

SUCCESSFULLY INTRODUCING A NEW CAT OR KITTEN TO YOUR MULTI-SPECIES FAMILY

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Introducing a new cat into an established multi-species family can be a challenge. The existing hierarchy is a delicate balance of interrelationships, and humans are often reluctant to upset the status quo. Many people avoid this by refusing to get a new cat until older pets die. But this rigid stance denies everyone—animals and humans—the infusion of fun energy a new cat or kitten can bring to the family.

If you're considering getting a new cat or kitten, it's essential that you know the preferences of the animals you already have. Most people can tell if their dogs are cat-friendly. Most people can tell if their cats get along well with others. But determining how they'll react—ahead of time—to a new family member might be a little more complicated. If you're not sure how your animals feel about potentially inviting a new cat or kitten into the family, get the help of an animal communicator. Let them chat with your current animal family members and see what they think about the idea of bringing home someone new.

You may have to do some deal-making to get everyone on board with the idea. For example, an older cat may not be in love with the idea of a kitten, but wouldn't mind an older cat who would agree to keep its distance until everyone gets to know one another. A dog may be okay with either a cat or a kitten, but since he's been bopped on the nose before, he wants to make sure the family chooses a laid-back cat with less of an attitude than most.

Once everyone's on board with the idea, it's still essential to manage the situation to achieve the best possible outcome. Keep the new cat or kitten isolated in a small room for the first few days, or even weeks. This allows her time to get used to the smells and sounds of the household from a safe distance. She might feel lost and overwhelmed if set down in the middle of a large bustling household. A small space with a litter box, food and water bowls, and a covered bed or box to hide in, will give her time to feel safe in her new home.

The humans in the family should visit the newcomer often, giving plenty of lap time and cuddling. This helps the new kitty to get acquainted with people, but also allows the animal family members to sniff each other's scents mingled on the human's clothing. The sense of smell is very important to animals, and they may react unfavorably to animals whose scents are unlike their own. Little tricks like brushing everyone with the same brush or sharing blankets between the newcomer and the established pets will help them to become used to each other before they even meet.

When the new cat—and the established animal family members—start showing friendly curiosity about what's behind that closed door, it's time to introduce the new kitty to the rest of the animal family members. (If they're looking at the crack under the door and hissing, it's not time yet.)

When it is time to make introductions, it's important that you know your animals' personalities and control the introductions to ensure everyone's safety. Remember that even when the spirit is willing,

the will can be weak. A dog's prey drive may override his intention to play nice, if a cat he doesn't know well decides to run from him.

Assuming that your dog is already cat-friendly (if not, a new cat probably isn't in your immediate future anyway) leash the dog and allow the cat to explore. If you've trained your dog to "settle" or you can give the down-stay command, that's even better. A new cat will be more relaxed around a dog that isn't towering over her.

During the introduction, judge the dog's reaction. Ears forward, body and tail relaxed, tail wagging equals curiosity. Staring eyes, tense body, tail straight-out or hackles raised means your new cat is in danger. If all is well, allow both animals to greet each other and allow the dog freedom to interact off-leash when it is earned.

Introducing new cats to existing cats is a little different. As long as your older cats have been spayed and neutered, any drama should be all-for-show and fairly short-lived. Most cats feel it is their duty to teach newcomers how to behave. A certain amount of hissing and slapping is natural and harmless, and you should allow them to work it out by themselves. Take care not to give the newcomer too much attention in front of the other cats until she has been accepted. Shared playtime with lavish praise and attention for the established family members will help the new fur-baby to find her place in the new order of things.

With your sensitivity and understanding of each family member's feelings, before long, you'll find everyone cuddling and happy together.