

## Restore Peace in a Multi-Pet Household

**Find out how to handle another new pet introduction.**

*By Kelly L. Stone*

Mick (cat) and Beauty (dog) are now close friends.

You worked so hard to achieve a harmonious environment in your multi-pet household. Yet again, you find yourself opening your heart and home to another one. As you prepare to integrate your new addition to the family, see what advice other pet owners and experts have to offer ...

### A New Dog

When Laura Janssen, a pet owner, took in a stray lab, her cat climbed the refrigerator and refused to come down. Pet Owner Susan Walrath's cat, Mick, was very unhappy when Susan rescued a German Shepherd. "Beauty would go up to Mick to say 'Hi,' but Mick would hiss and spit. Mick was overwhelmed," Walrath says.

"A dog is the natural predator of the cat and any dog, no matter how small, can kill a cat," says Melinda Merck, a veterinarian with The Cat Clinic of Roswell in Georgia.

The dog must learn it is beneath the cat in the pack. Experts offer different scenarios on how the dog can achieve this:

### Reinforce Hierarchy

Place a cat bed on top of the dog's crate. "That's a dominant position for the cat to be in, and with dogs, somebody over them is a dominant gesture," Merck says. If the dog accepts the cat as dominant, leave the bed on the crate indefinitely.

### Eliminate Chasing

Indoors, put the dog on a long leash. If the dog lunges at the cat, stomp on the leash and say, "No!" Immediately correct the dog's behavior by snapping the leash. "Pop the collar once — if it stops the chasing, praise the dog," says Alan Steinle, owner of Command Performance Dog Training in Atlanta. If the dog ignores the pop, apply rapid multiple pops and vocalize aggressively until the dog stops, then praise. "With each incident this process should go up in intensity until the dog wants to avoid the correction more than he wants to go after the cat," Steinle says. Continue this training until the dog's behavior changes.

### Teach Submission

Crate the dog and allow cats to approach, sniff, and even swat the dog. "When the cat smacks them in the nose a couple of times, the vast majority of dogs will get the message," Steinle says. "Do this until the presence of the cat is not an issue for the dog." (Caution: If the dog excitedly tries to get out of the crate and to the cat, it might only increase his drive to get to the cat later. Stop using the crate for this purpose immediately. Crate the dog when unsupervised and ensure that it's in an area inaccessible to cats.)

### Get Help

Seek a qualified dog trainer's help if your dog refuses to stop lunging at or chasing your cat.

(From left to right): Henry, Fifi and ChewBurt cuddle in the nap basket.

"Diva" Fifi stands over Cruise on the cat tree.

### A New Cat

Cheryl McAuliffe, a multiple pet owner, adopted Gracie from a shelter. "Gracie does not have a nice disposition toward other cats," McAuliffe says. When the existing cats came in, Gracie would hiss, swat and chase them.

Theresa Ford, also a multiple pet owner, brought full-grown Fifi into her home. "Fifi's a diva princess," says Ford. "She bossed Harley-Bubba, and Cruise all over the place."

“Cats are all about space,” Merck says. “It’s like merging two households of teenagers. Everybody has to do their posturing. ‘I’m going to use this litterbox,’ or, ‘I don’t want you laying up there, get down.’ It takes a while for adult cats to work that out.”

When adding new cats to your home, remember to add more litterboxes, scratching posts and food and water stations as well, says Ingrid Johnson, a cat behavior consultant in Atlanta.

To get your cats accustomed to the new one, try these general guidelines:

**Week 1:**  
Put the newcomer in a room (with food, water, litterbox) and close the door so that the cats can only smell each other. “They get a lot of hissing and spitting out of their system,” Johnson says. “Put canned food or treats on either side of door, or run a string under the door with a toy tied to both ends so they can play. This encourages them to approach and sniff.”

**Week 2-3:**  
Try the first scenario, but stack baby gates in lieu of the door. Feed cats on either side to promote positive feelings, Johnson says.

**Week 3 and Up**  
Let the newcomer out and put the other cats in the room to increase familiarity. Then slowly introduce them to one another during the next few days. “Redirect attention off the new guy by putting out canned food, toys or treats. Associate the new cat coming in with something positive — a new cat condo for instance,” Merck says.

Kelly L. Stone lives and writes in a multi-pet household in Georgia. Visit her online.

**In February's CAT FANCY:**  
Find out how to maintain peace in a multi-cat home.