

# INTRODUCING YOUR NEW KITTEN TO YOUR DOG

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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. An adult dog will most likely consider a kitten to be either a play-thing or prey and consequently will either want to play with it or harm it. A kitten may be very intimidated by an adult dog. 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 Kitten to a Resident Dog

1. If your dog does not already know the commands "sit", "down", "come" and "stay" you should begin working on them. Little tidbits of food increase your dog's motivation to perform, which will be necessary in the presence of such a strong distraction as a new kitten! Even if your dog already knows the commands, work with obeying commands in return for a tidbit so that your dog will perform more willingly and reliably.
2. When you first bring her home, confine the kitten to one medium sized room with her litterbox, toys, scratching post, food, water, and a bed. Feed the dog and the kitten near either side of the door to this room. Depending on your feeding schedule, this can either be the animals' regular meals or special "goodies" they will get only as part of the introduction process. This will help to start things out on the right foot by associating something enjoyable (eating!) with each other's presence. Don't put the food so close to the door that either the dog or the kitten are too upset or distracted by each other's presence to eat. Gradually move the dishes closer to the door until the animals can eat calmly directly on either side. Next, use two doorstops to prop open the door just enough - maybe only an inch - to allow the animals to see each other, and repeat the whole process.
3. Switch sleeping blankets between the kitten and dog so they have a chance to become accustomed to each other's scent. Also put the scented blankets underneath the food dishes.
4. Spend some quiet time in the kitten's room. Sit down on the floor or the bed and let the kitten approach you. Don't stare at her, and scratch her gently under the chin or behind the ears. Before you go in her room, take a few minutes to pet the dog so you have his scent. Take some tidbits and/or a dangling toy with you so that the kitten associates you and the scent of the dog with "good things".
5. Once the kitten is using her litterbox, eating regularly, approaching the door without fear or aggression while the dog is on the other side, and is comfortable with your presence in her room, let her have some free time in the house while putting the dog in the kitten's room. This switch provides another way for the animals to have experience with each other's scent without

a face to face meeting, and also allows the kitten to become familiar with her new surroundings without being frightened by the dog.

6. After several of these switches, if the animals are becoming less curious about each other's scents and things have been going well on either side of the closed door during feeding or "treat" times, then it's time for a brief face to face introduction. Put your dog's leash on, and command him to either "sit" or "down" and "stay", using food tidbits. Have another family member enter the room and quietly sit down with the kitten on his/her lap. The kitten should also be offered some special tidbits. If the kitten does not like to be held, you can use a wire crate or carrier instead if the kitten is used to and comfortable in a crate. Cover the crate with a towel and allow only one side open so the kitten doesn't feel so exposed. **Do NOT** use a crate if this will be the kitten's first experience with one or if the kitten is not calm while crated. At first, the kitten and dog should be on **OPPOSITE** sides of the room or as far apart as necessary so that neither becomes fearful, aggressive or "out of control". Repeat this step several times until both are relatively calm, and just curious about each other. Do not progress to the next step until this has happened. This may take several days or more of practice.

7. Next, move the animals a little closer together, with the dog still on leash and the kitten either held gently in a lap or crated. If the dog gets up from his "stay" position, he should be firmly repositioned, praised and given a tidbit for obeying the "stay" command. If the kitten becomes frightened, increase the distance between the animals and progress more slowly. Eventually, the animals should be brought close enough together to allow them to investigate each other. If the kitten is not frightened and wants to walk toward the dog on her own, let her do so as long as the dog remains under control.

8. When the kitten and the dog can be calm when close to each other you can begin letting each move around a little more in each other's presence. Continue to keep the dog in a "down-stay" using tidbits, and let the kitten explore the room. If she's still a little timid you can encourage her with a toy. Switch roles, and hold or crate the kitten and let the dog walk around. Keep the dog on leash, even in a heel position if he is still quite excited. If he is doing well, let him approach the kitten on his own. With each practice session, increase the time the animals spend together and gradually let them have more freedom of movement. Be sure that your cat has an escape route, and a place to hide. Keep the dog and cat separated when you aren't home until you are certain the cat will be safe.

9. Avoid any interactions between the animals which result in either fearful or aggressive behavior. If this happens during a face-to-face introduction, calmly separate them, and continue the introduction process using the gradual steps outlined above. You may need to find another intermediate step to practice before allowing the same amount of contact again.

Developing successful relationships between cats and dogs can require a lot of time and patience. Sometimes the two can become best of friends, while other times they only develop a mutual respect and tolerance of one another. If you have problems, 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.