

## Introducing A New Pet Into Your Home

You can make the transition easier for new pets by using gradual introductions. The new pet should be kept separate from the other pets whenever they are not closely supervised. This advice may be extreme, but it is designed to ensure that no injuries occur. It is also designed so that the existing pet has as little change in their "normal" routine and environment as possible. The original pet(s) should have access to the same areas of the house as previously. If the dog was crated, the crate can still be used. If access was restricted to the first floor, this pattern should continue. The new pet should be placed in a neutral area (den, finished basement, brightly lit bathroom) with toys, a blanket, water, a litter box if the new pet is a cat, and anything else that it might need. It is important that the new pet not be placed in an area that is considered highly desirable by the other pets. Areas of high value usually include places where the people spend a lot of time with the pets (bedrooms) or where the pets choose to stay when they are alone (around food dishes or on window sills that are good perch sites).

Whenever any animal is isolated for any reason it is critical that the animal receive a lot of social attention whenever possible. This is especially true for new pets. When you come home greet the original pets (make all the dogs sit first) and let them out, if this is your normal routine. Do not rush--when people are stressed and rush they may either facilitate undesirable interactions between the pets or not be as attentive to cues about impending problems as they otherwise would. Introduce the new pet gradually. First, spend some time alone with the new pet. Then bring the new pet outside on a leash or harness and let the other pets explore him or her. If you anticipate problems with the current household pet, it should also be on a leash. The pet owner should not be tense and the leashes should be loose. Positive reinforcement **MUST** occur anytime the pets interact positively.

The best time to perform gradual introductions is when the animals are calm. Start by petting the original pets and telling them that it is "okay" only if it is truly okay; do not reward hissing, growling, or biting. When you tell a pet it is "okay" when it is upset, you are not calming the animal - you are rewarding the inappropriate behavior. If the animals in the household are calm and either ignoring each other or act friendly despite the new addition, you can feed them within sight of the new pet. This distance should be close enough that they

can easily see and watch each other, but not so close that they become upset. Once you find this distance you can move their food dishes closer together by an inch a day until they are side by side. If you ever have an aggressive encounter, back off from that distance and return to the last distance where neither pet reacted. Leave the dishes there for a few days and then gradually start to move them again.

Feeding and petting the animals in each other's presence teaches them that good things happen when they are together and calm. For this to be successful, neither side can react violently. If an altercation should occur, separate the pets and try again later. The goal is for the pets to interact successfully for about 2-4 weeks before you start to decrease the perimeters set forth. The goal is to establish a threshold under which the animals can demonstrate the behavior that you desire. It is up to you to modify the environment.

Some aggressive and undesirable interactions are not violent but are still not conducive to the development of a good relationship between the pets. You can learn to watch for subtle behaviors that can signal potential problems, should the recipient of those behaviors not be able to change the course of the interaction. In dogs these behaviors include piloerection (hair lifting on scruff, neck, or back), staring, snarling, stalking, side-by-side posturing with growling or lip lifting, and pinning the other animal by grabbing its neck. Cats are masters of subtle threats, and their biggest nonvocal threats include a direct stare and an elevation of the rump and the base of the tail with or without piloerection. Hissing, snarling, and pouncing are also threats but are less intimidating to many animals than the display just described. Some hissing can be expected when introducing cats. Even when the cats have been cat friendly to other cats in the past a new encounter can still be startling.

If the new pet is sitting in close proximity to the other pets and everything seems to be going well, tell all the animals that they are good and give them all small food treats and petting, if they like to be petted. This works best if you have two people so one can hold the new pet while the other deals with the other animals. If you are working with two people, switch roles so that the new pet does not associate its rewards with only one person. This can still be accomplished with one person by using leashes, harnesses, and crates. Leashes can be tied to furniture or doorknobs that are at a distance that will allow the pets to sniff each other and react, but not so close as to permit them to lunge at and injure one another. Pets should not be left unattended if they are tethered. They could injure themselves or die.

The entire time that you are doing this exercise-and it could take hours or weeks-make sure that each pet has 5 to 10 minutes alone with you each day when all you do is pay attention to that pet. This attention could be grooming, playing with a toy, or just petting and massage. Make sure that the pet is happy and relaxed at these times. If you know in advance that you are getting a new pet, you may want to establish these periods of individual attention in advance of the new arrival. If these periods follow a regular schedule, the pets will learn to anticipate them. It may decrease their anxiety about the new addition because they can rely on them.

Once you are able to get the pets to react to each other in a positive manner or not to react at all when restrained, remove the restraints. Be vigilant and keep a water pistol, foghorn, air canister, or whistle with you to interrupt any dangerous situations. If the animals are all behaving well, remember to reward them with praise and treats.

The keys to success are patience and observation. It is critical that the animals are not inadvertently encouraged to become hostile or nervous in each other's presence by well meant but misplaced reassurance for inappropriate behaviors.

#### Checklist for Introducing a New Pet to Other Household Pets

1. Separate the pets when they are unsupervised.
2. Crate one or more of the pets.
3. Pet-proof the home.
4. Gradually introduce the pets using food and rewards.
5. Introduce the pets during quiet times by using leashes and harnesses.
6. Keep the pets at their determined threshold and praise for appropriate