

## Introducing a Kitten to Your Other Pet(s)

*These hints can also be applied to introducing an adult cat into your home and having a good relationship with the rest of your pets. It just usually takes more time with adult cats (see additional resources below).*

### The personality of your resident pets

Even if your older dog or cat has lived peacefully with other animals in the house, there is no guarantee that he will welcome a new kitten! Fortunately, most older animals will accept any pet brought into the home. Usually, however, even the calmest dog or cat will be concerned at the appearance of a new kitten. When you bring a new kitten into the home, your other dog or cat will need lots of extra attention. He needs to know that you still love him and that the newcomer is not a threat to his position in your household. Pets that are spayed/neutered are less aggressive and less territorial, so integration should be easier.

### Your new kitten

When you first bring your new kitten home, it is important to isolate her. Choose a room in neutral territory (not where your other pet likes to sleep). This will give you time to reassure the older pet, and will also protect the youngster from potential aggression and let the new kitten privately get used to you.

### A place for kitty

Set up the kitten's room with a bed, scratching post, litter box, food and water dishes, and toys. Put the kitten in the room and let her explore a bit while you are still with her. Then leave her alone for a short time so she can become comfortable in the new surroundings. At first, the kitten may hide. Try to coax her out to comfort her. Don't try to push too fast, though. She will gradually get used to you. New kittens are won over with food, but don't give her too many treats! Make sure to visit your vet with the kitten before allowing her to meet your other pets. Be sure to keep a separate litter box, food and water bowls even after the introduction until you are sure the cats will share.

### First introduction

Animals get to know each other by smell. Your older pet will spend a lot of time sniffing at the bottom of the door to kitty's room. The kitten will do the same on the other side. You should also do a "scent exchange" by rubbing a small cloth on kitten's cheek and then rubbing it on your other cats, and vice versa. Cats communicate by scent, so this can help them get to know each other. Cheek pads are a good source of the cat's feel good chemicals – you notice them rubbing on things, right? It's a claim of home and happiness. Let them share each other's scents.

After a day or two, you should be able to determine your pet's reaction to the new kitten. A dog anxious to meet the kitten will scratch at the door and wag his tail, while a cat will purr and generally act curious or friendly. However, if your dog growls or barks at the door and your cat hisses and seems upset, it would be best to wait a few more days before trying a face-to-face introduction. An adult cat may be indifferent or may be eager to meet a new friend. Some pets are ready sooner, others take more time. Be patient. The new kitten will be ready to meet your other pets faster than they will be ready for her. Just be patient and let them take the lead.

### Take it slowly!

When your older pet seems ready, introduce the pets by opening the door just wide enough so they can see and smell each other. Be certain that you stand close by to supervise. Depending on their reactions, gradually open the door wider for short periods of time until they become adjusted to looking at each other without becoming upset. This procedure may take several days, but it is usually successful.

The first time the two pets meet face-to-face should be short and, hopefully, calm. If the older pet is a dog, proper restraint, such as a leash will prevent him from chasing and scaring the kitten. Don't force the issue. Let the animals go as close, or stay as far away, as they want. Repeat short introductions as often as necessary, until the animals are able to stay comfortably in the same room, with supervision. Don't expect instant friendship – that takes time.

Each time you let the animals together, give them more time. Always be observant for clues that one of them has had enough and let the older cat go his own way. As you get them together for longer sessions, it will be time to let them play. Interactive play supports integration. Spend time with each animal alone and also with the group. If you have more than two animals, it is easier to start with a pair and then move to the whole group. Interactive play allows you to bond with your pets, while giving them exercise. It helps a shy cat become more self-assured, since it imitates the hunting experience. Cats need to be confident to hunt, so chasing strings, balls and furry toys are very helpful. Play also lets cats bond with each other, because it simulates hunting as a team. Your play sessions don't need to be long, and they should always end with a reward, a small treat and lots of praise given for good behavior.

### Everyone needs space

Your older pet needs to be reassured that the newcomer will not take over his territory. If he has a favorite sleeping place, don't let the kitten sleep there. Provide the little one with her own toys and play space. Animals are usually protective of their food and feeding dishes. Ideally, since the kitten should be eating her own kitten food, keep her feeding dishes in a different room as long as possible. Monitor mealtimes to prevent either animal from pushing the other away from its plate. Kitten food is best for the first year, so it may be a good idea to continue feeding your kitten in a closed room for a while.

Although a high quality food formulated for all ages will provide complete and balanced nutrition, if your adult cat is

a little overweight, he does not need the extra calories that he'd get from kitten food. And if your cat is already eating a weight loss or weight control kibble, the kitten will not receive all the nutrition she requires for her growing body if they share food bowls. It is best to feed the pets the food formulated for their specific life stage. Now might be a good time to switch the whole cat family over to regular meals, instead of free-feeding. This can help you monitor their weight and make sure that nobody gets fat, with animal obesity on the rise.

### Litter Box

Two or more cats in a household often do share a litter box, but many adult cats do not appreciate sharing with a kitten, at least until they are better adjusted. Providing two litter boxes should help prevent your adult cat from starting to soil in inappropriate areas in protest.

### Friends or Foes?

Reward good behavior. When your resident cat or dog meets the kitten, and does not misbehave, give him a treat and tell him what a good pet he is. Supervise the pets very closely until you can trust their behavior. Expect that an older cat will swat the kitten when she's being a pest, but try to limit those unfavorable interactions by distracting the kitten away from the other cat. It may take months for your older pet and the kitten to become totally comfortable with each other. They may never become friends, but simply learn to tolerate each other. Even if they remain standoffish, most pets appreciate another warm body in the house when their owners are not there. But usually over time, the majority of pets find a workable relationship, even if they are not best friends!

Remember: Take it slow. Your pets will give you the signal to move faster and make changes. You need to work on their time, NOT yours. If you follow the rules and listen to your pets, you will have a very rewarding experience and a lifetime of love from the animals you rescued!

### Additional resources (click on links for more info)

[http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/cats/tips/introducing\\_new\\_cat.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/cats/tips/introducing_new_cat.html)

<http://www.americanhumane.org/animals/adoption-pet-care/cat-behavior/introducing-cats-to-cats.html>

<http://www.petfinder.com/cats/bringing-a-cat-home/cat-to-cat-introductions>

[http://cats.about.com/cs/catmanagement101/a/play\\_with\\_cat.htm](http://cats.about.com/cs/catmanagement101/a/play_with_cat.htm)