



Paw Perfect Introductions podcast

Episode Four – Introducing a dog or puppy to your cat

Cathy: Hello, I'm Cathy Beer from Pets4Life, and you are listening to the Paw Perfect Introductions podcast. This is episode four, and our topic is about introducing a new dog or puppy to your cat. I have animal behaviourist Dr Joanne Righetti with me, who will share tips about how to do a Paw Perfect Introduction between a new dog or puppy to your family cat. Welcome, Jo.

Dr Righetti: Hi, Cathy. It's lovely to be on the podcast again.

Cathy: And I love your Better with Pets blog, by the way. How is that going?

Dr Righetti: Yeah, it's good. I've been doing it for years, but I really tried to ramp it up and now I'm getting some companies to write for me and I'm getting pet owners to write and share their stories. I've got some really heart-warming stuff coming up soon, so I'm really excited about it and I'm having fun doing it.

Cathy: That's fantastic! Getting on to introducing a new dog or puppy to the family cat, I've heard quite a few stories of families who have a cat and life is going along nicely, but then they decide they'd like to add a dog, and that's when things can go pear-shaped. The canine interloper upsets the cat's world and causes a lot of stress for the cat. But it doesn't have to be that way. How can families prepare their cat for a dog or a puppy?

Dr Righetti: Well, every cat is different, and some just go with the flow and a new family member wouldn't make too much of a difference. But for most cats, it does upset their world just that little bit and noses out of joint. They're ready to pack their bags and run away, so it's very important that we really take care of their needs. So it's thinking about, what can we do beforehand? Well, if you've got any friends with dogs—you know, calm dogs—we don't want the really boisterous ones that are going to chase your cat. But if you do have a friend with a calm dog, you might invite them over with their dog, which would be kept on a lead the whole time, so your cat can actually see what a dog is all about. If that sounds all too stressful, or it's just not possible, then I think at the very least what you could do is play some noises of dogs to cats. You can download those from the internet; there are CDs available. Or, go out there and record your neighbourhood dog noises. Play those to the cat. Turn them up quite loud, just to see how your cat reacts. If they really react badly, turn the volume down and then begin to increase the volume over time. But really beforehand, there's really not a lot you can do with a cat. It's not like a dog where you can take it out and about

and see different things. With a cat, it's really about trying to keep an eye on it when you actually bring that dog home.

Cathy: Ah, right. So what are those steps to introducing it to dogs?

Dr Righetti: Well, obviously you've trained your dog carefully. Hopefully that's the case, anyway, because we want a dog that's really going to be nice to cats, or at least accept the cat. Now, they might not ever be best friends, but we don't want a dog that's going to be aggressive towards the cats. So wherever you're getting an adult dog from, make sure you've asked them about friendliness towards cats. A good shelter or a good owner will know what the dog is like. It's best to check that first. And so hopefully the dog's friendly, and you're bringing it home. Obviously you're keeping the dog on a lead as you come in. I would be putting your cat up high—onto its favourite windowsill or benchtop, maybe even into a cat carry case if it feels safe within that sort of crate area. And also, perhaps you can keep that up high at first. Settle your dog down, get to know your dog, and let your cat watch that dog interact with you and be part of the family. So this cat, from a safe vantage point, will then be learning about the dog's smell, the dog's scent, the dog's visuals, how the dog plays, all of its movements...because, well, dogs are different than cats, and cats have to learn that, and learn that they feel safe the whole time. So maybe if one person's playing with the dog, another person could be giving the cat treats or a bit of praise for calm behaviour. Then over time, you perhaps would lead the dog up towards the cat—again, on a lead—and let the dog watch the cat move around the room. Sit on the sofa, have the dog near you—at your feet or beside you, and let the dog watch the cat play, watch the cat eat, watch the cat do whatever cats do in your home, so the dog is learning about the cat. It's really important each pet learns about the other species.

Cathy: And would it be different to introducing a puppy to a cat?

Dr Righetti: Yes and no. Overall, you do exactly the same thing: the puppy's got to settle in; you've got to keep it on a lead. It's just slight differences. The puppy will be used to meeting new things. The whole of life is new to a puppy; the whole of life is exciting to a puppy. And you can use that to your advantage in introducing a cat. So do it very carefully. Puppies can get a little bit too boisterous for cats, especially in older cats, so you really need to control the puppy's movements. The cat is not the babysitter for the puppy. You are the puppy's carer. As the human, you are the one who provides the puppy's needs, including all its entertainment, so chasing a cat is not great entertainment. We need to look at chasing balls, chasing anything else, chasing you if you like, but just not the cat. But you can feed them side-by-side. When they're both sleepy, have them sit on either side of you. Generally, introducing a puppy shouldn't be too different from introducing a friendly adult dog.

Cathy: Would it be best, then, to confine the puppy to a crate for short periods?

Dr Righetti: Look, I'm a great believer in crate training or play pens. Now, a crate is not a prison. A crate is safe, den-like area for a dog to go into. And for all of our sakes, for all of our sanity, for all of our patience, I think it's a good idea for a puppy to have a place they can go and feel safe and feel that children in your home or guests in your home or even *you* are not going to interfere with its sleep. They get the chance to go in there, have a chew of a toy or a chew item and get a decent hour's sleep without disturbance. Puppies tend to like those places to feel safe. So yes, I would recommend a crate. Now, there are instances that when a puppy is confined, there are those cats that take it a little bit seriously in intimidating puppies and dogs—

Cathy: Ah!

Dr Righetti: —So it's not all dogs that do the chasing. There can be, what I might term a 'bully cat', and they're just getting their fun from intimidating dogs. And it's very few of them, and most dogs and cats can get along very nicely, but it's important that we don't let any one animal intimidate or just get over-boisterous with the other. Take care of all of your pets.

Cathy: So I guess it takes a lot of patience. It could take a few hours, a few weeks—it just depends.

Dr Righetti: Yeah, it depends. If your pets have met the opposite species before, then they're more likely to accept a new one coming in. But if they've never met the opposite before, then it can take a little while for your resident cat to get to know a dog. You know, dogs just are different. They move different, they smell different, so a cat will be saying, *Oh, I need to hide, I want to get under the bed*, or if they have access to the great outdoors, they may even try and run away. So it is really important that, with a resident cat, especially one that's never met a dog, or if you cannot be there to supervise, that you separate them, or you at least keep an eye on where your cat is going. You make sure that it can't run away from you.

Cathy: Great tips, Jo. In episode five, we'll be talking about introducing a new baby to your puppy or adult dog.

Dr Righetti: Exciting!

Cathy: Yes, it'll be good. So we'll chat further then. Thanks, Jo!

Dr Righetti: Thanks, Cathy!

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