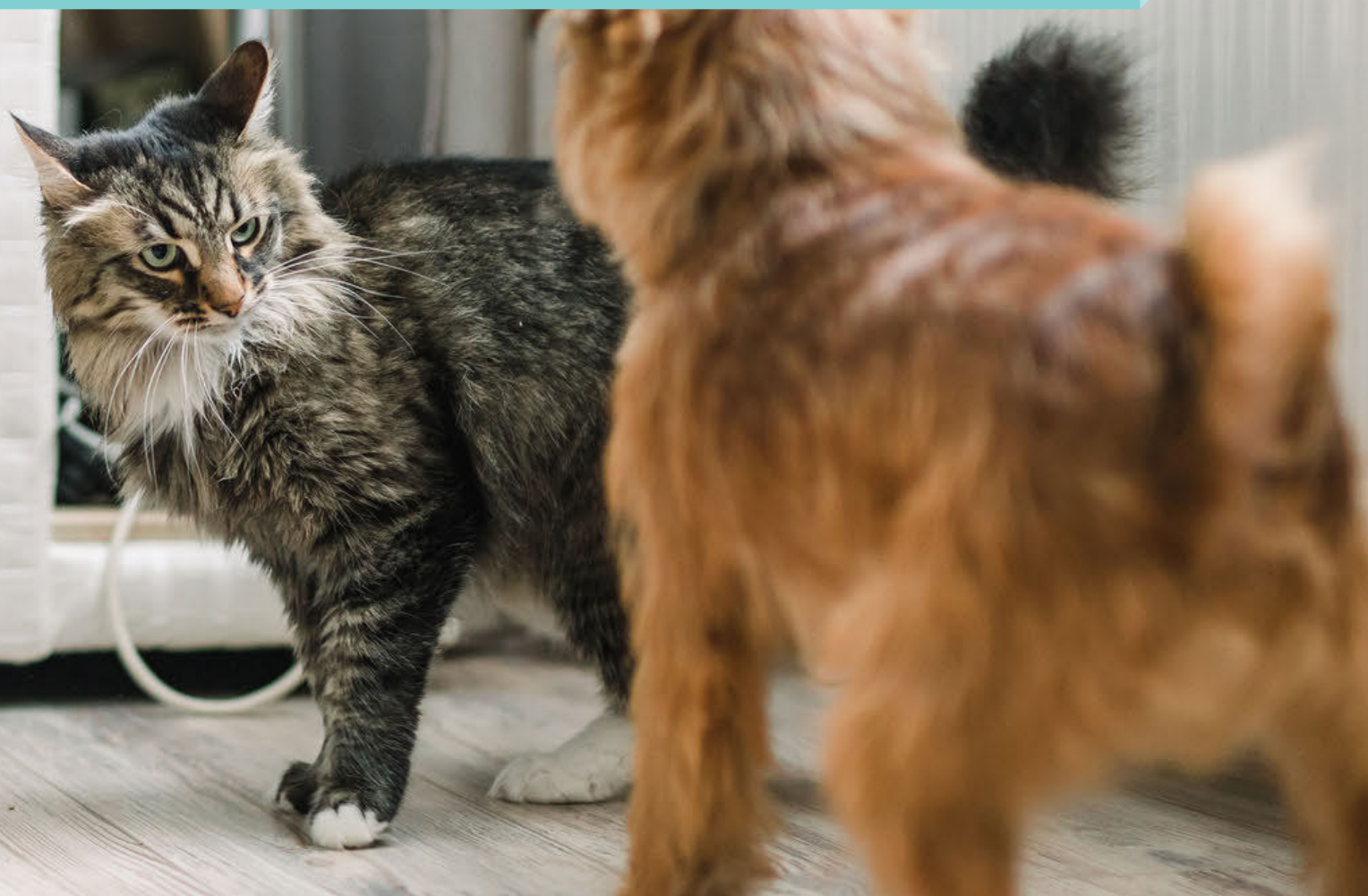


Adopt a Pet™

Animal House: How to intro a new cat to your other pets...

...Without turning your home into a circus.



If you spend any time on the internet, you might assume dogs and cats — or even a pair of cats — are destined to become best friends. It's all very magical and happy. But the reality is that introducing pets takes *real* work from the pet parent to shape the type of relationship they have. That work looks like patient introductions, a few key steps, and paying attention to body language.

Sometimes, a new cat will hit it off with your existing dog or cat right away. Other times, one or both parties need a little (or a lot) of space. Like any good matchmaker, you can increase the chance of success with a carefully orchestrated introduction.

When you bring a new pet home, there are some strategies you should take when you introduce this new pet to your existing pet — here's how to get started.

How to introduce pets to each other

Let's talk about getting pet introductions off on the right foot.

1. Keep them separate at first

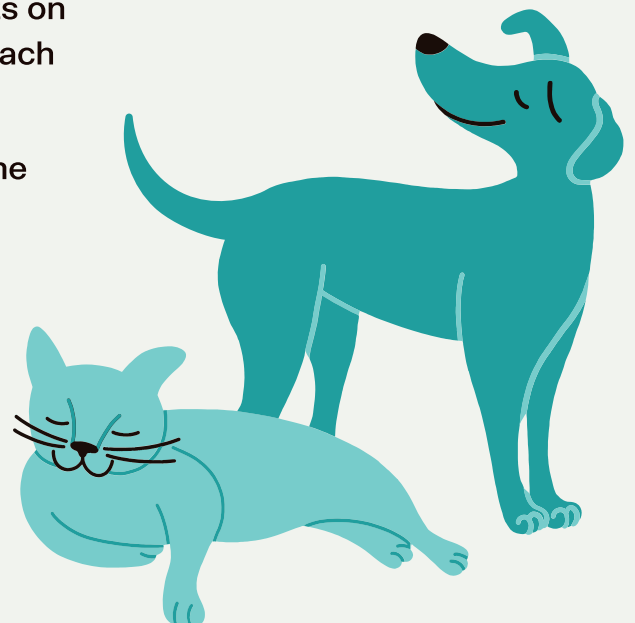
Start by keeping your new cat separated from your existing pet. Confine the new kitty to a room equipped with essentials such as food, water, toys, a bed, and so on. Give the newbie time to get used to their home *before* you start introductions.

You can also let them explore (when they're ready), while your other pet is in another area. When they're relaxed throughout the home, you can start the intro.

2. Allow them to get used to each other's smells

Swap sleeping blankets (or other items saturated with each pets' scents) between your new and resident pets by placing their blankets in each other's spaces. Sprinkle treats on each blanket to create a positive association with each other's scents.

If your existing pet and new cat hang out in the same areas (rotating in at different times), you can leave treats on the other pet's blanket. Feeding pets near each other's scent blanket can also be helpful.



Pay attention to body language

Before you introduce pets, you'll need some sense of how the meeting is going to go. Unfortunately, pets can't talk. But they can tell you a lot with their body language — you just need to know what to look for.



These signs mean that your cat is not ready to move forward with meeting another cat.

1. Hissing or guttural vocalizations
2. Lip-licking
3. Big, dilated pupils
4. Ears sideways or back
5. Swatting or lunging
6. Tense or arched body posture
7. Raised or puffed fur
8. A fixed, intense stare
9. A puffy tail
10. Trying to flee the area
11. Trying to look larger or smaller
12. Tail twitching in an agitated way
13. Skin twitching
14. General nervous behavior



These canine signs indicate that you need to slow down your introductions to a new cat.

1. Yawning
2. Panting
3. Lip-licking
4. Paw-lifting without being asked
5. Pacing
6. Stiff, frozen body posture
7. Growling
8. Whale eye (showing the whites of their eyes)
9. Tucked tail
10. Avoidance or turning away
11. Raised hackles
12. Lip curling or showing teeth
13. Ears pinned back
14. A hard stare

3. Let them meet — without seeing each other

Once they're doing really well with the above scent introductions — with no signs of nervousness or overexcitement — move on to very short meet-ups at a gate and/or closed door. Set up a pet gate in the doorway between them, and drape a towel or blanket over it so they can hear and smell each other without *seeing* one another yet.

A word of caution: not every pet gate is cat-proof. A cat who's motivated enough can jump a gate! Use a hardware-mounted gate, and one tall enough that jumping over isn't easy (or double stack them) — use a door-height pet gate for extra security.

Put *lots* of space between them. They should be far enough apart to feel completely relaxed and be happy to focus on treats, pets, or whatever positive reinforcement you're adding to this experience. If you're introducing a cat to a dog, keep the pup on leash.

If they can't relax at any distance, turn the intensity down by conducting sessions like this for a more extended period.

4. Increase visibility

Slowly uncover the gate over multiple sessions. When they're both ready, they can start moving closer to the gate, and you can gradually make the sessions longer. But you (and maybe a partner) need to be right there, keeping them focused on positive things and not on each other. Don't let them get too close. Keep at least five feet between them, and dogs leashed (if any).

5. Gradually open the gate

When they're doing really well hanging out on opposite sides of the gate for longer periods, you can start slowly opening the gate. Do this gradually, over many sessions. And as mentioned above, if you have a dog, keep them on a leash, for everyone's safety.

6. Let them share space

Start *short* sessions where they hang out in the same room — without barriers, but with plenty of climbing places where your cat can feel safe. (Do this only when everyone is ready.) Offer positive reinforcement as they share the space and have calm reactions to each other. Watch their body language. Gradually increase the length of these sessions.



Signs of positive progress

How do you know if things are going well?

Here's what to look for:

- **Relaxed body language:** Look for ears in neutral positions, a relaxed tail in a loose position, small pupils, and a calm posture. Either pet may lie down, groom themselves, curl up for a nap, or just mind their own business without giving the other pet much attention.
- **Curiosity and interest:** Sniffing at the door, sniffing each other, or exhibiting relaxed body language while observing each other suggests they're open to forming a connection.
- **Playfulness:** Play behavior, such as batting at each other's paws under a door or engaging with each other, can indicate that the pets are becoming more comfortable.



Common troubleshooting tips

Here are some tips to minimize stress and disputes between the pets.

Go slower than you think, and be patient

The biggest mistake pet parents make is trying to rush the process. When it comes to successfully integrating a new pet into your home, patience is a virtue. Some pets may learn to coexist peacefully within a week or two, while others may require several weeks or even months.

Make sure they can escape to their own safe space

All pets need a place where they can go to feel safe or have some downtime. (Cats, in particular, should always have an “escape” area.) Are there ample escape routes for pets who feel threatened? Are there locations where a pet might get cornered? If so, how can you block off these areas?

Be careful with food, toys, and other resources

To avoid conflicts, make sure each pet has their own food dishes, water bowls, and beds. Initially, feed them in separate rooms, and don't leave toys or any of their favorite items lying around.

Not all pets react well to eating near a barrier. If this happens, try playing with or petting each pet on either side of the door.

Cat-to-cat intros

- Give each cat plenty of space. Have you provided enough litter boxes (one per cat, plus one extra), hiding spaces, and scratching posts?
- Check for contagious illnesses by taking your new kitty to your vet to ensure they aren't incubating any contagious illnesses — such as parasites, FeLV and FIV before introducing them to other cats.

Cat-to-dog intros

- Be careful with play and using toys. Playing with the dog could intimidate a nervous cat, and playing with the cat could stimulate the dog's prey drive. Know your pets, and watch their body language.
- Don't do intros if your dog is on high alert or overly interested in the cat. If your dog is whining or scratching at the door, wait until their excitement level has calmed.



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