

FACTSHEET

Creating happy homes for cats and dogs

Some people insist you're either a cat person or a dog person, but many of us are animal people and enjoy the company of both cats and dogs. Cats and dogs can live together very happily in most cases, but there are a few important things you need to do in order to create a harmonious multi-pet household.

When you are thinking of getting a new pet, you should first consider your existing pet's personality and think about whether they will be happy with a new pet around. Introducing a new pet can be very stressful on the existing pet (or both pets in some cases), so you want to get it right. Some cats and dogs prefer to be on their own and some like company, so it's important to seriously consider this before you get a new pet. If you are unsure, you can always contact Cat Protection for advice, or if you have a dog and are thinking of adopting a cat, contact the breeder or the place where you adopted the dog from. The history of a shelter pet can be a very helpful guide. For instance, we will often have cats who we know did live happily with dogs in the past, or cats who we know have not liked dogs in the past.

Setting up your house

Regardless of whether you're introducing a resident cat to a new dog or vice versa, it's always a good idea to have a quiet and safe spot for your new pet. This will help them to adjust to their new forever home and their new furry friend. A laundry or bathroom is ideal as this is a small area and easy to clean if any toileting issues occur! Place a bed, water bowl, and food bowl in the area as well as some toys and for a cat, a litter tray (for a puppy you might want to put down training pads). Bedding that has the new pet's scent on it will help them feel more settled. Always give your existing pet the run of the home and confine the new pet.

Check that your home is puppy or kitten proofed to prevent any mishaps once the new pet ventures out into the home. Check that fly-screens are secure, power cords are tucked away or covered, and throw away any broken toys. Products like 'Feliway' for cats and 'Adaptil' for dogs are pheromone replicants that will help to reduce stress in your pets and are a great idea to have in either a spray or diffuser form, ready for the arrival of your new pet. Other products like Zylkene, a nutraceutical product to assist with stress relief or calming treats can also be useful for both cats and dogs.

Introductions

One of the most important things when you have a multi-pet household, whether it is multi-cat or cat and dog, is getting the introductions right. Although in a perfect world all our pets would instantly love or at least tolerate each other, just as with people this is not always the case. We have to make their initial introductions a pleasant and enjoyable experience so they will want to interact with each other. Patience and reading both pets responses to each step are the key to trouble free introductions. NEVER rush the introductions process as doing this can cause irreversible damage to either/both pets.

There are a few steps to introducing pets:

- Scent introduction: before you introduce your pets face-to-face, you need to let them become accustomed to each other's smell. Scent plays an important part in the life of animals, so this step is crucial. When you bring your new pet home, don't wash your hands after playing with them. Go to your resident pet and let them smell your hands and clothes. They might hiss/growl or back away. This is normal, as they don't know your new pet's smell yet. Do this a number of times over a few days. Do the same when you pat your resident pet and play with your new pet. If your new pet is contained in a room with a gap under the door, let your resident pet sniff under the door, and vice versa. Feed the pets on each side of the doorway so that each pet is aware their food source is not threatened by the presence of the other pet. Once each pet is familiar with the other's scent on you, move to the next stage
- Scent swapping: place an item like a blanket that your resident pet has slept on in the room your new pet is in, and vice versa. After patting one pet don't wash your hands and pat the other pet. This will swap the two scents and help the pets become aware of each other without actually meeting. Once you notice the cat rubbing their face on the other pet's scented object, or the dog sleeping on the cat's scented object, move to the next stage
- Restricted introduction: the most important thing to remember when introducing the pets is that you don't want your resident pet to feel threatened or rejected. Place your new pet in a carry basket and carry them into the room or if a larger dog, place them on a lead and walk them where your resident pet is. If possible, close off this room so your resident pet can't run away. Let the pets see each other and introduce themselves. Don't force the resident pet to get close; they will do this when they're ready. Stay in the room. Expect hissing or spitting or growling from either pet, this is quite normal. However, any excessive aggression shown by either pet should end the introduction session for the day. Continue restricted introductions, one to two times a day, until no aggression is shown – then you can let the pets explore each other in a room with you present to monitor behaviour. Slowly let the pets explore the house together when you are home, never let new pets out in the home alone with existing pets before introductions are complete
- DON'T RUSH! It is very important that you introduce your new pet to other family members **slowly**. You will need to make sure your resident pet is comfortable with your new pet before leaving the two alone together. Always ensure the pets have enough space to get away from each other if they need time out. Of course, some pets will bond very quickly. You need to be sensitive to the messages the pets are giving each other to make the right decisions about how slowly or quickly to progress the introductions
- Remember to pamper your existing pet so they don't feel they've been replaced or aren't loved. Make sure each pet has their own toys and own bed; even if they don't use them it is important they know they have their own. Keep any existing routines with them, like play time or grooming time
- It is important to ensure that cats are confined indoors, or there is secure fencing in place so that they cannot respond to the new situation by running away. If your new cat is going to be an indoor/outdoor cat, they need to be kept inside for the first month to become accustomed to their new surrounding and then slowly introduced to outdoors. Always keep all cats indoors from dusk to dawn
- Don't hesitate to call our Welfare Office if you need advice or would like to discuss your pets' behaviour.

Problems that might occur

- Aggression: if at any time either pet shows aggressive behaviour to the other, you should separate them to prevent any injuries. Remember, a dog can severely injure a cat and a cat scratch or bite on even a big dog can be very painful. Dogs with eyes that are bulbous like Pugs or Chihuahuas are more likely to get a scratch on the eye which can cause severe injury or even blindness
- Being frightened: always have a place where your cat can have time out if they need it. In most cases it will be your cat who is showing frightened behaviour, so a quiet hiding spot in a wardrobe or a high perch is great as it can be a place where the cat can hide without the dog annoying the cat and the cat becoming aggressive. If the dog seems frightened of the cat, set up a collapsible crate or dog pen where the dog can sleep or rest without interference from the cat
- Over-grooming: in some cases, a stressful situation, like meeting a new pet, can cause a pet to over-groom. This will present as your cat or dog licking an area over and over, causing hair loss. If this happens, make sure you are spending good quality time with your pet, and give them lots of toys to entertain and distract them. Lavender heat-packs can help to calm your pet if put in their bedding, you could try 'Rescue Remedy' drops in their water bowl, calming treats, Zylkene, 'Feliway' and/or 'Adaptil' diffusers. If the behaviour continues, seek veterinary advice
- Hyperactivity: the addition of a new pet can sometimes see your existing pet becoming hyperactive, as they may want to play with your new pet all the time. Toys and extra play time can help alleviate this until the pets get used to each other and find the right balance between themselves.

It cannot be stressed enough how important it is for you to be patient and calm when introducing new pets to each other. If you are stressed your pets WILL pick up on that, making them even more stressed. Try to stay calm and take your time and this will help immensely.

If you are ever worried about introducing a new pet or have concerns once they are introduced don't hesitate to call Cat Protection on (02) 9519 7201 or your local vet.

While all care has been taken in preparing this document, it is intended to provide general information only and should not be taken as constituting professional advice. Mention of a product or business does not mean endorsement by Cat Protection.