

INTRODUCING CATS & DOGS

✓ FOLLOW YOUR NOSE

Cats and dogs need to smell one another before they see one another. Set up your new pet in a spare room where they cannot see your existing pet, then let them relax. Your existing pet can have free reign of the rest of the house. Both pets can now safely sniff one another through either side of the door, and based on their response you can decide how much time is needed before they actually meet. Feel free to switch their rooms or bedding for additional “get to know you” time -- again, before they see one another. This process can take at least a few days.

✓ MANAGE PHYSICAL SPACE

Once they're ready to meet, make sure that your dog is on a loose leash, and your cat has an easy escape route. Crates, baby gates, and exercise pens can be used to physically separate cats and dogs when you're not around to monitor the situation. You can provide vertical space as well, using cat furniture (*or regular furniture*) for your kitty to climb up if needed.

✓ SPEAK THEIR (BODY) LANGUAGE

An overly-interested dog may stare at a cat, stiffen, or lean forward before breaking into a chase. A stressed-out cat may flatten its ears, crouch down, flick its tail back and forth, or puff up its fur. You can prevent dangerous situations before they occur by listening to what your pets are telling you.

✓ USE FOOD

Feeding or giving treats to both animals on either side of the door before they meet is a great way to create positive associations between them. Treats can also be helpful in distracting a dog who is really, really excited to meet a cat! You can use high-value treats (*think peanut butter, hot dogs, or tiny bits of cheese*) to bring your dog's attention back to you if they start whining or barking when a cat appears. Be sure to give a reward before any excited behavior appears – you want to reward calmness, not excitement.

✓ CALL A FRIEND

Have a pet-savvy friend or family member help out as much as possible. They can stand on the other side of the door and tell you what's going on, they can give treats and encouragement, and they can even be an extra set of hands if a chase breaks out!

✗ DON'T ASSUME

You know your pet at home is perfect, and you're head-over-heels for your new family member, but they'll need time and encouragement to have a good relationship with one another. Animals are very specific in how they learn and behave, so it's not unusual for a dog to love people but chase cats, or for a cat to snuggle up to people but hiss and swat at dogs. Keep an open mind and don't assume that because your pet loves you, they love other species too.

✗ DON'T RUSH INTO IT

They have the rest of their lives to get to know one another; use their body language as cues to move forward instead of sticking to a preset schedule. It's much easier to be cautious, patient, and open minded with this encounter than it is to try to erase a bad first impression. If you notice any signs of stress, give them space or end the meeting.

✗ DON'T LET THEM WORK IT OUT

What would you do if you walked into your living room and found a stranger sitting on your couch? You can't tell your existing pet that this new pet is a friend, but you can set up their interactions to go as smoothly as possible.

✗ DON'T PUNISH

Punishing an animal through shock collars, spray bottles, hitting, or even yelling can easily send them over the edge. A stressed-out, fearful pet can be one more stressor away from biting or scratching you or another animal. Remember, you're in control over the situation, and you have the power to make this a wonderful experience for everyone!