

Information adapted from original article by the San Francisco SPCA, 2004.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS MATTER

A proper introduction between pets can make all the difference when you're bringing a new pet into your family. Read below for important guidelines on giving your introduction the best chance at success.

Always remember that safety for both pets is the top priority. Make sure to have a plan to separate the pets in the event either pet is at risk of being injured, such as if the dog begins to chase the cat as prey.



1. **Have a “safety room” (or multiple rooms) as well as high places the cat can access but the dog cannot.** Baby-gates, cat doors and clearing high surfaces can accomplish this. It is important that the cat can retreat to regroup and relax, away from the dog, and then venture forward into “dog territory” at her own pace. The cat should have access to food, water and litter in this area so that she is never forced to interact with the dog.
2. **Never force the cat (or dog) into proximity** by holding her, caging her or otherwise restricting her desire to escape. This can be stressful for the cat, which may lead to scratching or injuries. Plus, stress is a common reason for cats to break litterbox training.
3. **For the first introduction, have the dog on leash** in case he explodes into chase. If it seems to be going well, take the leash off and supervise interactions closely.
4. If the dog is behaving in a friendly and/or cautious way, try to not intervene in their interactions, except to **praise and reward the dog for his good manners.**
5. **Interrupt any intense chasing and try to redirect the dog’s attention to another activity** – this is very difficult so you may be forced in future to manage the dog onleash around the cat until you have worked out a routine or divided up the house.
6. **In the first few weeks, observe the trend: are things getting better or worse?** Monitor interactions until there is a pattern or plateau in their relationship.
7. If the dog is the newcomer, be sure to give plenty of extra attention to the cat so she does not associate this change with reduced attention and affection. If the newcomer is a cat, it’s also a good idea to make sure the dog associates the new intruder with good things for him. **Always aim to create positive associations for both pets.**
8. **Dogs should not have access to the cat litterbox** – it is too stressful for the cat and the dog may eat cat feces and litter. Most dogs will also eat cat food the cat leaves behind – **we suggest feeding cats in the cat’s “safe” room or on a high surface.**

Questions? Contact our Pet Helpline at spcawake.org/helpline or (919) 772-2326 opt 5, and we’ll be happy to help you!