore or to feel secure. When he is ready, he will come down alone. Try to spend several hours with your new cat as he becomes accustomed to your home. Your sensitive handling of the initial transition can ease the trauma and set the stage for a happy settling-in.

INTRODUCTION TO OTHER ANIMALS

The ability of animals to get along together in the same household depends on their individual personalities. There will always be one who dominates. A new cat will often upset the existing pecking order or the old cat or dog may feel it necessary to establish dominance immediately. Wise handling of the "getting acquainted" period is an important factor in the successful introduction of a new cat. The first week or two may be hectic, frustrating and time consuming. Be patient. The adjustment will take time.

Keep your dog confined until the cat feels secure in his new home. Introduce them indoors with the dog under control on a leash. Do not allow the dog to chase or corner the cat, even out of playfulness or curiosity. Supervise them carefully and don't tolerate any aggressive behavior from your dog. The cat should have a safe retreat, either up high or in a room inaccessible to the dog.

An adult cat may swat a dog to set limits. Allow your animals to accept one another in their own time and don't leave them alone together until this is accomplished. Never force interaction. Many cats and dogs become companions and playmates while others simply tolerate each other. Be sure to give your dog lots of extra attention to avoid jealous reactions.

Spayed or neutered cats are generally more accepting of other cats. Adult cats are generally more accepting of kittens than of other adults. Two altered adult cats often become friends in the same home.

SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS

Most cats choose several favorite sleeping spots where they can be comfortable, warm, and free from drafts. Providing a bed for your cat may discourage him from sleeping on furniture. A cozy box or basket lined with soft, washable bedding and placed in a quiet corner makes a suitable cat bed.



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Many dogs and cats get along very well. Dogs who are gentle and friendly and aren't squirrel-chasing, predatory types can be great housemates with cats. Even dogs who do chase small prey outdoors can often learn not to chase or harm cats indoors once they've grown accustomed to their household cats as family members. Although you should carefully prepare and supervise your new dog, you should have little trouble integrating him into your household if he's lived peacefully with a cat before or if your cat has lived with a dog. But keep in mind that dogs and cats, like people, need time to get to know each other. If they've never seen each other before, they probably won't be instant friends.

Since cats take awhile to accept new cats, your cat might not accept a new dog as quickly as you'd like. It might take years for a trusting, mutually agreeable relationship to develop between a cat and dog who live together. The younger, more energetic and more tolerant your cat is and the smaller, calmer and more obedient your new dog is, the more likely it is that your cat will accept living with a canine companion.

Know What to Expect

Dogs who have never lived with cats usually react to them one of three ways:

- **Play.** Your new dog might treat your cat like another dog and try to play with her, particularly if your dog is young and your cat is inquisitive and approaches him. If your cat is young and your dog is small, this interaction can lay the groundwork for a strong, relationship between the two. However, it's more common for cats to react defensively to an invitation to play from a strange dog—or even a new, young cat. Cats generally don't play as rambunctiously as dogs, and dogs often chase and bite during play. If your cat is older or your new dog is large, your dog's playful behavior can be even more problematic. Play between dogs and cats should be closely monitored. Playful dogs often don't respond appropriately to a cat's signals to stop, and the tension or aggression between the two can escalate rapidly, causing the cat distress and putting her in danger. Keep in mind that a dog can kill a cat easily, even in play. And a scared or angry cat can use her claws to seriously injure a dog.
- **Prey.** Unfortunately, dogs often perceive cats as prey. This is especially likely if your cat runs when she sees a dog. Your new dog might respond to your cat's movement as he would to the

movement of a fleeing prey animal. He might chase and even kill your cat. Similarly, cats who have never lived with dogs will likely view them as predators and will run or become defensively aggressive.

- Cautious interest or avoidance. An older or quieter dog might be intimidated by your cat, particularly if she's young or rambunctious. He might approach your cat cautiously or watch her from a distance and avoid her whenever possible.

Cats who have never lived with dogs generally react to them one of two ways:

- Cautious interest or avoidance. Cats who were raised with dogs, young or confident cats, and cats living in multicat households might accept a new dog as a safe and interesting intruder. Their reaction might be to watch the dog from a distance or approach him inquisitively.
- Defensive antagonism. Many cats don't accept the introduction of new animals well. They consider other animals as intruders in their territory. And cats, unlike dogs, don't have a built-in social system that helps them to peacefully share territory. They react defensively.

How to Set Up Safe, Successful Introductions

It's up to you to protect your cat and set up introductions carefully so that she feels safe and has a pleasant experience getting acquainted with your new dog.

Here are some suggestions for making the most of introductions:

- Trim your cat's claws to keep the interaction as safe as possible for your new dog. (To learn how, please see our article, [Trimming Your Cat's Claws](#) [1], for detailed instructions.)
- First impressions are important to a cat, so you want the initial meetings to be as stress-free as possible for her. Before you bring your cat and new dog together, prepare for their first introduction by working with your cat to teach her to redirect her attention to you.
- Begin by identifying some treats that she likes best. Most cats prefer soft foods heavy with scent, like tuna or small pieces of chicken.
- Bring your cat and the treats into the room where you'll likely do your introductions. Then wait for her to look away from you. When she's not looking at you, say her name. When she looks back, quickly praise her and give her a treat. Gradually allow her to get further away before you call her name so that she has to move toward you to get the treats. Never yell or discipline her if she doesn't react to her name. After some practice, she'll begin to respond consistently because she'll learn that when she responds to her name, you give her treats. If you attempt to discipline her for not responding, she could easily associate her name with your anger—and that's the opposite of what you want to teach her!
- Before you introduce your new dog and your cat, work with your dog separately to teach or refresh some obedience skills. Two important exercises for him to learn well are a recall (coming when called) and a "leave it" exercise. When your dog has learned these skills, you can control him if he gets overexcited around your cat. If you're not sure how to teach your dog these skills, please see our articles, [Teaching Your Dog to Come When Called](#) [2], [Teaching Your Dog to "Leave It"](#) [3] and [Training Your Dog](#) [4]. Also, don't hesitate to contact a Certified Professional Dog Trainer (CPDT) in your area for assistance. Please see our article, [Finding Professional Help](#) [5], to locate a CPDT near you.
- At first, confine your new dog to a room using a baby gate. Don't restrict your cat or change her environment any more than necessary. You can start to introduce your cat and your dog near the doorway to that room, with the baby gate between them.
- To prepare for this first meeting, start by taking your dog outside and running him around to help him work off a bit of energy. Bring delicious treats that your new dog will love, like bite-sized pieces of chicken or cheese. Practice sit, down and stay after he's run around for a while and seems to be getting tired. Then bring him inside and put him in his room, behind the baby gate.

- Next, fill your pockets with your cat's favorite treats. If your new dog is rambunctious, put his leash on him and have someone on his side of the gate to handle the leash.
- Sit in front of the door and call your cat. Have your dog lie down or sit to keep him from behaving threateningly as she approaches.
- When your cat comes, toss her a treat. Praise and treat your dog as well if he behaves calmly in her presence. Do this several times each day for a couple of days. This way, your cat will associate your dog with delicious treats and vice versa.
- If your dog overreacts to your cat and does something that makes your cat back away from him, distract him and get his attention focused on you. Avoid accomplishing this by using leash corrections. Instead, get your dog's attention by asking him to sit or lie down. Use treats to reward him for his fabulous obedience when something as interesting and distracting as your cat is nearby! Your cat should be free to approach the baby gate and get closer to your dog or to retreat if she wants to. Reward her any time she approaches the baby gate by tossing her treats.
- Let your cat set the pace. Never attempt to force any interactions by holding your cat, putting her into a crate or carrier or restricting her movement in any way. If she doesn't seem afraid of your dog, or if she even tries to jump over the gate to see him, you can introduce them in your living room or another large room with your dog on leash. Once you're in the larger room, make sure your cat can get away from your dog during the introduction. She should have the freedom and room to retreat, run and hide, slip beneath a piece of furniture where the dog can't follow, or jump up on something that puts her above your dog. Continue introductions until your pets interact in a calm, friendly manner. Cats often bat at a dog they accept with their claws sheathed or rub against him, and dogs respond by gently nudging back or offering a play bow.
- Keep your dog on-leash during these introductions in the living room and for the first couple of weeks. Allow the leash to be loose, but hold it firmly in case your dog decides to try to chase your cat. Use your recall and "leave it" exercises if your dog starts nosing or following your cat and she seems perturbed. When you ask your dog to come to you or leave your cat alone and he responds, be sure to give him a special treat.
- If your dog seems friendly or cautious, not much intervention on your part is required except to praise and reward your dog for his good manners and your cat for her tolerance.
- Be careful to watch your cat as well as your dog. One well-aimed cat paw with all claws extended can cause serious injury to a dog.
- Interrupt any chasing, barking or agitated behavior from your dog by using a leash to move him away from your cat. Redirect his attention to another activity, or ask him to do some easy obedience exercises for food rewards. To redirect your cat's attention, call her name and use treat rewards like you practiced before bringing your new dog home. Avoid scolding your dog, yelling at him or jerking on his leash. A positive approach is crucial because you want your cat and dog to associate each other with pleasant experiences. You don't want them to learn that everyone gets tense and angry and that bad things happen when the other pet is around. Dogs are more likely to engage in chase or prey behavior when they're tense or aroused, and cats develop many undesirable behaviors—such as urine marking, excessive grooming, hiding and aggression—when they're stressed or anxious.
- When you're not around or can't directly supervise, keep your cat and dog confined in separate areas of your house. Most dogs and cats can share a home in harmony once they've gradually become accustomed to each other over time. However, if your dog chases your cat or ever shows intolerance toward your cat in your presence—such as growling when she walks past while he's chewing a bone or being petted by you—keep them separated in your absence.
- Your dog shouldn't have access to your cat's litter box. If he does, it will be highly stressful to your cat, and your dog might eat the feces and litter.
- To prevent your dog from eating your cat's food, consider feeding her on a high surface, like a windowsill, a dresser, a shelf or cat tree furniture.