



# Introducing Your New Dog to Your Resident Cat

---

Bringing home a new dog or puppy is likely to be a very fun and exciting experience for all human family members involved, but if you have a cat that's a member of the household, it's more than likely going to be a very stressful, if not terrifying, event for your resident cat(s). Your new dog most likely will also have little to no experience with cats in an indoor setting. Wayside Waifs does not behaviorally test dogs with cats at the shelter, for the welfare of the cats, and we've found it's not an accurate predictor of how the dog will do with a cat in a home environment. The only way we know if a dog is good with cats is if they lived with cats successfully in a previous home. Even that is not a guarantee that they will do well with a completely different cat in a completely different home.

Follow the steps and tips below to ensure you introduce both your new dog and cat in the safest, least stressful manner possible.

- First and foremost, it's important to have **realistic expectations** when introducing dogs and cats to one another. You should expect to take a minimum of a month to properly introduce your dog and cat. Cats typically are much more territorial than dogs and, as a result, may take months before they actually feel comfortable being in the presence of a dog. It may take years before you see dogs and cats sleep next to one another, and, depending on their temperaments and relationship, that may never happen. Changes to a cat's environment can also cause them a great deal of stress, and adding a new family member is going to be a significant change for any cat. This stress can manifest itself in different ways for cats: Some cats stop eating and/or drinking, some start urinating and defecating outside their litter boxes, some hide and become asocial with everyone in the household, and, though rare, some cats become more aggressive. Your new dog will also need to learn that the cat is not a toy and not to be chased.
- **Take age into consideration.** If you have a cat that is elderly (defined as 11 years or older by most veterinarians), it is not a good idea to get a new dog because the stress alone will greatly decrease their overall quality of life and welfare. The stress could also shorten your older cat's life span. Elderly cats do not have the reflexes and strength to jump up onto high places or crawl under things to get away from an overzealous dog like they were able to when they were young. Puppies five months of age or younger are much easier to train how to appropriately behave around a resident cat because they are still in a developmental stage where they are easier to socialize and their prey drive is not as strong and developed. Likewise, kittens under the age of four months are going to be much more accepting about adding a new dog to the family. However, extra care should be taken when introducing an adult dog to a young kitten because they will not know when to run and how

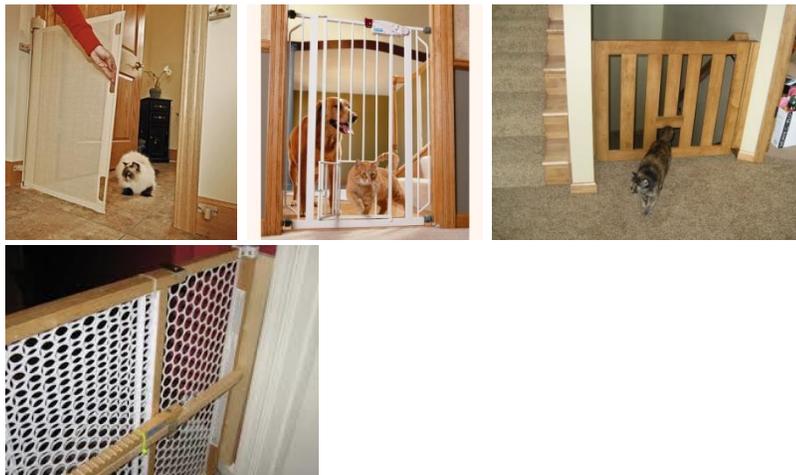
to hide if the dog decides to aggressively chase and possibly try to kill the kitten. Young puppies and kittens will be the easiest and most successful of all the dog and cat combinations to introduce to one another.

- **Know your breed.** Many breeds do quite well with cats in a home; however, some breeds—due to the job that they were bred to do—have higher prey drives than other breeds. Generally speaking, herding breeds (such as border collies, heelers, & cattle dogs), hound breeds (such as coonhounds, greyhounds, & plott hounds), and terriers (such as jack russell terriers, bull terriers, & airedale terriers) have a hard time trying not to chase, nip at, and/or kill small, furry animals regardless of whether they are indoors or outdoors or are beloved members of the family.
- Create a **cat-only safe zone** for your cat a few days before you bring home your new dog. This safe zone should be a room that your cat already naturally feels happy and relaxed in; bedrooms typically make good cat safe zones. It's also important that this room remain a dog-free zone for the first few months so that your cat always has a haven. It will also ensure your dog isn't trying to eat the cat food or the cat poop in the litter box (which is common with dogs due to the higher amount of protein in cat food). Set up the room so that your cat is as comfortable as possible:
  - have a soft cat bed for your cat to sleep in
  - food and water should be in one corner of the room
  - litter boxes should be in the opposite corner of the room as the food, and there should always be one more litter box than there is cats because cats often prefer to urinate in one box and defecate in another (1 cat = 2 litter boxes, 2 cats = 3 litter boxes, 3 cats = 4 litter boxes, etc.).
  - make sure they have furniture/closets to hide under, on top of, or in should they feel scared when they hear the dog running around the house or sniffing by the door
  - keep the blinds/curtains on the windows open so your cat has other distractions such as watching the birds and squirrels; you may even consider setting up a suction cup bird feeder on that window to help bring the wildlife to your cat
  - have plenty of toys and scratching posts out for your cat; you want your cat to be as comfortable as possible and give them the outlet to perform natural cat behaviors so they don't feel sequestered to one room of the house
- When introducing your new dog to your resident cat, it should be done slowly and gradually while introducing **one sense at a time**. First they should only be able to hear one another; then they should only be able to sniff one another under a closed door; then they can see one another through a baby gate, and finally they can meet face to face, but the dog must be kept on a leash for the first few trials. Only move forward with a step in the introduction if you see no hard staring, hissing, growling, or barking. They should both have relaxed bodies and be acting like their normal, social selves. They should pretty much be ignoring one another and looking to their humans for attention and rewards. Follow the steps below to ensure that your introductions go as smoothly as possible:
  - **Week 1:** Allow them to hear & smell one another. Just allow your cat to passively hear the new dog in other areas of the house for the first couple of days. Your cat will be able to

passively smell the new dog on your clothing during that time, and your new dog will be able to smell your resident cat throughout the house and on your clothing. After the first couple of days have passed, allow your dog to go up to the door of the cat's safe zone and sniff. Do NOT allow your new dog to go charging up to the door and scratch/pound on the door; keep your dog on leash while in the house if you can't find a way to keep him or her from leaving the door alone. Rub a towel on your dog and place it near your cat's food bowl so your resident cat can start to form positive associations, such as eating, with the scent of the new dog.

In the meantime, while both your dog and cat have limited access to one another, you'll want to work on your dog's obedience skills: teach them "look at me," where your dog is rewarded for making eye contact with you. Avoid using the treat to lure them to look at your eyes so that it becomes a trained behavior that doesn't rely on a food lure. You'll also want to teach them "leave it" (as explained in the Food Aggression handout) with treats on the ground; then begin to generalize it with other distractions, such as a bouncing ball or a crinkling bag of treats. You'll eventually be able to use the "leave it" command if the dog begins to fixate on the cat or tries to chase the cat.

- **Week 2:** Allow them to see one another. Set up a physical barrier, such as a baby gate, where both animals can see one another but don't have access to one another. Again, you may need to keep your dog on leash if your dog is trying to lunge, bark, or jump on the baby gate. You'll also want to work with your dog on a calm "sit" and "look" or the "leave it" command by the baby gate. Reward your dog and cat with treats if they are both acting calm and relaxed. See the images below for ideas for barriers and gates; they now come in a variety of lengths and heights and are capable of fitting any doorway.



While your pets are becoming visually acquainted with one another, you'll want to use this week to double check and make sure your cat has plenty of vertical spaces and low hiding places to retreat to when your dog and cat meet face to face next week. Shelving, entertainment units, cat trees, and behind/under couches are all spots your cat could potentially use should they feel threatened or need some alone time away from the dog. Below are some images of spaces your cat might enjoy.



- **Week 3:** Allow them to meet face to face. When you allow your two pets to go face to face for the first time, it will be important that you have your dog on leash and have treats ready to reinforce calm behavior while the leash will prevent your dog from trying to chase if your cat takes off running. Chasing is the biggest issue that dog and cat owners struggle with. Small cats in the wild can be both predator and prey, so it's not uncommon for a cat to use the flight response around any real or perceived danger. Unfortunately the cat's flight response can trigger the canine predatory chase behavior with your dog. If you allow your dog to chase and corner your cat, the relationship will quickly go downhill. It's often helpful for two adults in the house to be involved, one to work with the dog and the other to work with the cat. If your dog is acting like it's about to chase the cat, practice "leave it" and "come." Instructions for both commands can be found in the links below. It's important to end any face-to-face interactions while they are still going well instead of waiting until one or both animals are stressed.
- **Week 4:** Total vigilance, or go back a step if needed. There is no exact timeline that you need to follow, and remember, patience and positive experiences will be what really make for a respectful relationship between both animals. Be mindful that your cat will still need its safe zone for weeks after the introduction, and the dog should be kept out of that room. It's also not uncommon for the dog to want to eat the cat's food, and the dog will possibly try to eat the cat's poop right out of the litter box, so make sure you have secure areas away from the dog where the cat can easily access its litter box, food, and water. See the images below for how you can keep the dog out of a room while your cat can come and go easily.



If your new dog is obsessively trying to chase or bark at the cat or is trying to silently stalk and hunt the cat, then you should consider returning your new dog. Your new dog may have a very strong prey drive and will need to go to a home without cats. Likewise, if your cat is so stressed that he or she is hiding all the time, not eating or drinking regularly, starting to urine mark or isn't using the litter box, or is aggressively chasing your new dog, you will need to return the dog for your cat's welfare. Not all dogs are suitable with cats, and not all cats are suitable with dogs.

***If, after trying these suggestions, you are still experiencing undesirable behaviors in your dog, SUBMIT QUESTIONS by clicking the link under Ask A Trainer on the Behavior and Training page of the Wayside Waifs website: [www.waysidewaifs.org](http://www.waysidewaifs.org).***

Written by the Wayside Waifs Animal Behavior Team  
© 2015 Copyright Wayside Waifs, Inc. All rights reserved.

**Addition links and information:**

<https://positivecattitudes.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/munera-it-takes-two-successful-cat-and-dog-interactions.pdf>

<https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/dogs-chasing-cats>

<https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/cat-behavior/introducing-your-cat-new-dog>

<https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/introducing-your-dog-new-cat>

<https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/teaching-your-dog-leave-it>

<https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/teaching-your-dog-come-when-called>