

# Introducing Cats and Dogs

Cats and dogs don't have to fight like... well, cats and dogs. They can live peacefully together and even develop close bonds. But first they need to be safely introduced.

## Considerations for New Roommates

While many cats and dogs can live happily together, not all are suited for it. Consider size and personality when deciding how to introduce a cat and dog, how careful to be, and whether it is even fair to try. Large dogs and those with a history of chasing small animals can make introduction more risky. A cat that tends to run away from dogs or other scary things can become a target for even the best behaved dog. Be realistic about the challenges and seek professional help early if you need it.

## Safety First

When introducing a dog and cat for the first time, safety for both animals should be the priority. Even small dogs can seriously injure or kill cats. Cats can cause eye injuries and lacerations to dogs.

- **Supervise and Separate:** The animals should be set up in their own areas of the home until they have been fully introduced. The whole family should discuss how to prevent accidental meetings while the animals are getting to know each other. Consider keeping at least two layers of separation (ex. Dog in a crate as well as a closed door between the animals), especially if you have any concerns based on the considerations above,
- **Leash Up:** The dog should be on a leash around the cat until both animals are fully comfortable and under control around each other.
- **Train Your Dog:** Teach a "come" so you can call them away from the cat. Other skills like "leave it," "stay," and "go to place/bed/crate" can also be helpful. Always use positive reinforcement to avoid the risk of fear or aggression that comes with punishment.

## First Meeting

Always start with introducing only one dog and one cat at a time.

1. Have your dog on leash while your cat is allowed to move freely. As the (generally) more vulnerable animal, the cat should be allowed to keep whatever distance is comfortable.
  - a. Use a baby gate between the animals as extra security if you have concerns.
  - b. Make sure there are raised areas available for the cat to get off the ground.
  - c. Don't let your dog approach your cat.
2. Reward your cat for just being in the same room as the dog. Reward your dog for focusing on you, relaxing, or doing any of their known cues or tricks.

Keep it short and sweet. Don't wait for the animals to have a problem before separating them. Remember, first impressions matter a lot so make sure they are positive.

If either animal is tense, overly focused, unwilling to take treats they normally enjoy, or unable to focus on you, move them further apart. You need to start at a distance that is comfortable for both of them.

## Prevent Negative Interactions

Assuming your first meeting went okay, you can begin increasing the time to animals spend together. As you move forward it is very important to keep the animals feeling safe around each other.

- Don't give your dog a chance to chase, ever! Supervise the two anytime they are together as they are getting to know each other. Keep your dog on leash and have amazing distractions ready.
- Watch for unwelcome approaching or investigating, even if it's friendly. If anyone is tense, encourage whichever pet is getting too nosy to move along.
- Provide appropriate exercise and play so that nobody annoys or frightens the other with their energy or requests for play (this goes for both dogs and cats!).

## All Good Things

Provide all good things when the animals are together (as long as it's safe). Feeding time, treat time, and cuddles can all be shared in the same room. Quiet play is good too; just be careful to keep the energy level under control; there can be trouble when excitement gets too high. Start with plenty of distance so that everyone is calm and relaxed. Continue to give each animal space and dedicated interaction as they need it but the more positive experiences that they have in one another's presence, the more good associations they will have with one another.

## Happily Ever After?

Building a relationship between different species can take time and energy but having happy pets and a peaceful household is worth the work. If your hard work seems to be paying off, keep things on track by:

- Maintaining the routine of shared positive experiences like feeding and treat time.
- Making sure everyone is getting enough exercise and has appropriate outlets for play.
- Building time together slowly. It's best not to jump from one good hour together to a whole day left alone.
- Continuing to monitor young pets as they grow up. Kittens and puppies are more unpredictable and less able to control themselves during play which can lead to issues.

## If You're Still Struggling

For some cats and some dogs, friendship may not be in the cards. You may always need to do some type of separation and supervision with your pets. Whether or not you feel they can live safely and happily in the same home will depend on many factors so **involve a professional if you have any concerns.**

---

Silicon Valley Pet Project is here to help! Visit our website at **[www.svpetproject.org](http://www.svpetproject.org)** or email us at **[info@svpetproject.org](mailto:info@svpetproject.org)**.

This material was written in collaboration with Certified Professional Dog Trainer and cat behavior consultant Jessica Char. Learn more at **[www.CanineEngineering.com](http://www.CanineEngineering.com)** or **[www.FelineEngineering.com](http://www.FelineEngineering.com)**.