



Introducing dogs and cats

RSPCA COMPANION ANIMALS PET CARE FACTSHEET



Historically, cats and dogs are considered to not prefer each other's company, although they can form close relationships. However, the behaviour of both cats and dogs is extremely complex. For example, some cats do not cope well with change in their environment and many cats are happier living without other pets in the house.

How you introduce dogs and cats can make a difference. Once a relationship breaks down and one of the animals feels threatened, it is difficult to repair. Even if your dog has lived with a cat before, new cats may not necessarily be tolerated. If they are to become friends, it is essential that the dog is not allowed to frighten the cat. Taking things slowly with careful introduction is vital to prevent excessive reactions.



PREPARING FOR THE INTRODUCTION

- Choose a quiet time when the household is calm – avoid festivities, parties, visiting relatives or friends, and find time to concentrate on calm reassurance for both pets.
- You can integrate the new pet into your home better by ensuring that they smell of “home” before being introduced as scent is an important communication method for both species. Gather scents from the new pet's head by gently stroking with a soft cloth and dabbing this around your home and furniture to mix and spread the scents. You may also wish to swap the bedding of your animals to enable them to smell each other prior to meeting. You could also stroke the dog and cat separately but without washing your hands to exchange their scents (make sure you wash your hands afterwards though!).
- Letting the new pet get used to the new smells of the house, and another animal, before the initial meeting can help in the introduction. For this reason, it is useful to delay the pets from meeting for a few days or even a week. During this time, keep them in separate areas of the house, but allow each pet to investigate the other's room and bed without actually meeting.



USING A PEN OR LARGE DOG CRATE FOR INTRODUCTIONS

- Problems can arise if initial meetings are allowed to deteriorate into a chase. The best way to avoid this is to use a kitten pen, puppy pen or large dog crate for initial introductions. Kitten pens are metal mesh pens with a door, which can be left open or shut securely and look similar to a dog crate.
- Within the pen or large crate you should provide your cat with a hiding space, this could be a cardboard box or an igloo type bed – the cat should be able to conceal themselves.





- As well as being large enough to accommodate a hiding place with the pen or large crate it must also be big enough for your cat to stand up (including fully on hind legs), turn around and stretch out fully.
- Put a blanket over the top for more security – but allow for viewing out of one side at least.
- Ideally it is also best to place a platform within the pen or large crate so that your cat can choose to get up higher – this can help them feel more secure. If you use a sturdy cardboard box for the hiding space it can also double up as a platform.
- The cat pen or crate should be placed on a raised surface so it is off the floor or settee.
- The pen allows the pets to see each other, sniff through the bars and interact without any attack or intimidation. The bars allow them to be close together but provide protection at the same time.
- Place the cat or kitten in the pen/large crate and let the dog come into the room. Let the dog come into the room and give both animals attention and calm reassurance.
- Keep your dog on his/her lead to control any interactions. The dog should be kept as calm as possible on the lead and asked to sit quietly- reward your dog with treats and praise for remaining calm. Do not force a meeting and remove your dog before he/she becomes too excitable.

FACE TO FACE MEETINGS

- When both your dog and cat are relaxed and calm with the controlled meetings the time is right to let your pets meet without the pen/ large crate. Choose a room where the cat can escape behind furniture, jump up high, or hide if necessary. The cat should be given a safe position in the room, and the animals should be allowed to get used to each other gradually. This will take patience.
- Keep your dog calm and on a lead to avoid him or her chasing the cat as this will upset the relationship and it is likely that it will then take much longer before they become used to each other.
- Again, associate the presence of the cat with reward for your dog's calm behaviour. Praise your dog for calm interactions, and use suitable treats to reward the dog for good behaviour.
- Once you are sure they are not going to fight or chase, then start to use the whole house – the pets will probably find places to sleep and routines which allow them to live peacefully in the same house while gradually becoming used to and accepting one another. However, never leave the dog and cat together unattended until you are happy that they are safe together.
- Make sure that there is enough space and that they can access all of their things without coming into contact with the other pet if they don't want to, e.g. food, water, litter tray.



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If you do decide to introduce another pet into your home, seek further advice on the best way to introduce them. Your vet may be able to refer you to a clinical animal behaviourist who will have a combination of appropriate qualifications, up to date knowledge, skills and experience to treat behaviour problems in a way which doesn't put the welfare of the animals at risk.

The RSPCA would like to thank Julie Bedford (BSc (Hons), PGCE, PG.Dip (CABC), CCAB) for her involvement in producing information on introducing dogs and cats.



OTHER POSSIBLE LINKS:

- [Dog welfare needs](#)
- [Cat welfare needs](#)
- [Find a vet](#)
- [Find a clinical animal behaviourist](#)

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