

All About Pets

The national pet care information service



INTRODUCING YOUR DOG TO THE FAMILY



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

Supervision is essential when your new dog meets family members and other pets for the first time. Careful handling of introductions will set the scene for future interactions and help your dog settle into family life.



Introducing to children

Even if used to children in the past, a new dog will not be used to yours and will need time to get to know them. Help prevent your dog feeling overwhelmed by insisting the dog approach the children rather than the other way round. This prevents feelings of being under threat and your dog is less likely to snap in self-defence.

Children can encourage the dog to come to them by sitting down and offering a titbit or a game with a toy. Ask them not to stare as this can be threatening. If the dog goes to them they can stroke and fuss underneath the animal's chin to begin with rather than patting on the head. Remember a dog at face level with young children may seem quite frightening, so be prepared to move the dog away if the child becomes overwhelmed or if the dog is about to jump up.

Dogs do not always appreciate being hugged or cuddled unless familiar with it from an early age. It is a great temptation for children to do this, especially if they have been used to doing it to a previous dog. You will need to slowly find out what your new dog will accept, supervising constantly to ensure no unacceptable behaviour occurs on either side.

After the initial introduction, ask the children to give the dog a bit of space and time to find its feet. A new game for the children, introduced at the same time as the new dog, can distract their attention for a while and enable the first few days to go more smoothly. If your children have not owned a dog before, they may need to be taught to respect the animal and not treat their companion as a toy. High-pitched squeals can upset a dog until used to them, so try to keep play as calm as possible.

Some dogs, such as collies, have a strong herding instinct and may nip at children's ankles, causing them to squeal and run away. This excites the dog, encouraging more of the same, so this type of behaviour must be stopped at once or it can become a habit. Children have to learn not to tease or bully the dog, and the dog has to learn not to jump up at the children, be too boisterous or nip them in play. It is important to supervise all their activities until both parties have learned the rules. It is not advisable to leave children under the age of ten alone with any dog.

Be especially careful with older dogs and children. A dog with impaired vision or hearing may be startled by sudden approaches and may bite in defence. Explain the difficulties the dog is having to the children so they learn to approach more gently.

Introducing to other dogs

It is best to introduce dogs on neutral territory so take both dogs out for a long walk together. The interest of the walk will make the introduction less intense and they can get to know each other as they walk.

If you need to use a car to take them home, keep them separated until you arrive. When you arrive home, take them into the garden, allowing the new dog to go in first and let them run around together for a few minutes.

Before allowing them into the house, remove anything they are likely to fight over, such as toys or bones. Attention from members of the family may also be a resource to fight over, so ignore both dogs until they have settled down.

Try to ignore any small disagreements and scuffles. If you see both dogs stiffening up and staring at each other, distract them by pretending something more interesting is going on elsewhere. Be ready to lead the dogs away and isolate each of them until they have calmed down. Extra care should be taken when introducing a large dog to a small one since the damage inflicted during a fight can be much worse for the smaller dog.

Usually introductions go smoothly and the new dog is treated, and acts, like a visitor. The hierarchy between them is sorted out during the first few weeks and disagreements are possible during this time. Try to avoid situations that may cause aggravation. Feed them apart until they are used to each other, separate them before answering the door and do not make such a fuss of the new dog that your old dog feels excluded. Care should be taken not to leave them alone together until it is obvious that they have become friends.



Introducing to cats

Even if your dog has previously lived with a cat, new cats may not necessarily be tolerated. If they are to become friends, it is essential the dog is not allowed to frighten the cat. This means having the dog on a lead and under control when they are introduced. Let the cat have the freedom to get out of the way or approach if your dog wishes.

The cat will probably need time to assess the dog before your dog becomes brave enough to approach and make friends. For this reason, supervise all their encounters for several weeks to ensure a successful outcome. Do not allow the dog to give chase at any time since this will upset the relationship and it will be much longer before they become used to each other. Care should be taken not to leave a cat and a dog alone together until it is obvious that they have become friends.

For further information, see the All About Pets leaflet, Introducing your Cat to Other Pets (C23).



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All About Pets provides expert advice, information and support for pet owners. It aims to ensure the welfare of Britain's pets by promoting responsible animal care. For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit www.allaboutpets.org.uk. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is a service of The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity, which provides practical support, information and advice for pet and horse owners. Through our network of animal adoption centres we rehome thousands of animals each year. Our hospitals provide veterinary care for the pets of people who cannot afford private vets' fees.

How you can help

The Blue Cross is a registered charity and receives no government funding. We rely entirely on the generosity of pet lovers to help support All About Pets and other vital animal welfare projects. Any contribution would be most welcome. For more information on how you can help call us on 01993 822651 or visit our website at www.bluecross.org.uk.



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