

# INTRODUCING YOUR NEW PUPPY TO YOUR CAT

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Dogs and cats who were not exposed to each other's species when they were young will require some extra time to become accustomed to each other. A puppy will likely want to play with an adult cat, or may even be afraid of her. An adult cat may either react fearfully and defensively when confronted with a young, silly puppy, or could decide to "take him on" if he gets too out of control. It is less likely for a puppy than an adult dog to respond aggressively to a cat, with the intent to harm her. Dogs and cats will react to each other differently because they differ in their communication signals and social behaviors. They will need to be introduced to each other slowly and gradually so that neither is harmed or frightened and aggressive reactions don't become a habit.

## Introducing a Puppy to a Resident Cat

1. Any puppy in a new home needs lots of supervision. Managing normal puppy behaviors such as housetraining and chewing require that the puppy not be allowed to explore the house unsupervised. Puppies, like toddlers, easily get into trouble on their own! Thus, when you first bring the puppy home, you'll want to choose an area where you can confine him when you can't be watching him. A kitchen or laundry room blocked off with a baby gate or other barrier works well. You can also use an exercise pen, a playpen, or a crate. Ask your veterinarian for a handout on crating and crate training to prevent over-use of the crate. Provide a bed, water, toys, food (if feeding free-choice) and papers for elimination if you are paper-training the puppy.
2. Unless the puppy is extremely rambunctious or the cat quite timid and frightened, you can probably let the cat decide on her own how close she wants to approach the puppy when he is confined in his area. If either animal becomes aggressive or frightened (a few hisses and barks are OK), you can manage the introduction by having one person sit with the puppy and offer him some small tidbits of food. Another person can sit with the cat on the other side of the barrier, also with some special tidbits. Lay a "Hanzel and Gretl" trail of tidbits from the cat's position to the barrier in order to encourage her to approach the puppy. Keep the puppy relatively calm using the tidbits. The puppy can be encouraged to "sit" and "down" by holding the food just above his head (as the head goes up, the rear goes down!) then slowly moving the food straight down to the floor and then forward. Practice these procedures for several minutes or until both animals are calm, even though they may be curious about each other. Allow them to touch noses through the barricade if they wish.
3. Next, try walking the puppy around the house on a leash. Encourage the cat to stay in the vicinity by making "good things" happen to her - offer her some tidbits, play with her favorite toy, or merely hold her in your lap if she enjoys being petted. An important goal is for both animals to have pleasant things happen to them when they are in each other's presence. If neither animal is overly upset or excited, drop the puppy's leash and let him approach the cat.
4. It's OK to let the cat set her own limits as to what she will tolerate from the puppy. Most puppies get the message that they have over-stepped the cat's tolerance limits after several hisses and swats. Even declawed cats can intimidate a puppy. It is unlikely that a puppy will be

injured by these threatening behaviors. Although a few of these limit-setting interactions are OK, don't let them become a habit. If your cat is hissing and swatting or running away every time the puppy approaches her, you need to work more on controlling their interactions as described above.

**Precautions:** Dogs like to eat cat food because it is very high in protein, and therefore very tasty. You should keep the cat food out of the puppy's reach (in a closet, on a high shelf, etc.) Why dogs like to "raid the litterbox" is not well understood, but eating cat feces is a relatively common behavior. Although there are no health hazards to the puppy from this habit, it is usually distasteful to owners. Unfortunately, attempts to keep the puppy out of the litterbox by "booby trapping" it will also keep the cat away as well. Punishment after the fact will **NOT** change the puppy's behavior. Probably the best solution is to place the litterbox where the puppy cannot access it - such as behind a baby gate, or in a closet with the door anchored open (from both sides) just wide enough for the cat.

If even after following these introduction procedures your puppy and cat are not getting along, ask your veterinarian for more information or for a referral to a behavior specialist. The certified applied animal behaviorists at Animal Behavior Associates, Inc. will be happy to consult with you and help you work with your pets.