

# What is the best way to introduce a new dog to the family?

Coming home with a new dog is fun and exciting, but you need to keep a few things in mind. If you have kids, other animals such as cats or rabbits, and other dogs, the dynamics of your pet world will change. Any new pet addition to a house that already has pets will cause a shift in the "pecking order", so to speak.

When bringing home a new animal, the most important thing to remember is to protect the animal which is in danger of getting injured. Your dog must always be on a leash during the introduction. Dogs are "pack" oriented. In their world, you are part of their pack, and considered in charge (I hope). If a dog does not know that this new addition is going to be part of the family, he will not protect it and probably try to kill it or chase it off. It takes a few days for this to happen. If the dog shows aggressive behavior towards the new pet, it is your job to tell him no, you want this new addition to be part of the family. If you watch an informative dog show, you will see that they are generally not very forgiving. If one dog oversteps his boundaries, he is viciously warned. So warn your dog and protect the innocent, vulnerable animals.

## **Introducing a New Dog to Your Family Dog**

When you first bring your new dog home, introduce them in a neutral setting, like the front yard, or somewhere that the existing family dog does not normally go. This way, he will not be protective of his surroundings. Both dogs should be on a leash and given little slack, held by people strong enough to hold their respective dog back. A choke collar is effective in these situations. Let them meet, watching their actions and getting ready to retrieve the dogs from each other. Sniffing vigorously is normal, including private areas. Dogs get to know each other through their scent. If one or both of the dogs starts to act aggressively, paired with raised fur on the top shoulders and haunches, walk each dog further apart and have the dog focus on you. You can re-assure them that they are OK verbally but avoid any form of reassurance if they continue to bark or show aggressive signs-this would only reinforce the aggression. When each one calms down, re-introduce them until they are sniffing and acquainting themselves without fur raising and aggression.

If they are not getting along at all, it is best to have them near each other, but separated by a physical boundary such as a fence. Two crates, where they can see and smell each other but not get at each other, will work well. Put each dog in their crate, and push them closer and closer together as time goes on and their growling/aggressiveness subsides. When they are comfortable near each other in their crates, try introducing them again in the same way as described earlier. Dogs will get along better when they are opposite sexes, or they have been neutered or spayed. Un-neutered males tend to be more aggressive and territorial. Keeping them in separate rooms until they get along while unsupervised is the wisest idea.

## **Introducing a New Puppy to Your Family Dog**

Introducing a puppy to a grown dog is usually pretty easy. With your large dog on a leash and held by someone who can restrain him, allow the puppy, who is also on a leash, to approach the dog. Watch for their body language! If fur is standing, be on alert! If you aren't sure, separate them, don't take a chance. If they are not seeming like they are getting along, look into hiring a dog trainer. It's worth the time and money, and usually cheaper than the vet!

## **Introducing a New Dog or Puppy to Your Family Cat or Rabbit**

If you already have cats or rabbits or other animals that a dog can easily kill, this is a very fragile and serious situation. If your dog is a puppy, your life just got much easier. If the dog is full grown, you should have been told how your new dog acts around other animals. Take caution! People are not always truthful because they want to find a home for their dog. They might say that the dog is good with children, other pets, but be skeptical, over cautiousness is better than injuries and/or death to a valued family member, pets or human. In the case of introducing a new dog to an existing cat or rabbit, a dog trainer might be the best way to ensure that your animals are safe and your dog is assimilated easier. As usual, the dog should always be restrained to prevent injury to your animals. You don't want him to get loose and be able to get to your new pet. Cats and rabbits rarely survive dog attacks, and when they do it is usually costly. Trust should not be given since you do not know this dog. Remember, a taut leash and conservative measures are always best.

If you are introducing a puppy to a full grown cat, provided your puppy is not big enough to hurt the cat, no sweat. You can let the cat teach the puppy. To be safe, keep your puppy on a leash and bring him to the cat. The puppy will be curious, and if he gets too close the cat will swat him. This is his first lesson and if the puppy runs away you can be assured that your cat is probably safe. If the puppy goes after the cat, hold the leash tight and tell him "NO!" with a strong and loud tone. Again, a choke collar is always more effective than a regular collar. In this situation, the puppy should not be allowed to be free when the cat is around, until he learns that the cat is part of the family and it is his job to protect the cat. Even though your puppy is small, he may still be able to cause damage to your cat.

If you have a rabbit, or other small free roaming animal, things are more difficult. Rabbits and other animals are prey to dogs. It is hard to teach them that they are not to hurt them. It is easier when the dog is a puppy, but a puppy can still easily hurt a rabbit. Rabbits have very small bones, and even a puppy can cause injury, especially if the puppy is a large breed. If you are not having any luck, consider a dog trainer. They can work wonders.

## **Introducing a Cat, Kitten or Rabbit to the Family Dog**

If your dog is not used to cats or rabbits, the introduction is much harder and an expert should be consulted. If your dog is used to cats or rabbits, then all you have to do is teach him that your new pet is part of the family. Remember, restraining your dog is the most important thing. You don't want him to get loose and be able to get to your new pet. Cats and rabbits rarely survive dog attacks, and when they do it is usually costly.

First, let the new cat or rabbit investigate it's new home so she knows her way around and some idea of an escape route. After she has investigated the house, have your dog on a leash, and put the cat or rabbit down. Let your dog approach the pet and watch carefully for body language. Raised fur is not a good sign. Keep a taut leash, he should not have any room to be able to lunge! It can happen in a split second, so no fooling around! If your dog won't settle down, remove the cat or rabbit and try again later. Putting the cat or rabbit in a small cage where the dog can smell the pet but not have access is a good way to get your dog used to the smells of the new pet. After a little time you can retry the introduction, on a taut leash. If your dog will not stop being aggressive toward the new family addition, please hire a dog trainer to help.