



[Introducing your new dog to your existing cat](#)

Cats and dogs are often perceived as ‘arch enemies’ and impossible to live together. This couldn’t be further from the truth. The truth is that they read each other’s body language incredibly well and respond accordingly until they have got to know each other. Equally, if the introduction is rushed for either species it can take weeks, sometimes months, to repair the damage caused by the initial poor introductions. Here are some simple guidelines to ensure the wellbeing of both species to help them to adjust each other in an appropriate manner.

- Remember your cat was there first and no matter how aloof your cat may be, the welfare and protection of your cat is your first priority when bringing a new dog into the home. No matter what your perception is of your cat’s temperament, they could still surprise you when you introduce a new dog to the household, even if they have lived with a dog before.
- Cats are predominantly ‘flight’ animals so their first instinct will be to ‘get safe’. This could be upstairs or on a shelf as they like to be high up or could be that they just run every time they feel threatened. When cats run they get a natural rush of endorphins (happy chemicals) because they survived! It really is as simple as that for cats – survival first!
- Dogs naturally enjoy chasing. It’s an instinctive behaviour and they get a great reward when the thing they are chasing runs away. This reward is easy to gain the next time as the endorphin rush takes over and the reward is so simplistic for dogs – it ran. How exciting!
- Even if a dog has lived with a cat before, or a cat with a dog, this is a NEW relationship and should be treated with caution and respect for both species involved. Even cats that have lived with dogs before can take a couple of weeks to adjust to the new resident.
- Any introductions should not be forced and really need to be taken at the pace of the cat in question. Confining a cat in any way, either in a cat carrier or in your arms, has a risk of a trip to casualty for you so don’t force the cat. Patience is the key to a happy relationship between your cat and your new dog. Don’t try to rush it, as a mistake is not easy to repair.



- Cats actively learn more about their environment through scent than they do with visual stimulation so to help your cat prepare for the new arrival please ask us for some bedding that smells of the dog already. This may make the introduction process easier. Equally something that smells of the cat can be left in the dog's kennel here at the Centre. Speak to the team here if you want more advice on 'scent swapping' between the species.
- Whilst we do not 'actively' cat test a dog, we would not place a dog in a home with a cat who we believed to be at risk. But we can't make any guarantees. We would only consider rehoming a dog that is social and responsive with people and who also likes toys, treats or cuddles as a reward for 'good behaviour'. Please ensure you check with us, prior to taking the dog home, which motivator works best for your new dog to help you get a good results. Obviously if the dog has had positive experiences living with cats before then we are already more likely to succeed.

Consider the following!

- Where does the cat usually eat and sleep? Is this in the same area where you need to keep your new dog? Consider moving the things that are important to your cat, such as food bowls, water bowls, and litter tray to a different area a few days before your new dog comes home?
- Where is the cat flap located? Commonly this is in the kitchen area which is usually where most people wish to contain their new dog. You don't want an 'accidental' unsupervised meeting so you may need to consider your dog's main location as a short term safety measure or provide your cat with alternate access in and out of your home if this is applicable.
- Consider a baby gate or three!! As cats like to go 'up' this can commonly mean upstairs. By putting a baby gate across the stair way the cat can jump up and over (unless medically unable) and can watch the dog from the safety of the stairs. Also consider baby gates across the kitchen door and possibly the living room so that the cat can get brave and come closer but safe in the knowledge that (usually) a dog won't jump the gate.
- Consider if now is the right time to get a new dog for the welfare of your cat? If your cat suffers with anxiety related conditions such as over-grooming or bladder crystals, the stress of a new arrival may rapidly exacerbate these problems. Consider elderly cats that cannot move away quickly or kittens that are sometimes 'over-curious'. Be sure that you consider these factors. Consider the purchase of a Feliway diffuser (produces calming pheromones) to plug in at least 5 days before the new dog arrives as a very minimum measure.



- Clear counter tops, table tops and ornament shelves of any possessions of value. You may lose valued possessions if the cat jumps up purely in an attempt to move away from the dog, even if they have never done so before, so be prepared. If the cat does have a familiar high look-out point such as a table, consider feeding your cat something extra tasty when in that spot to reinforce a positive calm experience.
- Cats who are house-cats only or restricted to your garden through your choice also need additional attention to their welfare. The provision of additional litter trays for house cats should be considered providing at a minimum, one tray PER cat plus one spare and locations of these moved to dog free areas until all is settled.
- Most importantly, **KEEP THE DOG ON A LEAD AT ALL TIMES** when there is a chance the cat is around until things are settled. This isn't meant as a long term solution but a short term one while everyone gets to know each other. You can use a long training line and you can remove the line if there is a baby gate up preventing the chase cycle from starting. You can close a door and then take the lead off at times of safety for all concerned if you don't want to be attached to the dog the whole time. You can reward the dog with LOTS of treats, toys or cuddles when on a lead hopefully ignoring the cat or coming away from the fascinating furry thing when you call him.
- What you cannot do is reassure your cat that everything is ok when it has a dog trying to 'make friends' no matter how well intended, trying to 'make friends'. The main objective in the early days is to stop the dog from chasing, minimise the cat's desire to run away or escape and provide a calm environment for them to get to know each other.
- People often ask how long it can take to let the cat and dog settle together. It can be a few days or a few weeks. If you are struggling with the introductions working then please call the Centre sooner rather than later so that we can try to help you.

Be Patient!