

All in the Family

Ease your new kitten into the household to avert dysfunction.

Susan Easterly

Monitor early canine/feline interactions constantly, but don't appear anxious, Milani said. A dog will pick up on an owner's anxiety but misinterpret the meaning. "The dog isn't going to think, "Oh, my owner's upset because she's afraid I'm going to hurt this kitten." Instead, the dog will think its owner is afraid of the kitten for some reason," she said. Teaching your dog specific commands can alleviate worry and create a safety net. In the book "Cats for Dummies" (2nd Edition), co-authors Gina Spadafori and Paul D. Pion, DVM, DACVIM, suggest teaching your dog the "leave it" and "stay" commands before bringing a kitten home. You'll repeat those commands frequently in the first few weeks, so it's a good idea to make sure the dog knows them well. While most cats and dogs can learn to get along or at least tolerate each other's presence, there are exceptions. If a cat hides, stops eating or becomes aggressive with other pets or you, or if you detect injuries, separate your pets and start over or separate them permanently, Comings said. "In some instances, re-homing the newcomer may be the only solution if you've tried everything and the relationship is not working." Kittens, however, hold an ace in their introductory favor they are babies. Adult cats tend to accept young kittens into their realm more readily than other adult cats, Spadafori said. Finally, spaying and neutering your pets reduces territorial threats and health problems, creating more peaceful households. Bucky, now a handsome, neutered 6-month-old cat, found his place in our world. He learned to respect our older cats and can often be seen wrestling with our lady Lab. He's the best example I know to prove that adding a kitten to a family and multi-pet household can work. "Above all, keep things positive for all concerned by being patient and recognizing that mistakes will be made," Comings said.

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