



BUILDING BONDS

A Guide to Successful Pet Introductions

The introduction guidelines are designed to help set your pets up for success. By following them carefully and allowing your pets to move at their own pace, you are giving them the best opportunity to build a lasting relationship.

TIPS

- **Set realistic expectations:** a peaceful household, even with indifference between pets, is considered success.
- **Consider purchasing a [pheromone diffuser](#):** these odorless, cat-specific products mimic natural feline calming pheromones and can help reduce stress.
- **Pets set the pace:** the most stressed pet should determine when it's time to move to the next step. If you see hissing, body posturing or avoidance, know this can be normal, but may require a step back in the introduction process.
- **Interactive play** should mimic a cat's natural hunting sequence: stalk, chase, pounce and "catch." Since cats are solitary hunters, it's best to play with each cat individually in separate sessions rather than encouraging them to play with the same toy at the same time. This helps prevent frustration or competition.
- **Positive experiences matter:** treats, praise and playtime can help pets associate each other with good things. Give them reasons to like each other.

ASK FOR HELP

If things aren't going as planned, don't panic, Foothills Animal Rescue is here to help. Introducing pets can be challenging, and many issues can be resolved with a little guidance.

Reach Out to Us First

Call or email us and let us know what's happening. Where in the introduction process are you struggling? Our team will make sure your questions are directed to the appropriate staff member so we can help you create a plan for success.

If Returning Your Pet Becomes Necessary

In some cases, despite following the introduction process and giving everyone adequate time to adjust, a resident pet may not be willing to share their home. If you believe returning your adopted pet is the best option, please contact us to schedule a surrender appointment.

As a managed-intake shelter, advance notice allows us to prepare for your pet's arrival and ensure the smoothest transition possible.

Call: 480-488-9890

Email: support@foothillsanimal.org



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Open daily 10am-5pm

CAT-TO-CAT INTRODUCTION

Bringing home a new cat is exciting, but introducing them to a resident cat requires patience. Cats are naturally territorial and rarely become best friends overnight. In fact, rushed introductions are one of the most common causes of conflict in multi-cat households. The good news? Most cats can learn to peacefully coexist—and many become close companions—when introductions are done slowly and thoughtfully. Successful introductions take **days** to rest, **weeks** to explore and **months** to belong.

1

CREATE A SANCTUARY ROOM

Before your new cat meets any resident pets, they should have their own quiet room (bathroom or guest bedroom) to decompress and adjust to their new surroundings. This room should be set up with all necessary

cat resources to give them the **days** needed to settle in and start marking their territory. Both cats will benefit from time to acclimate to new scents and sounds. Play with each cat separately to build confidence and reduce stress throughout the introduction process.

2

INTRODUCE THROUGH SCENT

Cats rely heavily on scent to identify friends and family members. Before they meet face-to-face, allow them to become familiar with each other's scent. The goal is to create positive associations and familiarity with the other cat's scent.

- Swapping blankets or bedding
- Exchanging toys
- Gently rubbing each cat's cheeks with a cloth or soft bristled brush and placing it near the other cat
- Offering treats on or near scented items

3

ROOM SWAPS & SCENT MAPPING

Once both cats seem comfortable with scent exchanges, allow them to explore each other's spaces—separately. No face-to-face meetings just yet.

Place your resident cat in another room while the new cat explores the

home for a short period. Then allow your resident cat to investigate the sanctuary room. This process helps both cats to become familiar with each other's scent without the stress of direct interaction. Scent mapping refers to your new cat's ability to scent mark and “map” out areas and resources in the home.

4

VISUAL INTRODUCTIONS

Once scent exchanges and room swaps are going well, it's time for brief visual introductions. Keep these sessions short and positive. To start, open the sanctuary room door while keeping a baby gate in the door frame to deter any direct contact.

Allow the cats to see each other from a safe distance while enjoying high-value treats or wet food feedings.

Some hissing or body posturing is completely normal. The goal is not immediate friendship—it's calm coexistence, which can take **weeks**.

5

SUPERVISED TIME TOGETHER

When both cats are comfortable seeing each other, begin short supervised interactions in the same space. Keep sessions brief and positive.

Continue providing interactive play for both cats separately to build confidence and alleviate stress.

Increase the length of visits gradually over time, allowing the cats to co-exist and create a “group scent” that will mean familiarity to both cats.

It can take **months** for a new cat to integrate into a home and equal time for your resident cat to adjust to sharing their territory.

6

FULL ACCESS TO THE HOME

Once the cats are consistently relaxed around one another, your new cat can gradually gain access to the rest of the home.

Even after introductions are complete, leave the sanctuary room available for several weeks. Having a familiar retreat can help your new cat feel secure.

A special select group of cats become best friends who groom, play and sleep together. Some learn to peacefully share a home, and many just co-exist. All outcomes are a success.

Calm neutrality is the goal.

Continue with daily interactive play sessions, as the “hunting sequence” will build confidence and alleviate stress.

RESOURCES

Spread resources throughout the home rather than keeping everything in one location. This helps reduce competition and prevents conflicts. We recommend:

- One litter box per cat, plus one. Place in different locations throughout the home to avoid competition or unwanted “run-ins.” Litter boxes should be in low foot-traffic, quiet areas.
- Separate food and water stations
- Several scratching posts and resting areas
- Plenty of toys and enrichment opportunities
- The more resources you have, the less likelihood of tension or altercations

PRO TIP

Cats naturally seek **vertical spaces** because they provide a sense of safety and security. Cat trees, wall shelves and window perches allow cats to observe their surroundings, build confidence, reduce stress and help prevent territorial conflicts in multi-cat homes.

WHEN TO SLOW DOWN

Moving too quickly can create setbacks. Slowing down is not failure, it is part of the process. Adult cats will likely take longer to adjust than kittens, especially if the resident cat has been in the home for quite some time. Take a step back in the process if you notice:

- Persistent growling or hissing
- Chasing, hiding or escape attempts
- Swatting through barriers
- Blocking access to resources
- **Stop and seek guidance** if there is any physical altercation

CAT-TO-DOG INTRODUCTION

Introducing a new cat to a resident dog takes time, patience and planning. While many cats and dogs learn to live together successfully, rushing introductions can create fear, stress and setbacks. The goal isn't instant friendship, it's helping both pets feel safe and comfortable around one another. Successful introductions take **days** to rest, **weeks** to explore and **months** to belong.

1

CREATE A SANCTUARY ROOM

Before your new cat meets any resident pets, they should have their own quiet room (bathroom or guest bedroom) to decompress and adjust to their new surroundings.

This room should be set up with all necessary cat resources to give them the **days** needed to settle in and start establishing their territory through scent marking.

2

PREPARE THE HOUSE

Before introductions begin, make sure your cat has plenty of resources, hiding spots and elevated spaces throughout the home.

- Cat trees, window perches
- Shelves the dog cannot reach
- Rooms the dog cannot access (use a baby gate at the sanctuary room door so the cat can easily retreat when desired)

3

INTRODUCE THROUGH SCENT

Cats and dogs gather information through scent long before they meet face-to-face. If your dog becomes overly excited or fixated on the scent, continue working at this stage before moving forward.

- Swap blankets or bedding
- Exchange toys
- Allow dog to sniff items with the cat's scent
- Reward calm behavior with treats and praise

Place dog items away from the cat's valued resources (water, food, bedding, etc.)

4

TERRITORY AND SCENT MAPPING

Allow your new cat to explore the home without the dog present.

This helps your cat build confidence, become familiar with their surroundings and identify important "safe spots" throughout the home. Cat trees, shelves, window perches and

other elevated areas give your cat places to retreat if they ever feel overwhelmed.

Scent mapping refers to your new cat's ability to scent mark and "map" out areas and resources in the home, thus establishing their territory. It can take **weeks** for your new cat to claim and mark their space.

5

THE FIRST MEETING

The first introduction should be brief and controlled. If there are multiple dogs in the home, they should be introduced to the cat one-at-a-time.

- Two adults present
- The dog on a leash
- The cat free to move
- Plenty of high-value treats for both pets

Choose a room your cat has already explored and feels comfortable in. Position the dog on one side of the room and allow the cat to observe from a safe distance or elevated perch.

The goal is simple: allow both pets to exist in the same space without forcing any interaction. Keep the first few sessions short, then increase the time slowly. Reward the dog for calm, soft body language.

6

LEARNING EACH OTHER'S BEHAVIORS

Helping a resident dog understand cat behavior is all about teaching impulse control, managing excitement, and preventing the dog from chasing.

Once your cat and dog are comfortable being around one another, allow one pet to play while the other watches.

For example, let the dog watch the cat play with a wand toy, then allow the cat to watch the dog play or train with a family member.

The goal is not for the pets to play together. Instead, they are learning each other's movements and body language in a calm, controlled environment.

7

LIVING TOGETHER SUCCESSFULLY

When leaving the house, separate your cat and dog into designated rooms, until you are confident that your dog will not chase, harass or injure your cat, they should never be left together unsupervised. Some pets may be ready for access within weeks,

while others may take **months**.

Success is calm neutrality: The cat can move anywhere without being trailed. The dog can rest, eat, and follow cues while the cat's nearby. The household feels steady, predictable, and uneventful.

WHEN TO SLOW DOWN

Take a step back if you notice:

Dog Behaviors

- Intense staring
- Tense or stiff body posturing
- Lunging or chasing
- Barking or whining excessively
- Inability to focus on you

Cat Behaviors

- Hiding constantly or being marginalized to one room
- Growling, hissing or swatting
- Refusing food or not using litter box
- Fear or stress

CAT RESOURCES

Spread resources throughout the home rather than keeping everything in one location. This helps reduce competition and prevents conflicts. We recommend:

- One litter box per cat, plus one. Place the litter box in quiet, low foot-traffic areas throughout the home to avoid the possibility of a surprise run-ins with the resident dog
- Ideally, two food and water stations
- Several scratching posts and resting areas
- Plenty of toys and enrichment opportunities

PRO TIP

The distribution, location, and abundance of resources will lessen tension and stress in a cat-dog household. Cats naturally seek **vertical spaces** because they provide a sense of safety and security. Cat trees, wall shelves and window perches allow cats to observe their surroundings, build confidence, reduce stress and allow for safe retreat when needed.

WHEN IT'S UNSAFE OR UNFAIR

Some pairings can't be safely integrated, and recognizing that early protects everyone. Safety and emotional welfare is the priority for both animals. If a cat is living a marginalized life due to fear or stress, or if a dog's behavior is consistently escalated or aroused due to the presence of the cat, then the situation is unfair. Always ask a professional if you are unsure.

