



When you get a new cat or dog, you can't wait to bring them home. However, your resident pets may not share your excitement. Introducing pets to each other is a process.

It is important you make an introduction plan, including when and how you will introduce your pets to each other. Here are some recommendations for introducing your pets in a positive and safe manner.

Factors to Consider

When you are making an introduction plan, consider the following factors about pets, particularly dogs:

- Physical size
- Sociability and behavioural history
- Energy level and play style
- Age and health status
- History of resource guarding

These individual factors will influence how an animal will interact with other pets. Get as much information as you can about their physical characteristics, health, and behavioural history. This can help you make an informed decision, in terms of selecting an animal who will integrate well with your resident pets.

Dog-Dog Introductions

For dog-dog introductions, you will need another household member or friend to assist you. Take the dogs for a walk on a leash in a neutral area. Having both dogs on leash will help you control the initial introduction. Use a six-foot leash that is NOT retractable, as retractable leashes can be dangerous for both dogs and people. Seek a relatively calm, low distraction area (i.e. quiet green space), as this will help reduce arousal levels in both dogs.

Caution: if you notice any defensive, fearful, or aggressive behaviour by either dog during the approach on a leash, do NOT proceed. This behaviour is your dog's way of telling you they are not comfortable. Keep the dogs housed separately and seek consultation from a certified trainer for appropriate steps in this situation.

If both dogs show sociable behaviour, allow the dogs to quickly sniff each other, and then call them apart. Continue the walk and then allow another, brief greeting on a leash. Repeat a few of these quick, on-leash greetings, as long as you are observing social behaviours by both dogs.

After going for a walk and returning home, consider keeping the dogs in separate areas. This way, your dogs each have their own space and can gradually become accustomed to each other. Try going for another walk and repeating the same brief on-leash greetings.

If the dogs show social behaviours, you may only need to repeat these walks a few times before letting the dogs interact freely in an enclosed space, while supervised. Leave leashes on the dogs, in case you do need to separate them quickly. Remove any of the resident dog's toys or food, so the dogs do not have any competitive encounters. This is especially important if one of the dogs has a history of resource guarding.

Caution: do NOT perform on-leash greetings if one of the dogs has a history of leash reactivity. Leash reactivity is when a dog shows reactive behaviour towards other dogs while on leash, such as barking, growling, or lunging. Dogs who are leash reactive should only be introduced to another dog with the guidance and supervision of a certified dog trainer.

Dog-Cat Introductions

Make an informed decision before you introduce a dog and cat.

For example, if your dog has a history of reactivity towards cats, it is probably not safe to introduce your dog to a cat. The welfare of both animals should be considered before introducing a new pet.

If you feel confident to proceed with the introduction, designate a safe area in your home for your cat, with an accessible route. Place a litterbox, food, water, and a "hidey hut" in an area that your cat can access, but your dog cannot. Having elevated perches or a tall cat tree will also help your cat easily retreat if they become fearful. Using pheromone plug-ins, such as Adaptil® (for dogs) or Feliway® (for cats) can also help promote calm behaviour.

When first introducing your pets, it is best to separate them in different areas of your home. This allows them to gradually become accustomed to each other. Remember, introductions are a **PROCESS** and not a single event. Ensure your dog cannot access the cat's safe space or area. You may want to start introducing the scent of each pet by swapping items from each pet's area (i.e. move one of your dogs' toys into the cat's area, and vice versa) over a few days.

When you do introduce them in the same space, keep your dog on leash. Keep the interaction brief. Do NOT use a retractable leash, as you will not have sufficient control over your dog. Monitor the behaviour of both pets. Try offering your dog an enriching distraction, such as a puzzle feeder or snuffle matt to keep them preoccupied. Reinforce any calm behaviour offered by your dog through positive reinforcement (i.e. treats). You may have to engage your dog in a training exercise (i.e. cue your dog to sit, focus, or another simple behaviour) to divert their focus from the cat to you.

Keep your pets separated and repeat on-leash greetings until you observe relaxed behaviour by both pets. Do not restrain your cat during greetings, as this prevents your cat from being able to approach or retreat from the interaction. Always be prepared to redirect your dog's attention, if needed. Lastly, always ensure your cat has an accessible exit strategy (i.e. high perches, cat tree, an accessible route to their safe space) where they can easily retreat from your dog.

Remember to be patient. It can take weeks to months for your pets to fully adjust to each other's presence. Never hesitate to reach out for behavioural assistance from a certified trainer, if you have concerns or issues.

Helpful Tips

Use positive reinforcement (with discretion). Using treats, verbal praise, or toys can help encourage a nervous cat or dog. However, be cautious. For example, some dogs may guard food against other dogs or may become hyper-aroused by food or treats.

Use calming pheromones. Pheromone products, such as Adaptil® (for dogs) or Feliway® (for cats) can help promote calm behaviour. These products are available as a spray, diffuser, or collar product. If using a spray, direct it onto surfaces in your pet's environment; do NOT spray it directly on your pet. You can use Adaptil® and Feliway® at the same time if you are facilitating a dog-cat introduction.

Additional Resources

Adaptil® and Feliway® are available for purchase at Bingo's Pet Shop at the Edmonton Humane Society. All sales proceeds go directly back to the Edmonton Humane Society to help the animals in our care!

Did You Know?

You can also ask us behaviour questions by emailing:
askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com

It takes approximately \$7 million to keep the Edmonton Humane Society operational for one year and 40% of these funds come from generous donations made by supporters like you. Please [Donate](#).