



# BEHAVIOR & TRAINING



## CAT, MEET DOG. DOG, THIS IS THE CAT

*how to conduct a proper dog-cat meeting*



Dogs and cats can grow to become great friends over time, but first impressions are very important. Bringing a new pet home with little to no preparations and hoping things go well is rarely successful. If your dog has never lived with a cat before (or vice versa) then there are a few ways the first meeting can go. Knowing what to expect and how to respond is key to creating the best first impression possible.

Preparation is extremely important when bringing two new pets together for the first time. Trying to integrate a puppy with an older cat may take more time and patience than introducing a young dog to a young cat. Rambunctious puppies can easily annoy an older cat.

### The Dog's Reaction (never lived with a cat before):

**Play:** If the dog has never met a cat before, it can become curious and try to initiate play. In this situation, it's best to keep the dog calm and distracted with food rewards so that the cat doesn't become frightened or hurt. If the cat does not appreciate the overtures, then teaching the dog to be calm around the cat is necessary. This can take time and patience, but with persistence both can learn to coexist over time.

**Cautious Interest or Avoidance:** A cat can be intimidating for an older or shy dog, especially if the cat is antagonistic. The dog might approach slowly, stay at a distance or completely avoid the cat.

**Prey:** Some dogs have higher prey drives than others and unfortunately some might see the cat as prey, especially if the cat runs from the dog. *It is recommended that dogs with this high amount of prey drive do not live with a cat as it can be unpredictable and dangerous.*

### The Cat's Reaction (never lived with a dog before):

**Cautious Interest or Avoidance:** It's normal for a new cat to hide away inside a closet or under a bed for the first few days (or weeks) in a new environment. However, if the cat has lived with another dog in the past or in a colony of cats, they might accept the dog as a new (slightly annoying) housemate and simply ignore the dog for a while. The cat might also try to initiate play with the dog by batting at it with claws retracted. Always supervise encounters between pets and let the cat set the pace of introduction.

**Antagonism:** If the cat has never lived with a dog or has always been solitary, this could be an extreme change for him or her. The cat might decide the dog is an unwelcome intruder and proceed to antagonize the dog. If this is the case, please see instructions below on proper introductions. *Please note*, if the cat is extremely stressed (loss of appetite, eliminating outside of the litter box, hiding for the majority of the day for more than a week, aggressive outbursts) then living in the same household as a dog is not the best choice for the cat. ***Continued...***



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**Below are directions to follow when introducing a dog and cat for the first time.**

If you're bringing a **New Dog** home:

*\*Always trim your cat's nails first!*

If you already have a cat in your home and intend on bringing a new dog into the picture, the most important thing to remember is to allow the cat to escape or hide if it feels frightened. Never restrict the cat's movements or ability to leave the situation.

Cats are very environmentally sensitive; this means that even the smallest change in the home can cause stress. This stress can manifest itself in a variety of ways, some of which are: eliminating outside the litter box, diminished appetite, destructive behaviors, prolonged hiding, or aggression.

In order to keep the situation as stress-free as possible, try not to change too much about the cat's lifestyle and environment. If you do need to change some things (location of the litter box, location of the food/water bowls, or addition of dog's belongings) do them gradually and at least a week before the new dog comes home. This way the cat is already adjusted to the minor changes before the big one occurs.

**Work with your cat at least one week before the first intro\*:**

1. Start "auditioning" different food treats and find out what they love. (Examples: chicken, liver, tuna, canned cat food, feline greenies, cheese)
2. Begin rewarding your cat for eye contact by giving him a treat when he look at you.
3. Play the name game with your cat:  
Say your cat's name.  
When your cat looks at you, say "Yes!"  
Immediately give food reward.

*\*These are important tools to help the introduction go smoothly. Being able to gain your cats attention instead of focusing on the dog will help keep introductions less stressful.*

**When bringing the dog home:**

Set up a separate room away from the rest of the family for the dog to stay in until the cat is reasonably comfortable with the dog. Always separate the dog and cat when someone in the home is unable to supervise their interactions. Bring the dog into the room immediately, *without meeting the cat*. Close the door and allow the cat to wander and investigate the new smells on its own. Once you feel the cat and dog are aware of each other (usually 24-48 hours) then you can do the first introduction.

1. Keep the dog on leash. Stay calm and focused.
2. Have treats ready (soft, smelly, and meaty works best) to divert the dogs attention away from the cat and to reward the dog anytime he/she reacts appropriately.
3. Start with the cat in the room (Remember: Allow the cat to have an exit strategy!)
4. Keep the dog at the far end of the room and start distracting him with treats.

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5. Let the cat assess the situation. Use the name game and cat treats to diffuse the tension and gain your cat's focus.
  - a. If the cat approaches the dog curiously or playfully, make sure to keep the dog's attention on the food rather than the cat and reward all good behavior.
  - b. Let the cat move about unhindered. If the cat decides to run away or hide, allow him or her to do so.
  - c. If the cat seems uncertain and freezes, use treats to help the cat gain positive associations of the dog and keep the meeting short.
  - d. If the dog looks at the cat without barking or lunging, reward heavily with treats. This way the presence of the cat will start predicting good things for the dog.
  - e. If your dog overacts to the cat, avoid leash corrections or harsh words. Use treats to gain his attention and then move away from the cat. The key is to create positive associations to the cat.

After the first intro:

1. Confine your dog to its room, do not change anything about the cat's environment or restrict the cats access to the house in any way.
2. Place a baby gate in the doorway of the dog's room. Let the cat explore and approach on her own. You can encourage your cat by placing a can of tuna (or other delicious treat) near the baby gate but at a safe enough distance that the cat feels comfortable to nibble at it.
3. Never force a face-to-face greeting and make sure to keep both parties as calm as possible.
4. If your cat doesn't seem afraid of the dog or tries to jump over the gate, you can do another introduction in a large room with your dog on leash. Always let your cat set the pace.
5. A cat who accepts a dog will bat playfully at the dog, rub against him, or push him with her head.
6. A dog will play bow or nudge the cat with its body.

\*If you are having serious issues like severe aggression or fear from either animals, contact a training professional for help.

If you're bringing a **New Cat** home:

1. Have a room set up for the cat that is away from the dog. Keep the door closed for a few days (or a week) until the cat is more confident in their new environment.
2. Let the cat sleep on a new blanket for the first couple nights, then give it to the dog to sleep on. Switch a few more times. This helps them become more accustomed with each other's scent.
3. Let them sniff each other through the bottom of the door. Have treats ready to distract your dog and direct his attention away from the door if necessary. Keep these interactions short and sweet.
4. If your cat doesn't seem afraid and readily approaches the door when the dog is present and your dog doesn't become defensive or overly-stimulated, place a baby gate in the opening of the door. Keep your dog at a distance on leash and use treats to direct his attention to you while the cat stays inside the room and assesses the situation.



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5. If they both seem relaxed, curious, or cautiously playful (cat will come up to the gate or try to jump over and the dog might play bow, whine, or extend its body to sniff at the baby gate) then let the dog approach the gate.
6. If the cat hisses, retreats and hides then go back a step. Remove the baby gate and close the door, repeat step 3.  
**TIP:** Use extra special treats for your cat! When the dog is near, give your cat tuna, chicken, liver, or wet food. This will help your cat associate the presence of the dog with delicious treats.
7. If your dog overacts to the cat, avoid leash corrections or harsh words. Use treats to gain his attention and then move away from the cat. The key is to create positive associations to the cat.

This process can take weeks or months so don't become discouraged if it's slow at first. Always let the cat set the pace and try to keep both animals as calm as possible using extra special food treats.

Even after the animals are integrated together, supervise their interactions and separate them when you're not present. Interrupt any chasing or barking and redirect your dog onto another activity. Don't let play between them become overly physical or too intense.

Always praise and reward your dog and cat for treating the other appropriately. Positive feedback helps let your pets know what the desired behavior is.

Good luck, and if you have any specific questions or concerns please email [training@eastbayspca.org](mailto:training@eastbayspca.org)