

# Boroughbred Behavior Resources



## Issue: Introducing Cat to Dog

When bringing a new animal into the home, safety is the most important factor. Do your best to adopt a pet that will be a good match for your current pet at home. Keep in mind it is difficult to predict what a dog's behavior will be around cats when it has not previously been observed. You should also be mindful of your cat's personality because an addition of a dog may be too stressful for them. Understanding both pet's histories is important because we want to ensure a good quality of life for both pets. The key to making the introduction a success is to make sure both animals are safe and under as little stress as possible. Below are some steps to make the introduction process as smooth as possible for everyone involved.

### Settling In – Steps prior to Introduction

Keep the cat in a separate room or area with all of their essential's (food, water, litter box, scratcher, toys, and bed). This sanctuary room must be secure so both pets are unable to see or reach one another. Avoid putting a cat and dog together and allowing them to "work it out" because it may potentially become a dangerous situation. Most pets need an adjustment period when first arriving to their new home so give the newcomer some time to settle in and become familiar with the environment. When the dog is taken out for walks or moved to another secured area, you may allow the cat to explore the dog's area to investigate the dog's smell (assuming the cat is well-adjusted). If the cat is the newcomer, this will give your cat the opportunity to get to know the rest of the home. Offer your cats treats during this process to help your cat build a positive association with the dog's scent and the rest of the environment. Always put the cat away before the dog returns.

As an extra safety measure, we advise keeping the dog on leash during introduction. Once both animals appear fairly calm in rooms next to each other, you may move onto the next step. If either animal appears stress or agitated by the presence of the other in another room, we recommend hiring a professional positive reinforcement, force-free trainer to help.

### Introduction

The next step is to introduce the animals by placing a baby gate or X-pen between both areas. Take the dog out for a walk or conduct a play session to take away some energy so he's more relaxed once the door opens. Keep the leash on the dog and monitor both pets' behaviors. Walk the dog a distance away from the baby gate and reward the dog with treats and praise for focusing on you and/or ignoring the cat. If the dog looks at the cat, call the dog in a happy voice and reward them when they divert their attention from the cat. You can also offer toys.

If either pets display discomfort, move the dog further away from the cat's safe space. Allow your cat to approach the baby gate on their own. You can offer a trail of treats by the barrier to encourage interest. It'll help to have a family member assist during these training sessions. Be sure to offer plenty of hiding spots and vertical space (cat trees, shelves, or perches) so your cat has a place to retreat if they feel uncomfortable. These spaces will help your cat feel secure around the dog's presence. Move at a pace that is comfortable for the stressed animal and use treats and praise to reward for curious, calm, or brave behavior. Gradually move the dog closer to the baby gate if both pets remain calm. Be sure to keep these training sessions short to minimize stress. If these encounters last too long and become too stressful, your pets will not likely be inclined to meet again in the future. Try to conduct several short sessions each day and always end on a positive note to encourage both parties to look forward to the next session.

If the dog starts to lunge, growl, or bark at the cat, or if the dog fixates on the cat and won't break their stare, walk the dog away and try again when the dog has calmed down. Do not yell or jerk on the dog's leash because we don't want the dog to associate the cat with a negative feeling. Just walk away and eventually the dog will learn that calm behavior allows them to get closer to the baby gate. If your dog continues to display concerning behavior after numerous training sessions or if the cat is too stressed or displays defensive aggression, it may not be a safe match. We recommend contacting a professional trainer to work with you before moving to the next step.

## Supervised Interactions

Remove the barrier and allow both pets to explore the home while keeping them under close supervision. At the beginning of this stage, the dog should remain on leash until you are certain both animals feel comfortable with each other. Use the leash to safely move the dog into a different area in the home if you see anything concerning. Never leave them alone unsupervised, even for a second, until you're confident they've both established a safe relationship with one another. Continue to separate the dog and cat when you are not supervising; there should be a significant period of time where the dog and cat are at ease with each other before they are allowed to be together unsupervised.

Note: We highly recommend acclimating your dog to wearing a basket muzzle. This will allow for a safe environment for both animals while they are desensitized to each other's presence in the home. Please refer to our "Introducing a Muzzle" flyer for information on how to properly desensitize your dog to enjoy wearing a muzzle.

Now that the cat is allowed outside of the safe room, adding extra hiding places and vertical space around the home will add another layer of security for your cat. Even if the dog is soliciting play, these interactions can still be overwhelming to a cat. A tall and sturdy cat tree or elevated shelving space will give your cat the opportunity to escape and be out of reach from an overly rambunctious dog, offering them reprieve if they need it.

Continue to give both pets treats for behaviors you'd like to see more of to help them form a positive relationship with each other. Try not to rush this process because safety is the most important factor. Being patient and using positive reinforcement is the best way to ensure a peaceful co-existence between both pets.

### If you need more help:

Seek out a consultation with a professional, certified behaviorist or a certified dog trainer.

Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers: <http://www.ccpdt.org>

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists: <http://corecaab.org>