



Paw Perfect Introductions podcast
Episode Two – Introducing a cat or kitten to your dog

Cathy: Hello, this is the Paw Perfect Introductions podcast. I'm Cathy Beer from Pets4Life, and with me is Dr Joanne Righetti from Pet Problems Solved to talk to you on how to introduce a new cat to a dog, and a kitten to a dog. Hi, Jo. How are you doing today?

Dr Righetti: Very well, thank you. I'm sitting here with my dog and cats...
<Laughs>

Cathy: Oh, good. <Laughs>

Dr Righetti: ...who all tend to get along quite well together.

Cathy: Oh, that's good. I'm just thinking, it can't be easy to introduce a cat to a dog unless the dog is already known to be cat-friendly. Is that the case? Would you agree?

Dr Righetti: I think you have to approach it with caution. If your dog is already cat-friendly, you still don't know exactly how they're going to react to a new cat or kitten coming in. So, there still has to be a lot of supervision. If your dog has never encountered a cat before, or all encounters have been very negative ones—and that may be "negative" as in the dog wants to attack a cat, or the dog wants to be overly enthusiastic with the cat, or the dog is scared of a cat—then you may be in more trouble. So, no matter who or what you're introducing, you still have to supervise every part of introductions.

Cathy: Right. And how would you do that introduction then? So, you're bringing home a new cat to the dog. What would be the first step?

Dr Righetti: Yeah. First step I would do, even before you brought that cat home, I'd probably be playing—this sounds a bit weird—but playing some recordings of cat noises to the dog.

Cathy: Ah.

Dr Righetti: You can download sounds from the internet; you'll find them on the CDs of sounds, and so on. And just play different sounds to your dog, and just see how they react. Now, if they react with absolute horror at this, and they start really barking aggressively and so on, you might need to do a few more steps—

before your cat comes home—of watching cats from a distance, praising your dog for being calm. But if your dog can't accept those noises, you might even give the command "cat," and say "good boy," "good girl"—bit of praise, bit of treats, and so on. So they're accepting that "cat" noise equals positive things. Then when it comes to actually bringing a cat home, we need to make sure that this new cat is comfortable in your home. So, I'd be bringing the cat in, putting it into a room that you can go and talk to your cat or kitten, and the cat feels safe and gets to know you, but it doesn't have to yet encounter the dog. Just leave that for a little while. And the amount of time you'd leave it for really depends on the whole situation. So, we could say an hour; we could say a few days—really depending on how this cat is accepting coming into your home and how you feel that your dog is going to react. Because your dog will actually know the cat's there. Your dog will probably hear the cat. It will, no doubt, smell the cat, and may even catch a glimpse of the cat through the window or so on. And you'll be able to tell how your dog is adjusting to this feline interloper in its home.

Dr Righetti: Then we obviously want to progress if we can. And what I tend to do with my animals—I've introduced quite a few cats to my dog—is actually let my dog observe through a window. The cat can then sort of play around, do what cats do—jumping up, meowing, eating some dinner, getting patted by somebody in the family. And you can be outside of that cat room, perhaps looking in with your dog. Or, if you have to be in the same room because you perhaps don't have a glass window, that's okay. You can be on the other side of the room but have your dog on a lead. And what you can do is let your dog monitor the cat, watch the cat, but not interact, and praise your dog for calm behaviour. If your dog gets stropy, gets too boisterous, gets scared, starts barking—any annoying behaviour that you don't want your dog to do in front of the cat—take it farther away; try and create more distance. Or pause, come back in an hour or a day's time, and try it again. So what we're doing there is introducing the dog to how the cat behaves. And then we also have to do the opposite. We have to put the cat in a cat carrier cage or keep the cat well out of the dog's way by placing it up high so it feels safe in the dog's presence, and we let the dog behave naturally. And then the cat—whether it's an adult cat or a kitten—is then learning about the dog's behaviour. So they're both learning about other species' behaviour—they're both learning about these other new family members—but they're doing so in such a positive way. They're accepting each other. And if they're getting praise and pats and perhaps their favourite treats or their toy at the time that they're watching this other animal, they will think, *This animal's a real positive thing in my life*. And they're really well committing to the home.

Cathy: That's great, Jo. I'm just thinking that dogs like the horizontal space. They're down on the ground...

Dr Righetti: That's right.

Cathy: ... but cats like more vertical space. They like to get up high. So do you think about how to also make your house a little bit more cat-friendly—maybe a few shelves or things up high...

Dr Righetti: Absolutely.

Cathy: ...So that the new cat can get away from the dog and feel safe and secure and look down on the dog. <Laughs>

Dr Righetti: Absolutely, look down on the dog—that's a cat's prerogative. Yeah. <Laughs>

Cathy: Yeah.

Dr Righetti: No doubt, height makes a cat feel safe and secure. So, creating bookshelves, creating windowsills. If you allow your cat on the benchtop, great. If not, provide some other shelving system that they can get up onto. They feel much better when they're up high. And the other thing to take care of is their safety when they're toileting. Even if you do intend to let your cat outdoors at a future stage, when it first comes to your home, it needs to remain inside for a few weeks, so you have to provide a litter tray or two. The cat has to have safe access and feel secure when they're toileting, and the dog has to be kept away from it, because it will scare the cat and because it may well want to divert the contents of the litter tray, which is not what anyone would want. We've got to make sure this cat is safe to observe its world and safe to toilet and also safe to eat, without feeling the dog's about to eat its entire day's dinner all in one second, because dogs will eat everything that's going.

Cathy: Yeah.

Dr Righetti: We really have to make sure our cats feel safe.

Cathy: Would that be one or two weeks that the new cat would just stay confined in its own room in the house?

Dr Righetti: Again, here we're really talking differences in cat personality and ages of cats, and in looking what your dog's personality is like. If your dog is very boisterous, you want to supervise every introduction for many weeks. If your dog is a very calm dog, perhaps an old dog, perhaps it's been used to living with cats its entire life, then you may find that this dog accepts the cat within hours. There really are major differences in animal personalities and their behaviour. We really have to just err on the side of caution.

Cathy: Right.

Dr Righetti: Go with the animals' pace. And we absolutely make sure that there's no danger to either animal before we leave them alone together. And I say "to either animal" because sometimes it's actually the cat that's rather boisterous with the dog.

Cathy: Right. <Laughs>

Dr Righetti: <Laughs> So we just have to make sure the dog is not feeling terrified of the cat because, after all, cats have weapons, and they will use them if they're cornered or pushed into what they feel is a threatening situation. So we do need to make sure that every one of our pets is cared for and they feel safe at home.

Cathy: And would you just be going through the same process if you brought home a little kitten as opposed to an adult cat?

Dr Righetti: It really is much the same. Each one of them has their own special needs and we have to take care of those, but overall we're just making sure that each of them feels safe in their household, and that includes the safety of our dog. And the same would apply if we have children or if we have other pets that they're going to encounter. We need to make sure that every animal feels safe.

Cathy: We'll wrap it up there. Thanks very much. We're looking forward to episode three now, where we'll be talking about introducing a new cat to an existing cat. So that's going to be interesting.

Dr Righetti: Oh, fun.

Cathy: One cat to another cat. I think that's going to be quite challenging. We'll chat with you further then in episode three.

Dr Righetti: Thanks, Cathy.

-ENDS-

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