



Introducing Cats to Dogs

Congratulations! You've decided to adopt a new family member of another species from your current furry friend. Now we need to introduce them. Regardless of either pet's history or familiarity with the other species, your cat and dog should never meet each other right away and a proper introduction period needs to take place. Every step of the below protocol is vitally important and steps should not be skipped to ensure the success of the introduction process. Be aware that there is no set or predetermined amount of time that the introduction process should take. Every animal is different and every pair will take their own amount of time to feel comfortable with each other. Patience is key and will be rewarded.

First Thing's First: Prepare the Space

Properly setting up your home helps to maximize the potential for discovery, time-sharing, and space-sharing required for cats and makes the whole transitional period as noncompetitive as possible. Arranging the space for both your cat and your dog is a crucial part of the introduction process to help make everyone feel as safe and comfortable as possible, and is the first thing that you should do, even before bringing your new pet home.

Block off all the "unders" (under the bed, under the couch, under the TV, etc.) that your cat may be able to access. Think about where potential ambushes could occur, or where a scared cat might burrow away, not to be seen for days on end. "Unders" promote a sense of insecurity and "smallness" in cats, whereas hiding holes (like covered beds or boxes) in places up off the floor or underneath things (preferably on top of trees or perches) promotes a sense of confidence and security with the cat's surroundings and cohabitants. Be especially vigilant about checking in and around any cabinets or other built-in features. One of the most common ways that cats find their way into the walls of a home is through gaps either inside or along the outside of where a cabinet meets the wall.

The way cats perceive territory is floor to ceiling, 360 degrees. Make sure you're giving equal emphasis to different spots both vertically and horizontally for your cat to go. This is because you want as many options available to your cat as possible as they may feel more comfortable being up high or in a lower hiding spot depending on the situation. Utilizing vertical space allows cats even more, well, space, to spread out and get to know each other from a distance.

Be sure you have a "Cat Superhighway" around crucial social spaces—usually the living room or the bedroom, or wherever everyone spends most of their time in the home. The Superhighway creates multiple lanes of traffic, with various on and off ramps, using design elements like shelving, cat trees, and window beds, to provide vertical breathing room. This allows your cat to have the ability to get from one end of the room to the other without having to touch the ground. With the vertical space taken care of, tunnels, covered beds, and makeshift hidey spots

such as an end table with a blanket draped over the sides help “catify” the floor, along with litter box placement that prevents ambush and doesn’t create dead ends.

Establish a base camp for your cat. Base camp should be a room that you spend time in: a socially meaningful space where you can commingle your scent with your cat’s. This could be a bedroom, an office, or even the bathroom when there is no other option. As long as the human scent is strong, it will help your cat establish a sense of home and security by combining their scent with yours. Conversely, a laundry room, garage, or basement is not a great place to set up base camp, since these are not rooms you likely want to spend a lot of time in, and they probably don’t smell strongly of you. You may not want your bedroom to be the new animal’s base camp if your resident pet sleeps with you as you don’t want to kick them out of that “home within the home.”

Integrate signposts:

These are objects that signify territorial ownership for your cat. By definition, a signpost is something your cat has left a visual sign on, such as scratching posts, litter boxes, and cat beds.

Integrate scent soakers:

These are soft items that absorb a cat’s scent, and can also serve as a signpost. They say “I live here,” and allow for rubbing, scratching, or lying in. Beds, blankets, carpets, cardboard scratchers, and scratching posts are all excellent scent soakers.

Scent and Site Swapping

One of the hallmarks of this integration method is that your cat and your dog will not initially lay eyes on each other. Therefore, the main purpose of this isolation phase is to gradually introduce the cat and dog through scent before they actually see each other. This scent-before sight protocol makes for a much more predictable and harmonious introduction, because they can become familiar with each other prior to any visual assessment.

To this end, there are a few things we can do to help this “getting to know you” process along:

1. Scent Swapping - This is one of the most nonthreatening ways to get one pet’s scent in front of the other, and it’s as simple as it sounds. Simply take a “scent soaker” from the dog’s space—a blanket, soft fabric toy (that most easily retains the scent), or bed—and offer it to the cat to investigate. Do not force it in their face; simply set it down in the periphery of their space to investigate on their own time. Place a scent soaker from your cat’s base camp into your dog’s space as well.
2. Signposts - Take a more significant item from your cat’s base camp (like a cat tree or large bed) and place it out in a main room of your home, in a major window. This allows your cat to mark the space with their own scent, establishing a peaceful co-signpost in the home without even needing to be out in the space yet.
3. Site Swapping - Once your cat appears to be comfortable in their base camp and not showing signs of stress or fearful behavior such as walking in a crouched position, hiding under things, or jumping every time they hear a door open, it’s time for site swapping. Site (not sight) swapping allows your cat to explore your dog’s territory

without ever laying eyes on the dog. Your cat has to be comfortable in the space before they can be comfortable with any new residents. If the cat in base camp is your resident cat, then this step can occur immediately after bringing the new dog home. This is also an opportunity for key signposts—like cat trees, litter boxes, etc.—to take on a shared scent. Allow your cat out into the dog’s space (the rest of the house) while your dog is contained in a different area (such as outside or on a walk) to explore and then return to base camp (you can even let the dog explore the cat’s base camp during this time if you have someone else to help you. The dog should be on leash and should remain calm while exploring the cat’s space). Take this process as slowly as you need to, allowing your cat to explore only one or two rooms at a time if they get anxious or overwhelmed, and continue this process each day until both your cat and dog are comfortable with the entire house and not showing any signs of stress or heightened interest/arousal.

Shared Mealtimes

Choose a door that leads into your cat’s base camp and set up their food bowls— a bowl for your cat on one side of the door and a bowl for your dog on the other side of the door— at an equal and respectful distance from your “feeding door”, making sure that there’s plenty of space on both sides of the door. The door is to remain closed during this step.

A “respectful distance,” is defined as the minimal distance the cat and dog need to be from the door in order to walk up to their bowl, eat, and walk away, without hyper fixating on the door, barking, hissing, swatting, putting a paw under the door, or engage in any other shenanigans that occur when cats or dogs are stressed out. This distance, at least initially, becomes the sweet spot at which each pet is aware of, but not threatened or distracted by, the other one. When your cat and dog are introduced to each other via this “remote handshake,” they smell food and get to eat every time they meet. And now every time they eat, they’re engaged in that handshake. This is what building positive associations is all about: cat/dog = food = good.

Once you’ve identified that “safe” distance try serving each meal just a few inches closer to the door – moving each bowl incrementally closer to the door, and thus closing the distance between both pets as they become increasingly comfortable with each other all while they are enjoying their food.

If you’ve moved the bowls closer and you see that your dog or cat—or both— show any signs of stress such as staring at the door, see the cat start to flick or wag their tail, or see your dog start to growl/bark, your cat hiss or growl, etc. you are likely too close to the door and you need to move the bowls farther away and find that sweet spot again. Try using painter’s tape to mark this spot or “feeding line” on both sides of the door. Defining the distance visually is also a great way of marking your pets progress.

The goal is to get as close to that closed door as possible, with the same predictable result

each time. Don't move the bowls closer to the door until you see both animals are soft and relaxed; there must be no reactivity or signs of stress whatsoever. Both your dog and cat should be completely calm. Be careful not to get overzealous and move the bowls so much that your dog or cat gets panicked and sends you back to square one. Patience is important.

Once you get to the point where your dog and cat are eating every meal about a foot away from either side of the door and walking away without issue, it's time to allow visual access! The work that you've done up to this point has resulted in predictable behavior between the dog and cat and a cordial (or, at least tolerant) "scent handshake" at every meal. It's a mistake, though, to assume that they will be just as cordial once the visual element is introduced. Instead, begin at the beginning and reset the bowls to where you first began when moving on to the next step.

1. **Initial Eye Contact:** Set up a baby or pet gate in the doorway of your cat's base camp. Take the feeding line all the way back to where they can see one another and eat with little or no disruption, and do the same process of feeding your cat and dog all over again. Make sure it's a gate that is high enough that neither the dog or cat can jump!
2. **Raising the Curtain:** Drape a blanket or sheet over the gate. This gives you a much greater sense of control over the degree of visual access because you can "raise the curtain" gradually over a period of time. The curtain allows you to start with the absolute bare minimum of visual access. For many cats, this added layer of security makes all the difference in giving them the confidence they need to take that next paw over their feeding line. Remember to only raise the curtain gradually, and only after you see calm and relaxed behavior from both your cat and dog; no signs of stress!
3. It often helps to have your cat on an elevated surface for shared mealtimes (and any time they are around a new dog). This gives the cat more confidence. The key to cat and dog relationships is that the cat should always feel confident—if he acts like prey (runs away), he will probably be treated like prey (chased).

Shared Playtime

Once your cat and dog are eating meals within a few inches of each other, it's time to move to the ultimate reward: playtime! To prepare, have your "sight blockers" ready—a sight blocker is something that: (a) the cat/dog can't see through; (b) is solid enough that you can place it between them and they can't bust through it, and (c) is high enough that you don't have to bend down to place it between them and your hands are out of the "danger zone" should a fight break out. Flattened and taped-up cardboard boxes of the appropriate height work well, or you could try a thick piece of foam core. Don't use a blanket or something flimsy. They'll just run through it.

When you see that first sign of stress—usually it's the moment at which movement stops and

a stare down starts—it's game over: sight blocker down. Redirect their attention from one another using treats, toys, walking the dog away on leash or using the sight blocker to guide your cat or dog away from the other, if needed.

Dogs should always be on leash for shared playtime, no matter how far apart or how little attention they are paying to each other! Dogs can dash after a cat before you can react, and if this happens, their relationship will probably take a huge hit. And again, it may help to have the cat on an elevated surface if they need a confidence boost.

Now, choose a common-area room in which to have a joint session. This should be the largest room with the most amount of empty space. Next, enlist the help of a second person. The objective is to keep your cat moving in play, and your dog focusing on some other activity (easy basic training, Kong enrichment, snuffle mat, etc). Momentum is on equal par with engagement during this exercise, and, likewise, stasis is our greatest enemy.

Begin by playing with the new pet in the room first (or whichever one is the least confident). Make sure they are engaged, and keep them moving if it's your cat. If you are dispensing treats, get a bread-crumbs trail going; as they are chewing one, you put the next one down where they can see it, so that they are moving toward the next treat as they are finishing the previous one. The same goes for toys; you need to be in control of your cat's head—the rest will follow. This should be interactive cat play—be the prey with your wand toy! In times of potential stare downs, nothing is more your friend than your ability to move your cat's eyes where you want them to look. It may help to have the cat on an elevated surface when they are in the same room together. If your dog is in the room, have enrichment items for them to work on. This should be something that will last a decent amount of time and will encourage them to lay down and settle in with it, such as a frozen kong, a bully stick, or any other chew or lick treats.

Have your second person calmly bring your other pet into the room and immediately offer them enrichment. If your cat is the second pet entering the room, begin playing with them and a favorite wand toy. If your dog is the second pet entering the room, offer them a favorite toy or something to chew on, lick, or a snuffle mat to work on. You should, as always, make each animal feel that they are making all their own decisions, which includes ignoring the other animal and working on their own projects.

During this time if your dog ever begins to show intense interest in the cat (staring/hyper fixating, tail up and starting to wag faster, whining, barking, growling, etc), even if it seems playful, redirect the dog and calmly remove them from the room. A dog can be extremely overwhelming to a cat extremely fast. Don't allow your dog to chase your cat, even in play! This is almost always seen as predatory to cats and can be extremely scary and ruin a relationship quickly.

In a perfect world, the session would end by leading them both out of the room with a toy or treat, however, if you need to remove your cat or dog into another room before they react to each other, then that's what you do. Always try to end on a positive note. Remember, you

are trying to create positive associations, which is a check we can cash only with consistent, positive experiences. For this reason, always end the sequence with mealtime. They will already have an established positive response to each other with mealtimes.

Even as they begin to spend more time together, be sure that your cat has plenty of spaces that your dog can't get to, such as their perches and cat trees. The Cat Superhighway is crucial to cats sharing a home with dogs as allows them their own space to get around the house without fear, and a place to observe and learn the dog from a distance they can't be reached.

DOGGIE LANGUAGE

starring Boogie the Boston Terrier



ALERT



SUSPICIOUS



ANXIOUS



THREATENED



ANGRY



"PEACE!"
look away/head turn



STRESSED
yawn



STRESSED
nose lick



"PEACE!"
sniff ground



"RESPECT!"
turn & walk away



"NEED SPACE"
whale eye



STALKING



STRESSED
scratching



STRESS RELEASE
shake off



RELAXED
soft ears, blinky eyes



"RESPECT!"
offer his back



FRIENDLY & POLITE
curved body



FRIENDLY



"PRETTY PLEASE"
round puppy face



"I'M YOUR LOVEBUG"
belly-rub pose



"HELLO I LOVE YOU!"
greeting stretch



"I'M FRIENDLY!"
play bow



"READY!"
prey bow



"YOU WILL FEED ME"



CURIOUS
head tilt



HAPPY
(or hot)



OVERJOYED
wiggly



"MMM..."



"I LOVE YOU,
DON'T STOP"



Body Language of Fear in Dogs



Slight Cowering



Major Cowering

More Subtle Signs of Fear & Anxiety



Licking Lips
when no food nearby



Panting
when not hot or thirsty



Brows Furrowed, Ears to Side



Moving in Slow Motion
walking slow on floor



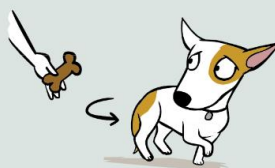
Acting Sleepy or Yawning
when they shouldn't be tired



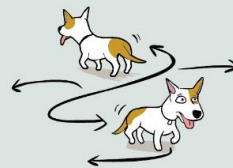
Hypervigilant
looking in many directions



Suddenly Won't Eat
but was hungry earlier



Moving Away



Pacing



Home of Low Stress Handling®
CattleDog Publishing®
A PART OF THE VIN FAMILY

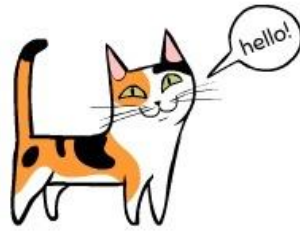


© Veterinary Information Network Inc.

CAT LANGUAGE



INTERESTED



FRIENDLY



ATTENTIVE



RELAXED



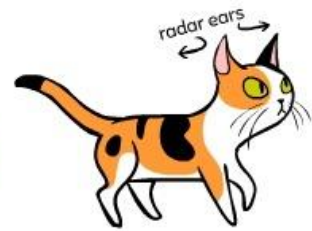
TRUSTING



FRIENDLY, RELAXED



CONTENT



CONFLICTED, CAUTIOUS



PLAYFUL



EXCITED



"THIS IS MINE"



ANXIOUS



PREDATORY



WORRIED



FRIGHTENED



THREATENED



TERRIFIED



SUPER TERRIFIED



IRRITATED



DISGUSTED



Body Language of Feline Anxiety



Slight crouching



Major crouching

More Subtle Signs of Fear & Anxiety



Dilated Eyes



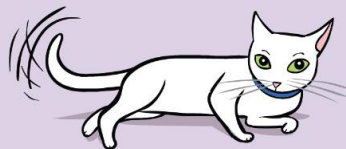
Ears Turned Back,
Furrowed Brow



Staring,
Focused on Object



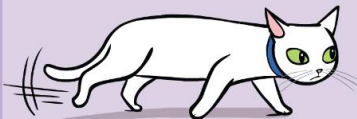
Hiding,
Looks Half Asleep



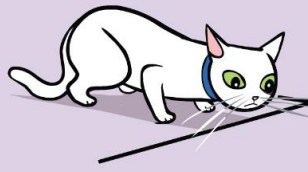
Laying on Side,
Tail Flicking



Hair Raised, Staring,
Ears Turned Back



Walking with Flat Back,
Tail Down, Head Down



Ready to Jump Off Perch



Suddenly Grooming,
Excessive Grooming

© 2020 Veterinary Information Network



Home of Low Stress Handling®
CattleDogPublishing.com
A PART OF THE VIN FAMILY



STRESS & SUPPORT SCALE

Stay On The Beach!

Dog's stress level is analogous to rising water level

BAT ZONE

Dog is **CURIOUS** about the trigger

Dog moves directly towards trigger

DOG:

- loose body
- soft mouth, ears
- not avoiding trigger
- sniffing ground
- passing glances, easy to look away
- moving to explore environment

DOG:

- gathering info
- arcs towards trigger
- ears up
- focused eyes
- air-scenting
- disengages easily

DOG:

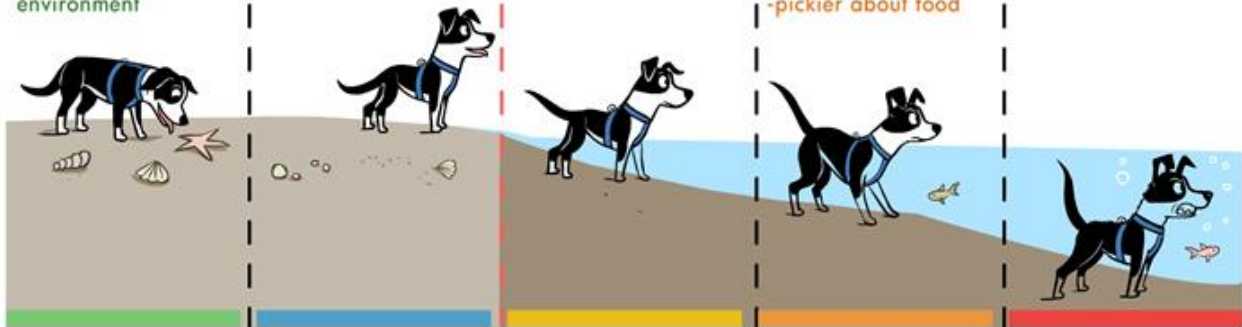
- arousal level moderate, but is decreasing
- intent on trigger
- disengages without help, but takes more than 2 seconds.

DOG:

- unable to disengage
- stiff face and body
- tail up and stiff
- mouth closed
- breathing faster
- avoids trigger altogether
- pickier about food

DOG:

- over his head
- signs of reactivity



© 2014 Grisha Stewart, EmpoweredAnimals.com, all rights reserved