

# INTRODUCING A CAT: TO DOGS

## RSPCA KNOWLEDGEBASE

### HOW SHOULD I INTRODUCE MY NEW CAT OR KITTEN TO THE FAMILY DOG?

First consider if it would be safe and appropriate to have both a dog and cat as part of your family. While dogs and cats can live together in harmony and even become friends, in some cases individual dogs may not be compatible with cats.

It is important that you manage the introduction to your family carefully and that your new cat/kitten and dog are always supervised until you are sure everyone is comfortable and safe. Introducing a new feline member to the family is a special and exciting time but can be a little overwhelming for all concerned. However, this can be managed with planning, so that everyone feels safe and there is minimal stress.

Some cats will integrate into a family with existing pets better than others. Older cats are likely to be less energetic than young kittens; if you already have old pets you may wish to adopt a calm dog friendly adult cat.

Once you have decided on a cat you will have to think about how best to introduce them to your existing pets to ensure that everything goes smoothly. This may be a stressful time for both animals and it is important that you are patient and prepared for the introduction to take place over at least a week but perhaps a few weeks.

Before you bring your new cat or kitten home you should spend some time preparing your house and your existing pets for their arrival. In particular, it is important to ensure that there are plenty of high resting places where your new cat or kitten will be able to easily and safely retreat away from your dog if they want to. In addition, you'd want to make sure that your new cat has a private dog free area with everything they need in it (food, water, litter tray, bed, hiding place, elevated platforms etc.). This helps reduce stress and avoid problems with your cat being too afraid to eat/drink or use the litter tray.

Ideally your dog should be crate trained. There are many benefits to this, but particularly in this situation, it will make the introductions easier and safer.

### WHEN YOU FIRST BRING YOUR NEW CAT OR KITTEN HOME

Before introducing a kitten/cat to your dog, allow some time for your kitten/cat to settle in their new environment and become comfortable with you. Introduce them to the house slowly and provide a comfortable hiding place for your kitten/cat to retreat to in case they feel threatened at any time. It may take several days or even a couple of weeks before your kitten/cat is confident in their new home and closely bonded to you. During this time keep your kitten/cat separated from your dog.

Once your kitten/cat is comfortable enough to start exploring the house, secure your dog in their favorite room with their bed, water, food and some favorite toys. Allow your cat to explore the house at their own pace and become familiar with your dog's scent. Then allow them to return to their own

room when they are ready, without letting your dog out. Repeat this over the next few days, allowing each animal their turn to have access to the whole house without ever confronting one another. In the meantime, work on reinforcing your dog's basic training so that you have good control over them when it comes to introducing your new kitten/cat to your dog.

By the time your kitten/cat is comfortable with their new home, your dog will have become aware of the presence of a new member to the household and hopefully will be getting used to the idea!

## INTRODUCING YOUR NEW CAT OR KITTEN AND YOUR DOG

Ideally your dog or puppy should be crate trained. There are many benefits to this but, particularly in this situation, it will make the introductions easier and safer.

When you are ready to introduce your new kitten/cat to your dog, do so when your dog is at their calmest. You may wish to take them for a long walk beforehand. For the first introduction, use a room in which your cat is easily able to escape to a safe place if they want to (for example, a room with a familiar and well-used high platform such as a multi-tiered cat scratching post) so the cat can escape from the situation and gain vertical height, as cats often like to be above the scene looking down and can feel safer that way.

If your dog is in a crate you can give them a distracting toy and then bring your kitten/cat into the room. Never force any interactions but just give your kitten/cat a lot of attention and positive experiences such as grooming, playing, and treats while they are in the same room as your dog. Just let the kitten/cat get used to the dog being there and vice versa.

Once your kitten/cat and dog seem relaxed in the room together, you can move onto having your dog on a leash out of the crate. If you are unable to use a crate for the introductions then start with this step. Keep your dog next to you on a secure leash while the kitten/cat is in the room and give them both praise and treats to reward calm behavior. It is helpful to have another person with you during this time if possible so each animal can be praised and rewarded at the same time. If your dog becomes highly excitable at any time during the introduction remove them from the room. Do this several times a day, keeping the meetings short so that stress is kept to a minimum.

You should allow the kitten/cat to choose whether they approach the dog or not. They may hiss or growl but if no interaction is forced they are unlikely to advance and if they do you can protect your dog from any aggressive advance. Just make sure you have an inanimate safe object (like a large cushion) to place between you and the dog and the kitten/cat for the worst case scenario!

Be patient, it will probably take a few weeks of having your dog on the leash with the kitten/cat around before everyone is sufficiently comfortable to try with the dog off-leash. These interactions should still be closely supervised. In the initial stages there may be some hissing and tail swishing but this should settle down after a few days. Keep a close eye on both animals and never punish either of them for aggressive behavior as this will be a negative experience associated with the presence of the other animal and counter-productive.

If you have more than one dog, it is best to introduce each one individually, as your kitten/cat may be overwhelmed if they has to meet both dogs at the same time.

Ensure your dog receives a lot of individual attention from you during the period of time over which you are introducing the kitten/cat. Do not leave your animals alone together until you are absolutely certain that they tolerate each other, the dog has been trained not to chase the kitten/cat and they are all safe. If you are not sure, continue to supervise directly when you are at home or physically separate them when you are not at home. The kitten/cat should ALWAYS have somewhere safe to which they can retreat (an area the dog cannot get to, such as high platforms), even when you do feel comfortable about leaving the two unsupervised together.

Keep in mind that your pets may never be best friends. Hopefully, however, they will at least tolerate one another and learn to live happily in the same house. In situations where cats and dogs do not like each other in the long-term, they may still be able to co-exist in relative peace by seeking out their own space and spending most of their time apart. Pets often have the ability to find a balance and share their territory. Having access to different rooms so that they can choose to be alone can be a big help to making both animals feel secure and happy.

Feeding the cat and dog separately is also important and ensuring that your cat has a private area to go to the toilet and a safe sleeping spot may assist.

If your attempts at introduction are not going well, or either animals seem stressed or agitated, it may be wise to seek professional help through a trained behaviorist.