



FELINE
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HANDBOOK
SPCA of Westchester

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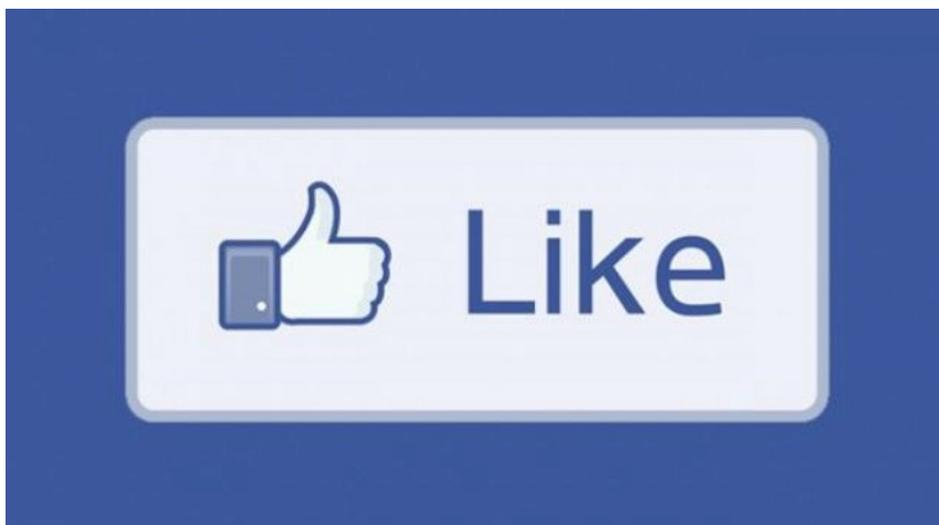
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Thank you to the ASPCA, Jacqueline Munera's Shelter Cat training manual, and Cat
Time

DO YOUR RESEARCH

BREEDS:

There are over 40 different breeds of cat and each breed has a different kind of personality and lifestyle. Before adopting a cat, do some research on the different breeds. Also remember that many cats found in shelters are non-breeds or “moggies”. These are essentially the cat equivalent of mutts and their behaviors are less easy to predict than pure-bred cats. Most “moggies”, however, have less health issues and are more sociable with humans and other cats.

This website is great for learning about different cat breeds:

<http://cattime.com/cat-breeds>

If you are adopting a non-bred cat or a moggy, please ask the people who have worked with the cat about any kind of behaviors that you should know about or any sort of health issues that the cat might have or may be susceptible to.

LIFESTYLE:

Make sure that your cat fits your lifestyle. After learning more about the different breeds of cats, find a few kinds of cats that would feel comfortable with you and your lifestyle. Remember that while some cats may be okay with staying home alone for the whole day, others may need more constant attention and won't be able to thrive if you work all day.

IMPORTANT: If you get to the shelter and can't find any of the breeds that you matched to your lifestyle, don't worry. Even though a breed might not match your lifestyle exactly or as well as you would like, it doesn't mean that the specific cat that you make a connection with in the shelter won't be able to adapt or you won't be able to make a few small changes so that you and your new cat can be happy. Remember: Our knowledge of how specific breeds behave is only generalized based on our observations, it is not absolute.

TYPE OF HOME:

Each breed of cat needs a different kind of home. Some may be fine in large homes with lots of room to explore while some prefer smaller, quieter homes. It is very important that your new cat feels comfortable in his/her new home, so make sure that you take this into account when adopting your new cat.

WHAT YOU NEED BEFORE BRINGING YOUR CAT HOME

FOOD: Dry, small bite cat food such as Purina One (Kitten brand for kittens). Supplement the dry food with canned cat food such as Friskies turkey & giblets.

WATER BOWL: Fresh water twice a day (and no milk or milk products!)

LITTER PAN: Size appropriate for kitten or cat; place in a quiet place away from food and water bowls. Some cats do not like litter boxes with a cover, especially large cats.

LITTER: Non-scoopable clay is recommended as clumping (sand) litter can cause lumps in the stomach requiring surgical removal (especially among kittens).

BEDDING: Optional soft cozy cat bed or blanket

SCRATCHING POST: A tall sturdy sisal (rope) type post that will help kittens and cats to climb, stretch, and play is recommended. Be sure it is sturdy so it won't fall over when the kitten becomes full grown. Try not to use a carpeted scratching post or pad as this could confuse the kitten/cat if you have carpeting in your home.

SCRATCHING PAD: Corrugated cardboard also works well.

ASSORTED TOYS: Plastic balls, little furry mice, etc.; wand toy for interaction and exercise should be used only under supervision and kept out of reach when not in use. (Be sure that rubber bands, strings, etc. are put away as kittens and cats can swallow these items during play and may not be able to regurgitate them.)

CAT BRUSH: Start brushing kittens early in life so she/he will regard this activity as pleasurable; especially important for long haired cats. Adult long hair cats usually need a grooming brush called a "rake." Use gentle strokes and talk softly to cats and kittens while grooming.

NAIL CLIPPER: Use small clippers for kittens and only use larger clippers if you are comfortable clipping a cat's nails. Typically, starting the nail clipping process early in a kitten's life makes this grooming task relatively easier as the kitten grows up. If you can't clip the nails, have a friend help you or have a Vet do this on a regular basis. Ask your vet to show you how to clip nails correctly, to avoid traumatizing the cat.

WHEN YOU ARRIVE HOME

Before you open the cat carrier, set up a small secure quiet safe room with dry food, fresh water, a litter pan with litter (placed on the opposite side of the room), a soft cozy bed, toys, a scratching post and a scratching pad. Keep the cat/kitten in the carrier until the room has been completely set up with the litter pan, foods, water, etc. as suggested below.

SET UP A “SAFE” ROOM:

- Make sure you secure any wires that kittens or cats might chew on.
- Make sure all windows and screens are secure and that cat/kitten cannot escape from room (keep the safe room door closed).
- Make sure all dangerous objects are put away, all fish tanks have secure covers, and toilet lids are always down.
- Check that any plants you have are not the types that are toxic to cats (and dogs if you have a dog). There is a section in this manual with a list of common poisonous plants as well as a number of websites that provide listings of pet-toxic plants.

EXPLORATION AND INTERACTIONS:

When the room is ready, open the carrier and show cat/kitten his/her litter box and food and water bowls.

Let the cat/kitten explore the room and hide if it wants to and come to you in its own time.

DO NOT try to forcefully get the cat/kitten out of its hiding place. She/he will be much more sociable if she/he is allowed to choose the time to make friends.

For the first week or so your cat/kitten will most likely come out to eat, use the litter box, and explore its surroundings at night when the household is asleep.



Talk softly to the cat/kitten to build trust and pet gently. Do not lure a kitten or cat out of hiding with food in your hand. Instead, toss a treat towards the kitten or cat and take a step away. This will help to build trust and show you mean no harm.

Make sure all small children are supervised with the cat/kitten. Be sure that they hold the kitten properly (don't squeeze the kitten, drop the kitten, yell, or cause the kitten any distress). This is especially important as this is the time of bonding for the kitten and it will greatly influence your future relationship with your new pet.

After about 1-2 weeks when the cat/kitten is secure in its own room, allow the cat/kitten out, **UNDER YOUR SUPERVISION**, to explore the rest of the house.

Make sure all doors and window screens to the outside are securely closed.

Always put the cat/kitten back in its own room before leaving the house. It is unbelievable what kittens get into in a short period of time.

Cats should not be allowed to roam freely outside your home for several months as cats need time to bond with you and your home. Kittens should not be allowed outside under any circumstances until they have received all of their vaccinations.

KITTEN CARE

If the kitten develops loose stools or diarrhea, a Vet visit is in order ASAP as the kitten may have coccidia (treatment: albon) or giardia (treatment: metronidazole) or tapeworm (treatment: droncit or drontal). This is assuming that your kitten has been treated for roundworms; having had two treatments of strongid three weeks apart. It is especially important to treat diarrhea in a young kitten quickly as they can rapidly become dehydrated and die.

You should try and handle your kitten as much as possible so they will allow you to take care of it in case of injury or Vet care.



KITTEN SOCIALIZATION

Kittens are great in many ways, but they are particularly fabulous to start your husbandry training practice with. They are wide open for new adventures and likely have fewer negative past experiences than adult cats in the shelter. This presumably means that your kitten sessions are going to be successful, and success leads to more success. The husbandry participation skills they learn will usually become a solid part of their behavioral repertoire, making their future owners—and vets—very happy.

Problematic behavior can be even more deadly for cats than it is for dogs, and supporting behavioral development of good cat “citizens” should be considered just as important as disease prevention.

There are a variety of ways you can start working on husbandry behaviors with kittens, most of which are the same as you would do with a puppy. Basic operational premise: pair highly positive things with slightly aversive or neutral occurrences.

Set up your kitten socialization practice area with all of the paraphernalia you can imagine, including carriers, scales, nail clippers, and stethoscopes. You can have an area with tables to practice grooming and handling activities or you can work with the kittens on the floor. Play is your ally here, so use it to make husbandry activities fun. For example, engage a kitten in chasing a wand toy or string and he won't even notice he is jumping right onto the scary scale. Then suddenly, that scale isn't so scary anymore! Practice picking up kittens, giving them a delicious snack, and then setting them back down to continue playing. Cats really can't see the area right in front of their noses and mouths, so they can use tactile senses to learn how to eat the food while leaving your fingers intact.

TO DECLAW OR NOT TO DECLAW

Declawing and Alternatives

Declawing is something that should only be considered in cases of EXTREME behavioral problems. Cats use their claws to exercise, play, stretch, climb, hunt, and mark their territory. Although your cat might use your hands or furniture for these activities, declawing is NOT the answer and there are many other ways to guide your cat to healthy claw activity.



The declawing operation itself is the human equivalent of removing the first joint of all your fingers. Many vets feel that the lack of these joints impairs the cat's balance and can cause weakness from muscular disease. Declawing can also make a cat feel defenseless and can affect their personality, making them skittish or nervous biters. In rescue work, we see many declawed cats that have been given up by their owners. Why? Because these cats still had behavioral problems that were worsened by not having their claws. So, if you are adamant about declawing your new cat, why not consider adopting a cat that has already been declawed?

Take it from an expert. Dr. Nicholas Dodman, author of *The Cat Who Cried For Help*, offers this perspective on the procedure: "Declawing involves more than simply trimming a cat's nails to the quick; it actually involves amputation of the tips of the digits, bones and all. The inhumanity of the procedure is clearly demonstrated by the nature of cats' recovery from anesthesia following the surgery. Unlike routine recoveries, including recovery from neutering surgeries, which are fairly peaceful, declawing surgery results in cats bouncing off the walls of the recovery cage because of excruciating pain. Cats that are more stoic huddle in the corner of the recovery cage, immobilized in a state of helplessness, presumably by the overwhelming pain. Declawing fits the dictionary definition of mutilation to a tee. Words such as *deform*, *disfigure*, *disjoint*, and *dismember* all apply to this surgery. Partial digital amputation is so horrible that it has been employed for torture of prisoners of war, and in veterinary medicine, the clinical procedure serves as a model of severe pain for testing the efficacy of analgesic drugs. Even though analgesic drugs can be used postoperatively, they rarely are, and their effects are incomplete and transient anyway, so sooner or later the pain will emerge.

‘The operative removal of the claws, as is sometimes practiced to protect furniture and curtains, is an act of abuse and should be forbidden by law in all, not just a few countries.’ (highly regarded British textbook by Turner and Bateson on the biology of cat behavior) However quickly cats forget the hideous experience of declawing, and even though they may not hold grudges, that doesn't seem sufficient justification for putting a family pet through such a repugnant experience."

There are alternatives to declawing. Exercise and play with your cat regularly. Give him/her a scratching post and teach him/her to use it. Trim your cat's nails on a regular basis. And, of course, talk to your vet or cat-owner friends about ways to "train" your cat to exercise its natural instincts in non-destructive ways. A squirt bottle is a great way to teach a cat not to scratch on particular surfaces. It doesn't hurt them and, if you are persistent, they will get the message. There is also a product called Soft Paws. This is a fake nail which is not sharp at the tip, which fits over your cats claws. It is sold in pet stores and veterinarian clinics. And if you are still adamant about having a kitty without claws, why not adopt a previously declawed kitty?

POISONOUS PLANTS AND FOODS

PLANTS:

Amaryllis

Common garden plants popular around Easter, *Amaryllis* species contain toxins that can cause vomiting, depression, diarrhea, abdominal pain, hypersalivation, anorexia and tremors.

Autumn Crocus

Ingestion of *Colchicum autumnale* by pets can result in oral irritation, bloody vomiting, diarrhea, shock, multi-organ damage and bone marrow suppression.

Azalea/Rhododendron

Members of the *Rhododendron spp.* contain substances known as grayantoxins, which can produce vomiting, drooling, diarrhea, weakness and depression of the central nervous system in animals. Severe azalea poisoning could ultimately lead to coma and death from cardiovascular collapse.

Castor Bean

The poisonous principle in *Ricinus communis* is ricin, a highly toxic protein that can produce severe abdominal pain, drooling, vomiting, diarrhea, excessive thirst, weakness and loss of appetite. Severe cases of poisoning can result in dehydration, muscle twitching, tremors, seizures, coma and death.

Chrysanthemum

These popular blooms are part of the *Compositae* family, which contain pyrethrins that may produce gastrointestinal upset, including drooling, vomiting and diarrhea, if eaten. In certain cases depression and loss of coordination may also develop if enough of any part of the plant is consumed.

Cyclamen

Cyclamen species contain cyclamine, but the highest concentration of this toxic component is typically located in the root portion of the plant. If consumed, *Cyclamen* can produce significant gastrointestinal irritation, including intense vomiting. Fatalities have also been reported in some cases.

English Ivy

Also called branching ivy, glacier ivy, needlepoint ivy, sweetheart ivy and California ivy, *Hedera helix* contains triterpenoid saponins that, should pets ingest, can result in vomiting, abdominal pain, hypersalivation and diarrhea.

Kalanchoe

This plant contains components that can produce gastrointestinal irritation, as well as those that are toxic to the heart, and can seriously affect cardiac rhythm and rate.

Lilies

Members of the *Lilium spp.* are considered to be highly toxic to cats. While the poisonous component has not yet been identified, it is clear that with even ingestions of very small amounts of the plant, severe kidney damage could result.

Marijuana

Ingestion of *Cannabis sativa* by companion animals can result in depression of the central nervous system and incoordination, as well as vomiting, diarrhea, drooling, increased heart rate, and even seizures and coma.

Oleander

All parts of *Nerium oleander* are considered to be toxic, as they contain cardiac glycosides that have the potential to cause serious effects—including gastrointestinal tract irritation, abnormal heart function, hypothermia and even death.

Peace Lily (AKA Mauna Loa Peace Lily)

Spathiphyllum contains calcium oxalate crystals that can cause oral irritation, excessive drooling, vomiting, difficulty in swallowing and intense burning and irritation of the mouth, lips and tongue in pets who ingest.

Pothos

Pothos (both *Scindapsus* and *Epipremnum*) belongs to the Araceae family. If chewed or ingested, this popular household plant can cause significant mechanical irritation and swelling of the oral tissues and other parts of the gastrointestinal tract.

Sago Palm

All parts of *Cycas Revoluta* are poisonous, but the seeds or "nuts" contain the largest amount of toxin. The ingestion of just one or two seeds can result in very serious effects, which include vomiting, diarrhea, depression, seizures and liver failure.

Schefflera

Schefflera and *Brassaia actinophylla* contain calcium oxalate crystals that can cause oral irritation, excessive drooling, vomiting, difficulty in swallowing and intense burning and irritation of the mouth, lips and tongue in pets who ingest.

Tulip/Narcissus bulbs

The bulb portions of *Tulipa/Narcissus spp.* contain toxins that can cause intense gastrointestinal irritation, drooling, loss of appetite, depression of the central nervous system, convulsions and cardiac abnormalities.

Yew

Taxus spp. contains a toxic component known as taxine, which causes central nervous system effects such as trembling, incoordination, and difficulty breathing. It can also cause significant gastrointestinal irritation and cardiac failure, which can result in death.

FOODS:

Many cats are picky eaters, so they're less likely than dogs to be attracted to certain human foods. Nevertheless, it's important to be aware that some foods can be dangerous to cats.

Bread Dough

Raw bread dough made with live yeast can be hazardous to cats. When a cat swallows raw dough, the warm, moist environment of the stomach provides an ideal environment for the yeast to multiply, resulting in an expanding mass of dough in the stomach. Expansion of the stomach can be severe enough to decrease blood flow to the stomach wall and affect breathing. Also, as the yeast metabolizes the sugar in the dough, alcohol is produced. The alcohol can be absorbed, resulting in alcohol intoxication. Affected cats can have distended abdomens and show signs such as drunkenness, disorientation and vomiting (or attempts to vomit). In extreme cases, coma, seizures or even death from alcohol intoxication might occur. Cats that have abdominal distention or seem drunk should be monitored by a veterinarian until they recover. All rising yeast dough should be kept out of reach of cats.

Chocolate

Most cats don't have a sweet tooth. However, some will eat foods containing chocolate, such as chocolate candy, cookies, brownies and chocolate baked goods. These and other chocolate-flavored treats can cause chocolate intoxication in cats. The compounds in chocolate that are toxic are caffeine and theobromine, which belong to a group of chemicals called methylxanthines. These compounds cause stimulation of the heart and nervous system. The rule of thumb with chocolate is "the darker it is, the more dangerous it is." White chocolate has very few methylxanthines and is of low toxicity. Dark baker's chocolate, on the other hand, has high levels of methylxanthines. Plain, dry unsweetened cocoa powder contains the most concentrated levels of methylxanthines. Depending on the type and amount of chocolate a cat eats, the signs can range from vomiting, increased thirst, abdominal discomfort and restlessness to severe agitation, muscle tremors, irregular heart rhythm, high body temperature, seizures and even death. Cats showing more than mild restlessness should be seen by a veterinarian immediately.

Ethanol

Ethanol, also known as ethyl alcohol, grain alcohol and drinking alcohol, can be very dangerous for cats. Due to their small size, cats are far more sensitive to ethanol than humans are. Even drinking a small amount of a product containing alcohol can cause significant intoxication. Cats are often attracted to mixed drinks that contain milk, cream or ice cream (e.g., White Russians, alcoholic eggnog and Brandy Alexanders). Alcohol intoxication commonly causes vomiting, loss of coordination, disorientation and stupor. In severe cases, coma, seizures and death can occur. Cats who are intoxicated should be monitored by a veterinarian until they recover.

Moldy Foods

A wide variety of molds grow on food. Some molds produce toxins called tremorgenic mycotoxins, which can cause serious or even life-threatening problems if eaten. Cats tend to be finicky, but they can eat molds that grow on dairy products, like cheese and cream cheese. The signs of tremorgenic mycotoxin poisoning generally begin as fine muscle tremors that progress to whole-body tremors and, finally, convulsions that can lead to death in severe cases. Left untreated, these tremors can last for several weeks. Fortunately, they usually respond well to appropriate veterinary treatment.

Onions and Garlic

All members of the onion family (shallots, onions, garlic, scallions, etc.) contain compounds that can damage cats' red blood cells if eaten in sufficient quantities. Garlic tends to be more toxic than onions on an ounce-for-ounce basis, and cooking does not destroy the toxin. While it's uncommon for cats to eat enough raw onions and garlic to cause serious problems, exposure to concentrated forms of onion or garlic, such as dehydrated onions, onion soup mix or garlic powder, can put cats at risk of toxicosis (poisoning). For example, some sick cats that are fed baby food containing onion powder develop anemia. The damage to red blood cells caused by onions and garlic generally doesn't become apparent until three to five days after ingestion. Affected cats might seem weak or reluctant to move, or they might have pale gums. Their urine can be orange-tinged to dark red. Cats with any of these symptoms should be examined by a veterinarian immediately. In severe cases, blood transfusions may be necessary.

INTRODUCING CATS TO CATS

Free-ranging and feral cats lead complex and busy lives. They maintain far larger territories than most people realize, and these territories often contain a variety of environments, such as forests, farmlands, urban gardens and yards. Within these territories, cats explore, hunt and scavenge for food alone. They only occasionally interact with other cats. They don't live in groups or even pairs, and they don't seek out contact with other cats. In fact, they actively avoid it.



Considering this natural behavior of cats, it isn't surprising that it can be very difficult to introduce a new cat into an established cat's territory, even when that territory is your home.

If you're bringing a new cat into your home, be patient. The introduction must be gradual. Following the initial introduction, it can take a very long time for a relationship to grow. It takes most cats 8 to 12 months to develop a friendship with a new cat. Although some cats certainly become close friends, others never do. Many cats who don't become buddies learn to avoid each other, but some cats fight when introduced and continue to do so until one of the cats must be re-homed.

If your resident cat becomes aggressive when he/she sees other cats outside your home, you'll probably have a difficult time introducing a new cat into your household. If your cat has lived harmoniously with other cats in the past, the odds are good that he/she'll adjust to a newcomer. However, it's impossible to predict whether or not any two individual cats will get along.

Unfortunately, there are no reliable guides for deciding the best matches among cats. Some cats are very social and enjoy living with other cats, while others prefer solitary lives. The individual personalities of the cats are more important than any other factor, such as sex, age or size. Be aware that the more cats you have, the higher the likelihood that there will be conflicts among them.

How to Manage Introductions

Step 1: Controlling First Impressions

The first impression a new cat makes when he/she meets your resident cat is critical. If two cats display aggression during their first meeting, this may set the mood for their future relationship. For this reason, it's best to separate your resident cat from your new cat when you first bring him/her home so that you can control their initial meeting.

- The two cats should be able to smell and hear—but not see or touch—each other.
- Each cat should have his/her own food and water bowl, litter box, scratching post, bed, etc.
- Feed the cats near the door that separates them so they learn that coming together (even though they can't see each other) results in a pleasant experience.
- In addition to regular cat food, feed the cats extra-special treats near the door as well, like tiny pieces of tuna, salmon, cheese, chicken, or liver.
- After two to three days, switch the cats' locations so they can investigate each other's smell. This also allows the new cat to explore a different section of your home.
- Some behaviorists suggest rubbing the cats separately with the same towel to intermix their scents. First gently rub one cat with the towel. Then rub the other cat. After the towel carries both cats' scents, bring the towel back to the first cat and rub him/her with it again.
- After a few more days, play with each of the cats near the door. Encourage them to paw at toys under the door. Eventually the cats may play "paws" under the door with each other.

Step 2: Letting the Cats See Each Other

After a week or so, assuming that you see no signs of aggression at the door (no hissing, growling, etc.), you can introduce the cats to each other. One method is to replace the door with a temporary screen door so that the cats can see each other. If you can't use a screen door, you can try using two baby gates positioned in the door jam, one above the other. Ask a friend or family member to help you with the introduction. Have one cat and one person on each side of the door, and start the introduction by setting each cat down a few feet away from the screen or gates. When the cats notice each other, say their names and toss treats to them, aiming the treats behind them. Over the next few days, continue to encourage feeding, eating treats, and playing near the barrier, gradually offering the cats' meals, treats, and toys closer to the screen.

Step 3: Letting the Cats Spend Time Together

The next stage is to permit the cats to spend time together without a barrier between them. Supervise these initial face-to-face interactions carefully.

- It's good to bring the cats together when they are likely to be relatively calm, such as after a meal or strenuous play.
- As the cats become more familiar with each other, allow them longer and longer periods of time together.
- If one cat spends most of his/her time hiding, or if one cat continuously harasses and pursues the other, please reach out to SPCA Westchester for feline behaviorists who can assist you with the introduction.

Final Tips

If you're bringing a new cat into a household with multiple cats, introduce each resident cat to the newcomer individually. After each of your cats has met the new cat one-on-one, you can start to allow all of the cats to mingle as a group.

Your cats will be more likely to get along if they're happy in their environment. Look at the layout of your home. Make sure there are plenty of hiding spots for your cats. Some cats like to sit up high on shelves or kitty condo perches. Frightened cats, on the other hand, tend to hide under and behind things, so make sure you provide spots at floor level as well. Place food, water and litter boxes out in the open so your cats don't feel trapped when they access these resources. Make sure you have a litter box for each cat, plus at least one extra.

INTRODUCING CATS TO DOGS



Dog and cat looking at each other

Many dogs and cats get along very well. Dogs who are gentle and friendly and are not squirrel-chasing, predatory types can be great housemates with cats. Even dogs that do chase small prey outdoors can often learn not to chase or harm cats indoors once they have grown accustomed to their household cats as family members. Although you should carefully prepare and supervise your cat, you should have little trouble integrating him/her into your household if he/she's lived peacefully with a dog before or if your dog has lived with a cat. But keep in mind that dogs and cats, like people, need time to get to know each other. If they have never seen each other before, they probably won't be instant friends.

Know What to Expect

Dogs that have never lived with cats usually react to them one of three ways:

Play: Your dog might treat your cat like another dog and try to play with him/her, particularly if your dog is young and your cat is inquisitive and approaches him. If your cat is young and your dog is small, this interaction can lay the groundwork for a strong, relationship between the two. However, it's more common for cats to react defensively to an invitation to play from a strange dog—or even a new, young cat. Cats generally don't play as rambunctiously as dogs, and dogs often chase and bite during play. If your new cat is older or your dog is large, your dog's playful behavior can be even more problematic. Play between dogs and cats should be closely monitored. Playful dogs often don't respond appropriately to a cat's signals to stop, and the tension or aggression between the two can escalate rapidly, causing the cat distress and putting her in danger. Keep in mind that a dog can kill a cat easily, even in play. And a scared or angry cat can use her claws to seriously injure a dog.

Prey: Unfortunately, dogs often perceive cats as prey. This is especially likely if your cat runs when he/she sees a dog. Your dog might respond to your new cat's movement as he/she would to the movement of a fleeing prey animal. He/she might chase and even kill your cat. Similarly, cats that have never lived with dogs will likely view them as predators and will run or become defensively aggressive.

Cautious interest or avoidance: An older or quieter dog might be intimidated by your cat, particularly if he/she is young or rambunctious. He/she might approach your cat cautiously or watch him/her from a distance and avoid him/her whenever possible. Cats that have never lived with dogs generally react to them one of three ways: Cautious interest, avoidance, or defensive antagonism.

How to Set Up Safe, Successful Introductions

It's up to you to protect your new cat and set up introductions carefully so that he/she feels safe and has a pleasant experience getting acquainted with your dog.

Here are some suggestions for making the most of introductions:

Trim your cat's claws to keep the interaction as safe as possible for your dog. First impressions are important to a cat, so you want the initial meetings to be as stress-free as possible for him/her.

At first, confine your dog to a room using a baby gate. Don't restrict your cat or change his/her environment any more than necessary. You can start to introduce your cat and your dog near the doorway to that room while keeping the baby gate between them.

To prepare for this first meeting, start by taking your dog outside and running him/her around to help him work off a bit of energy. Bring delicious treats that your dog will love, like bite-sized pieces of chicken or cheese. Practice sit, down and stay after he/she has run around for a while and seems to be getting tired. Then bring him/her inside and put him/her in his/her room, behind the baby gate.

Next, fill your pockets with your cat's favorite treats. If your dog is rambunctious, put his leash on him/her and have someone on his/her side of the gate to handle the leash. Sit in front of the door and call your cat. Have your dog lie down or sit to keep him/her from behaving threateningly as your cat approaches. When your cat comes, toss him/her a treat. Praise and treat your dog as well if he/she behaves calmly in the cat's presence. Do this several times each day for a couple of days. This way, your cat will associate your dog with delicious treats and vice versa. If your dog overreacts to your cat and does something that makes your cat back away from him/her, distract him/her and get his/her attention focused on you. Avoid accomplishing this by using leash corrections. Instead, get your dog's attention by asking him/her to sit or lie down. Use treats to reward him/her for his/her fabulous obedience when something as interesting and distracting as your cat is nearby! Your cat should be free to approach the baby gate and get closer to your dog or to retreat if he/she wants to. Reward him/her any time he/she approaches the baby gate by tossing him/her treats.

Let your cat set the pace. Never attempt to force any interactions by holding your cat, putting his/her into a crate or carrier or restricting her movement in any way. If he/she doesn't seem afraid of your dog, or if he/she even tries to jump over the gate to see the dog, you can introduce them in your living room or another large room with your dog on leash. Once you're in the larger room, make sure your cat can get away from your dog during the introduction. He/she should have the freedom and room to retreat, run and hide, slip beneath a piece of furniture where the dog can't follow, or jump up on something that puts him/her above your dog. Continue introductions until your pets interact in a calm, friendly manner. Cats often bat at a dog they accept with their claws sheathed or rub against him/her, and dogs respond by gently nudging back or offering a play bow. Keep your dog on-leash during these introductions in the living room and for the first couple of weeks. Allow the leash to be loose, but hold it firmly in case your dog decides to try to chase your cat.

When you're not around or can't directly supervise, keep your cat and dog confined in separate areas of your house. Most dogs and cats can share a home in harmony once they have gradually become accustomed to each other over time, however if your dog chases your cat or ever shows intolerance toward your cat in your presence—such as growling when he/she walks past while he/she is chewing a bone or being petted by you—keep them separated in your absence.

Your dog should not have access to your cat's litter box. If he/she does, it will be highly stressful to your cat, and your dog might eat the feces and litter. To prevent your dog from eating your cat's food, consider feeding her on a high surface, like a windowsill, a dresser, a shelf, or cat tree furniture.