

ACCLIMATING YOUR CAT TO OTHER PETS

If you are considering introducing a dog to your cat household or a cat to your dog household, be prepared to provide safety and extra training for all parties involved. The time and effort you spend ensuring a safe, gradual introduction will typically be far less stressful than that spent trying to repair an initially tumultuous relationship. Unfortunately, there are no 100% guarantees when it comes to animal relationships. Even though your cat may enjoy the company of your long-time family dog, she may not be as happy about a newer, younger, more rambunctious member of the family. Or while your cat may act the Grumpy Gus when he sees most cats, he may surprise you when he meets “the right cat.”

SET THE STAGE

Avoid introducing Fluffy to your new pet on his first night home. Instead, establish a nice, cozy, safe room for Fluffy to rest get away from everything before bringing in your new pet. Make sure the room includes toys, a litter box, water and, most importantly, comfortable hiding places. You can even design make-shift hiding places out of large cardboard boxes or empty, open dresser drawers. Cats typically choose flight over fight in a stressful situation. But if there are no safe escape routes, your cat will have no other alternative than to attempt to fight if frightened. Ideally your safe room will have a door or entrance that can be gated. That way you can manage how close and how often your pets meet each other.

TAKE YOUR TIME

The primary relationship you will want to build when introducing any new pet to your home is your cat’s relationship with you. Her relationship with your new pet will grow with time, but she has to trust you from the beginning. So spend time with your cat in her “safe” room just relaxing with her well before your new pet joins your household. Use this room to confine your cat during periods your new pet is exploring his new territory. Keep the pets separate for a few days at least, while they get individual opportunities to investigate each other’s scent. Give your cat chances to sniff out all the places your new pet has visited without the risk of being ambushed—and vice versa. Some cats hiss and growl at even the scent of a new animal in their territory. Given enough gradual exposure to the smells, your cat will eventually get used to the new scent.

Once your pets are calm about the new odors, let them get used to each other at a closer distance—behind closed doors. Your pets can learn a lot about each other through that little crack under a closed door. Make sure neither pet jumps on the door or otherwise frightens the other during these introductions. Be careful when/if any cat paws dart under the door for exploration. A new cat or dog could view that as an exciting new toy.

Move slowly. Make sure any interaction your cat has with your new pet is a safe, positive experience. It may take a cat days or weeks before they are ready to meet your new pet face-to-face. Make the initial face-to-face greetings short, frequent and behind a cracked door or a baby gate. Gradually increase their time together as they grow more comfortable with these greetings.

Be safe. Be patient. And you may just be rewarded with a positive relationship between your pets.

SUGGESTED PRODUCTS

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| Equipment: | Dog exercise pen or baby gate |
| Stress reducing: | Comfort Zone with Feliway, catnip, catnip spray |