



Dog-Cat Introductions, Recommendations, and Resources

Adopting a new dog or puppy is an exciting time and comes with a lot of joy, reward, and enthusiasm for the humans in the home. However, if you have other animals in the home, it is important to take their mental and physical wellbeing into consideration as well.

When bringing home a newly adopted dog to a current cat resident in the home, proper introductions that establish a new dog to cat relationship take time, patience, a lot of management, and even some training. The Franklin County Dog Shelter does not permit dog to cat interactions within the shelter for the welfare of the cat as they can increase the stress level for that cat. Additionally, they may not produce an accurate assessment. The only way to know for sure if a dog is compatible with a cat is if the shelter has a known history of the dog with cats. Even with a known history, it is important to keep in mind that proper introductions and training should occur to ensure a safe and successful cohabitation of animals.

We at the Franklin County Dog Shelter will provide you with this informational handout, as well as the below resources for you, on how to introduce your new dog and resident cat. We have included links for videos, articles, as well as a list of certified feline professionals who can assist with any concerns that may arise during or after the introduction period. Any home that has a resident cat and is looking to adopt a FCDS dog, will be permitted to complete a foster to adopt period in order to allow some initial understanding of if the dog and cat will be able to coexist safely.

The following will go over step-by-step recommendations on introducing your new dog and resident cat. We want to set each member of your family up for success and ensure it is done in a safe manner and in the least stressful way possible.

Never force interactions by holding either the dog or cat in place. Never place the cat with the dog in a small room with no place to hide. Always supervise interactions closely and immediately interrupt any concerning or intense behaviors. We highly recommend keeping a leash on the dog when around the cat, even if it appears the interaction is going well.

A Few Things to Consider First

The first thing to keep in mind is to set **realistic expectations**. You should expect this process to take about a month, even longer in some cases. Changes to environment, living situations, and the addition of a new family member can be more stressful for the cat than the dog. Stress manifests differently in cats and can affect their physical health quickly. Cats may display this stress by not eating/drinking, not using the litterbox, becoming antisocial and hiding more often. For some cats, aggression may even be displayed. While it is understandable you will be paying a bit more attention to your new dog and getting to know your new dog, it is very important to monitor any signs of stress for your cat as well.

You will also want to consider **the ages** of the cat and the dog. Stress for elderly cats could decrease their lifespan and they may not be able to jump, hide, or run as quickly as a young cat or kitten. If you have an older cat, adopting a puppy may be a more appropriate option as they are more susceptible to training and you can teach a puppy how to behave appropriately around the cat. Opposite of that, if you have a young cat or kitten, care should be taken when introducing an adult dog into the home. Kittens may still be in a socialization period and may not understand they should run or hide from a dog who may display predatory aggression towards

them. The ideal situation is having a young puppy and a young kitten to introduce to each other and will likely have the most successful outcome.

Another thing to remember is that if you know the **dog's breed**, breed characteristics can play a role in how your dog may interact with a cat. Some breeds have higher prey drive than others and more caution should be taken. Herding breeds, terriers, and some hound dogs have historically been bred to have a higher prey drive. It may be harder for these breeds not to chase, nip, herd, or try to injure/kill a small animal or cat even with proper introductions as it is simply part of their genetic make-up. This does not mean, for example, that a border collie can never live in harmony with a cat. However, it wouldn't be unusual for a border collie to herd the cat every now and then.

Before Bringing the Dog into the Home

The first thing you want to do before bringing your new dog into the house is ensure you have (or create) a **safe space for your cat**. This should be an area of your home that your dog is not allowed to have access to. Your cat should feel comfortable and have all necessary items to live freely in this space. In most cases, this is a bedroom, an office space, extra bedroom, or basement that your cat has a positive association with. Make sure this room has at least one litter box per cat, food, water, a soft bed, places to hide under and high places to jump onto, if possible a window and a space for your cat to look out the window, and plenty of toys or items to distract Your cat. Your cat may be living in this space for a couple weeks, you want to ensure they are comfortable and can display normal cat behaviors.

Introductions

Week 1

We want to introduce your new dog and your cat "senses by senses". We will start by first allowing them to hear and smell each other but not able to see or touch. This can be done by having the door of the cat room closed and allowing your dog to approach the door. Given dogs and cats senses are much more advanced than humans, both animals will be able to hear and smell each other through the door. Your dog and cat will also be able to smell the presence of each other on you. As you interact with each pet separately, their scent will be on your clothes. Allow passive smelling and hearing for a couple days.

During this time, while your new dog is getting used to the home and your cat is safely in their own space, it is ideal to start training some basic foundation skills and teach your dog a simple "watch me" cue or reward your dog any time they make eye contact. This can be a useful behavior to have as a distraction when introducing your dog and cat.

Week 2

The next step will be allowing your cat and dog to see each other but not fully touch. This is best done by setting up a barrier (in most cases a baby gate) between your cat's space and your dog. Depending on the size of your dog you may want to invest in a higher baby gate or multiple baby gates. Your dog should have a leash on and should be NOT be permitted to lunge, bark, or jump on the baby gate. Having supervised interactions between your dog and cat through the baby gate is encouraged but do not force an interaction. Reward each pet for calm and relaxed behaviors. This would be a great time to have short, positive training sessions with your dog (and your cat!). You can ask for simple behaviors such as sit, down, and watch me, while right next to the barrier. Your dog can form an association that good things and fun training occur when in the presence of your cat.

At this stage, your dog is likely to be more curious than your cat. While your dog may be right up against the barrier, your cat may not be. Be sure not to force your cat to approach the baby gate for face-to-face introductions if they are not comfortable. Making sure their room is set up with places to hide or jump upon are important at this point. You can allow positive sniffing through the baby gate, positive calm watching of each

other (do not allow intense staring), and positive/relaxed attempts to play (more likely initiated by your dog if this does occur). Do NOT allow any behaviors that seem to place your dog into a heightened state of arousal.

Week 3

As long as interactions through the baby gate have continued to appear positive, you can move onto face to face greetings by removing the barrier but not forcing anything. Allow your cat to exit on their own and do not allow your dog into your cat's space. Ensure that each animal appears calm and relaxed before moving to this point. Your dog's body should be loose, tail wagging or neutral, and no stiffening, lunging, hyper focus, or barking at your cat. Your cat should not be consistently hiding or avoiding your dog, and their body should also be loose and relaxed. Keeping a leash on your dog but not adding tension to the leash if you are holding it is important. Have treats available and be ready to implement some of the training you have done such as watch me, sit, or down to take your dog's focus off your cat momentarily. During this week, the biggest challenge you MAY face is your dog's urge to chase your cat. Now that they have more access to each other and are no longer separated by a baby gate, your dog's chase response may be more prominent than before. Do not allow chasing as any positive relationship you may have been building in the previous weeks could quickly deteriorate. In the beginning, keep face-to-face interactions short and positive. Always end on a good note. Encourage your cat to go back into their space or take your dog to a different area. Your dog should still not have access to your cat's safe space during this stage.

Week 4

Hopefully by week four you have been able to successfully allow your new dog and cat to coexist but it is important to always stay vigilant. Harmonious, respectful relationships between species take time and patience. You may find that some days you need to take a few steps back and place the barrier back up to give your cat more time alone. This is okay. Don't rush the process. Another thing to keep in mind is that it is not uncommon for dogs to want to eat cat litter and/or cat food so make sure your dog does not have access to either so your cat can still feel safe to eat and eliminate in peace. You can purchase a baby gate with a small pet door, prop a door open that allows your cat to enter and exit a room but not your dog, or place small steps that allow your cat to go over the baby gate but not your dog.

Conclusion

If at any time during the above steps you feel your dog is obsessive, unable to be distracted when in the presence of your cat, displaying severe aggression or predatory signals, and you feel your cat's (and possibly your) safety is at risk, you may need to consider returning your new dog. Likewise, if at any time your cat's stress level is affecting their quality of life and they are no longer eating or drinking, properly using the litter box, or constantly hiding, you may want to consider returning the new dog. Unfortunately, not all cats and dogs are suitable to live together and there are cases when no amount of time, patience, or training will allow for a stress-free cohabitation.

Always consider reaching out to a professional for help and ask questions. The behavior department at the Franklin County Dog Shelter is happy to assist you though keep in mind our area of expertise is primarily focused on dogs. Reaching out to a trainer who specializes in dogs AND cats may serve you better in this situation. We have provided you with a few resources below.

Congratulations on your new dog! We hope that by following these recommendations and taking your time your new dog and cat can build a positive relationship with each other in your home.

Resources

Articles:

- <https://resources.bestfriends.org/article/how-introduce-dog-cat>
- <https://www.animalhumanesociety.org/behavior/how-introduce-dog-and-cat>
- <https://positivecattitudes.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/munera-it-takes-two-successful-cat-and-dog-interactions.pdf>

Videos:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWCeD8X3lZg>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lcEU3Gfyhk>

Cat Trainers/Behaviorists/Feline Experts:

- Ohio State Veterinary Behavior Department
 - <https://vet.osu.edu/vmc/companion/our-services/behavioral-medicine>
- Tabitha Kucera
 - <https://www.chirrupsandchatter.com/>
- Dr Denise Johnson at Committed to Claws
 - <https://committedtoclaws.com/>
- Jennifer Mauger- L'Chaim Feline
 - <http://lchaimfeline.com/index.html>