

Introducing Resident Cats to a Dog

CatChannel expert Jeanne Adlon, professional cat sitter, offers practical advice for introducing cats and dogs to each other.

By Jeanne Adlon

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Q: I currently have cats in my home but would like to adopt a rescue dog. What are your suggestions for introducing them?

A: I am a strong advocate of pet adoption, whether rescues or adoption from local shelters, so good for you! Interestingly enough, nearly half of all homes with pets have both cats and dogs, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association, so you are in good company.

Personally, I have found that introducing dogs to cats can be easier than cats to cats and since I have always had both, getting along was always considered a certainty, not a maybe. Some years ago I adopted a wonderful little dog named Ziggy (named for the cute way he zigs and zags as I walk him.) When he first arrived, he ran around checking out all the rooms while my cats watched from their favorite perches on top of tall furniture. Luckily for Ziggy, he wasn't the first dog they had shared space with, but felines were new to him — and they looked like they'd be fun to chase. Well, after two days of firmly telling Ziggy "no" he understood chasing was a no-no. Today, he has a loving relationship with all my cats, particularly Ethel who thinks he is swell.

If you have cats in the home and want to adopt a dog, I suggest choosing a small one with a calm, easygoing temperament. Also, an older dog rather than a puppy would be best. Bring something with the new dog's scent home to your cats before his arrival, and vice versa if you can — animals react strongly to smell and it's best to get them started early on.

Prepare a room with all the essentials — food, water, toys and litter for your cats if you need to put them in there while your dog is getting acclimated. Also prepare a separate room for the new dog and make sure it has a pet gate. Allow the dog to explore his new home while on a leash and supervised by you. After he is back in his room, let your cats out to smell where their new roommate has roamed — their noses will be on high speed. In time, hopefully all will be able to co-exist.

Meanwhile, don't force them together and always remain calm : Anxiety can affect pets in a negative way. Know that a peaceful relationship requires time, patience and love. As always, I invite readers to comment and share their ideas.