

ACCLIMATING YOUR DOG TO OTHER PETS

If you are considering introducing a new dog to your dog 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 dog 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 dog may act the Grumpy Gus when he sees most dogs, he may surprise you when he meets “the right dog.”

SET THE STAGE

Avoid introducing Fido to your new pet on his or her first night home. Instead, establish a nice, cozy, safe room for Fido to rest when he needs to be away from everything before bringing in your new pet. Make sure the room includes food, water, toys, appropriate chewable items, and a nice soft bed. Make sure the room also has a solid door for those times when Fido wants absolutely no interaction with the new member of the family. A sturdy baby gate or an exercise pen anchored with hook and eye screws may also be used to safely barricade an open doorway. Don't be too cavalier with your barricade choice, even the most sedentary dog can become quite the athlete if he's trying to send a serious message to your new pet.

TAKE YOUR TIME

The primary relationship you will want to build when introducing any new pet to your home is your dog's relationship with you. His relationship with your new pet will grow with time, but he has to trust you from the beginning. So spend time with your dog in his “safe” room just relaxing with him well before your new pet joins your household. Use this room to confine your dog during periods your new pet is exploring her 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 dog chances to sniff out all the places your new pet has visited without the risk of being ambushed—and vice versa. You may also try swapping each pet's bedding to help during this phase.

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. Attach a leash to any dog that appears particularly rambunctious. Also be careful when/if any cat paws dart under the door for exploration. Your dog could view that as an exciting new toy.

Move slowly. Make sure any interaction your dog has with your new pet is a safe, positive experience. It may take your dog days or weeks before he is 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. If your new companion is a dog, you may want to add a long leash walk with a friend to your days. Avoid taking two dogs on leash yourself if they are unfamiliar with each other. If a scuffle breaks out you could be trapped in the middle. Likewise, wait until the dogs are quite used to each other on leash and in the house before letting them run off leash in your fenced yard together.

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

RESOURCES

You can call our **Behavior Helpline** (804-643-SPCA) for advice or to arrange a private consult at the Richmond SPCA.