

Introducing Dogs and Cats

Many people believe that dogs and cats are natural enemies. While it is true that some dogs find chasing cats rewarding, there are thousands of dogs and cats living together happily. If puppies and kittens are given the chance to meet friendly adult dogs and cats, they have a good chance of getting on well as adults. Sometimes this is not possible, or the background of the dog is unknown. In these instances, the introduction must be very gradual and under control to prevent either animal from becoming frightened or injured. This factsheet will outline ways in which you can manage this introduction safely.

Consider the Cat

Before introducing a dog to a household where there are resident cats, the cat's feelings must be considered.

If you have a cat who is frightened of dogs, it may not be fair on the cat to bring a dog into your home. In some cases, the introduction of a dog can lead to a lot of stress for the cat and this is not recommended.

Before introducing a new dog to your household there are things that you can do to help your cat feel safer. The following guidelines will give you the chance to introduce a new dog to your household without causing too much upset for your cat.

Preparation For the cat

- Make sure that there will be dog free zones in the house where the cat can feel safe and relaxed. It is important that the cat can get to its litter tray and feeding areas without having to meet the dog, so you may have to put in a cat flap in an upstairs window and move litter trays and feeding bowls.
- Shelving is a very good way to give the cat freedom of the house. Shelving can be built up high, near the ceiling with access ramps in areas that the dog cannot reach. The cat's food and bedding can be placed up on the shelves so the cat can come into rooms where the dog will be allowed, but feel safe and confident.
- Before bringing the dog home, it can be useful to bring some used bedding from the dog and leave it in the house in areas where the cat can smell the dog before they come to live.
- Always make sure the cat has a clear escape route from any place in the house where they might meet the dog.

For the Dog

- Spend time with the dog before bringing them home, teaching them basic obedience commands.
- Before bringing them into your house for the first time, make sure the cat is out of the way and that the dog has been well exercised.
- Prepare bedding areas for the dog in a quiet location, where they are unlikely to see the cat on a regular basis. For example, if the cat has to go through a cat flap in the kitchen to get outside, the dog's bed should not be in the kitchen.
- Be aware that most dogs love cat food and will eat it given the chance, so do not have cat food bowls in areas that the dog can reach.

Meeting for the first time

- An indoor kennel is an important piece of equipment to have when introducing a dog to a house where there is a cat resident.
- The first time the dog and cat meet, both should be contained & controlled. It is best to have the dog on a lead and the cat in a carrier or indoor kennel.
- During a quiet time, bring the cat into the room, in a carrier or indoor kennel while the dog is on a lead.
- Do not place them near to each other or allow the dog to go near the carrier. Just spend time allowing them to get used to each other and relax. During this time, it is important for the cat not to feel threatened or frightened. If necessary, start by placing the carrier up onto a table.
- The dog may get very excited; just ignore the excitement and keep the dog at a safe distance from the cat. Praise the dog whenever they ignore the cat.
- Do this for 5-10 minutes then take the cat out of the room in the carrier. Do not release them until they are in a safe, dog free zone area of the house.
- Practice this exercise 2-3 times a day for a few days. Both animals should become more relaxed as they get used to this routine.

The next step

- Once the dog is totally relaxed about the cat being brought into the room in its carrier, you can move onto the next stage. It is important there are plenty of high places in the room out of the dog's reach for the cat to perch and feel safe.
- Place the dog in their indoor kennel and bring in the cat in their carrier. Put the carrier on the table or shelf and open the door.

- Do not try to restrain the cat or force them to come out of the carrier. If the cat chooses to come out, praise them gently.
- Practice this exercise for 10-15 minutes, 2-3 times daily until the cat seems to feel confident and safe and the dog is relaxed.
- Once you feel the cat is unlikely to run and the dog is unlikely to chase the cat, give the dog a little freedom, letting them wander around the room while on the lead. Praise the dog for ignoring the cat and being calm.

Once you get to this stage, it will be a matter of using your judgement about how to proceed. Be sure that when you do finally allow the dog off the lead, with the cat in the room, the cat has a safe and clear means of escape should they become frightened. If you are unsure, continue to allow the cat to have freedom of the room while the dog is in the indoor kennel, until you feel the dog is used to the cat's presence.

Remember, the main cause of problems between dogs and cats is that the cats can become frightened and run. This excites the dogs and can cause them to chase. So, it essential to ensure the cat feels safe and confident at all times if they are going to live happily with a dog in the house.