

Introducing New Pets to One Another
Daniel Estep, Ph.D. and Suzanne Hetts, Ph.D.
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Many people have more than one companion animal sharing their lives and their homes. As a result, questions arise as to the best way to introduce a new animal to resident household animals. Each introduction will be different depending on the species (dog, cat, etc.), the number of other animals, and the ages, sexes and individual temperaments of the animals involved. Despite these complications we have a few suggestions that may help to smooth the transition of a new animal into your household.

A general rule of thumb is that unfamiliar animals should never be left together unsupervised to “work things out” on their own. First impressions are important to animals as well as people and if things start out badly, the animals may never get along.

Once you get the new animal home, confine her/him in a comfortable space (spare bedroom, cage, etc.) where she/he can be visually isolated from the other household pets but can begin to get accustomed to the new home. From time to time you may want to isolate the other animals and let the new animal explore the rest of the house without the other animals present.

Introductions between new and resident animals should be as pleasant as possible. Watch closely for signs of fear or aggression and separate animals if this occurs. Use food treats or toys to reward non-fearful and non-aggressive behavior and to keep the animals in a happy, pleasant mood.

Restrain the animals at first with leashes or by holding them near you. Animals that aren't moving around freely are less likely to cause fearful or aggressive responses in others. Additionally, fights are easier to break up among restrained animals.

Make initial introductions brief (5-10 minutes) but let them go longer and give the animals more freedom with each other as they become more relaxed around each other. Don't be tempted into leaving the animals together for long periods of time if the first few short introductions go well. Gradually work up to longer periods.

Don't punish animals for threatening each other or fighting. Simply remove them from the situation. The punishment may make them more aggressive with each other in the future.

Be patient. Several short introductions over a several days or weeks works better than a few longer sessions. If the animals haven't been fully integrated within a week or two you may need professional help.

Taking the extra time and effort in the beginning to insure that relations start off well may prevent fighting problems later that can be dangerous and difficult to resolve. As with most other behavior problems, prevention is the best medicine.