

Tips for Introducing a New Dog to Your cat

If you already have a cat or multiple cats, the first step in bringing home a new dog is to make sure that the new dog is friendly to cats. Many shelters will “cat test” dogs by having the dog near a cat to see how he or she reacts.

While this will not tell you with absolute certainty that the dog will be good with your cats, it will at least show you which dogs are *definitely* bad with cats.

A dog that seems indifferent or has no reaction when brought near a cat in the shelter may show different behaviors in the home – until you have the new dog in your home you cannot be completely sure of how he will act. It’s possible that a dog that ignores a confident, uninterested cat at the shelter may chase a shy or frightened cat in your home with great zeal.

Follow these tips when bringing your new dog home:

- When you first bring a new dog home, it is very likely that your cat will hiss and show signs of fear or aggression. This is normal and your cat should acclimate to the dog over time. It’s important to know to not punish your cat for showing you that he is upset with the new arrival, as this will only make it harder for the cat to feel safe around the dog.
- When you bring the dog home, make sure he is on-leash so that you can control his interaction with the cat. Do not force any interactions between them and let them meet at their own pace. Your cat should have places to go to “escape” from the dog, such as high cat trees or open doors. You want to minimize the cat’s level of stress as much as possible.
- Watch your new dog’s reaction to the cat while on-leash. You want to see positive signs from the dog such as mild interest, wagging his tail gently, backing away, or ignoring the cat. However, if you see the dog stiffening with ears alert and pricked, staring intently at the cat, and growling and straining at the leash, these are signs that your dog may be too predatory in nature to live successfully with a cat.
- You must always observe and supervise all interactions between the dog and cat for the first few weeks before allowing them to be alone together. If you need to leave them alone during this initial period, keep them separated either in separate rooms, or with secure baby gates that the dog cannot jump over or by crating the dog. Make sure the cat has access to his food and water and litter box during these times.

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- If the dog starts to chase the cat, redirect his attention as quickly as possible to something equally fun and interesting like playing with a toy, a food reward, petting and praise or having him sit or lie down. Many times dogs will chase cats because the running excites their instinctual drives, but once the cat stops running the dog will give up the “game.”
- Be sure to give lots of extra love and affection to your cat during this time to help reduce his stress. Try to associate the dog with positive things for the cat, like being brushed, cat treats or a favorite cat toy.
- Don't allow the dog to get into the cat's litterbox. Most dogs will try to eat the cat's feces and can ingest the litter. Also, the cat will smell the dog in his box and may possibly refuse to use it.



If you need more assistance with acclimating your new dog in your home, visit the Association of Pet Dog Trainers' Web site at www.apdt.com to find a member near you.

To locate a local professional pet sitter to provide dog walks or in-home pet-sitting visits for cats or dogs, please visit the Pet Sitter Locator at www.petsit.com/locate.

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