



Paw Perfect Introductions podcast
Episode Six – Introducing your baby to a kitten or adult cat

Cathy: Hello, I'm Cathy Beer from Pets4Life, and this is episode six of the Paw Perfect Introductions podcast. Renowned animal behaviourist Dr Joanne Righetti from Pet Problems Solved is with me to chat about how to introduce your baby to your kitten or adult cat. Hi, Jo, how are you doing today?

Dr Righetti: Hey, I'm great, Cathy. It's good to be on the podcast again and talk about pets.

Cathy: Yeah, great. In episode five, you shared some fantastic tips about helping parents prepare their puppy or adult dog for the arrival of a baby. So Jo, what do you suggest for as smooth as possible of an introduction between a new baby and a kitten?

Dr Righetti: Well, congratulations if you're expecting a baby, or you've had one and you're about to bring it home. And if you do have a kitten, then you've got two babies to deal with. Perhaps kittens are a little bit easier than human babies—sometimes they're not, though! <Laughs> Or even your existing cat may have a little bit of its nose out of joint at bringing home a new family member. So, what to do? Well, start preparing, if possible, before the baby's arrival. Get your kitten or cat used to the sounds of children and babies crying and so on by playing recordings of crying, which you can download from the internet, or borrow some friends' babies for a little while—just make sure you're always taking care of them around the cat. Cats love to investigate, so it's very important you supervise any introduction with a real baby. You can get the smells of babies around your home as well by having the nappies around, or if you're going to use baby powder or something—having all that around.

When you're bringing your baby back from the hospital or wherever you've had your baby, it's a good idea to come in, but give your existing cat a bit of your attention as you come in. They will have been missing you, so perhaps hand the baby over to your partner, and you go and greet your existing cat and give them a bit of love, a bit of attention. And then very gently let them meet and greet the new arrival. Don't be sad if your cat walks off, tail in the air, a bit haughty, and says, *Oh, I don't want to meet that thing*. That's just cats for you. And they'll come around in their own good time. But of course, people do worry about things like cats going to sleep in the bassinet or the cot, and that is something to watch out for. I mean, most cats stay away from screaming babies because they are very loud, but when a baby's snuggled up and asleep, they're very cosy and

comforted, so it might be a good idea to actually keep the door shut but have your baby monitor switched on, or just to know where your cat is at all times, perhaps by keeping it in a certain area of your home. Practice that all before the baby comes, and it'll be a much smoother ride.

Cathy: So is there a difference between a kitten and an adult cat—that advice or process that you just talked about?

Dr Righetti: Overall, there's not a great deal of difference. I think the difference is perhaps in the animal's behaviour. An adult cat knows its routine, and if you just keep feeding it at its expected hour or every two hours as cats do—you know, making sure that it has all its needs attended to—your adult cat will probably be fine. They'll investigate a little bit; probably stay away quite a bit. So just giving them things to do, windows to look out of—just so they can go up high and look down on you and the baby and get to know what a baby's all about.

With a kitten, a kitten's needs are really playful and entertaining them when you've just had a new baby and you're exhausted, perhaps the last thing you feel like doing is playing with a kitten, so you might want to enlist other family members' help. When you've got a bit of energy, set some things up—let the cat entertain themselves basically, with some automated toys or some food-releasing toys, even—cats can play with those. It's all about being prepared and just watching that the cat doesn't use the baby to play with, which is very unlikely. It's more when the baby starts to become a toddler, that the cat starts to think, *Oh, this could be fun.*

Cathy: Yes—

Dr Righetti: So, should be easy.

Cathy: Yes, I was wondering about that—when the baby becomes a toddler. So, now you've got a walking, talking little human that will be very interested in the family cat and maybe is thinking that the family cat is a fun toy.

Dr Righetti: Well, yeah...

Cathy: So, what do you think you need to do there? Do you need to separate or supervise that interaction?

Dr Righetti: Absolutely supervision is the key here. And I know as parents we don't always supervise every single interaction—we should, but sometimes the phone rings or we're cooking dinner or whatever. We get distracted. So we've got to teach our children as they grow old to be kind to animals. So the first thing that happens generally is that the baby has a grip reflex right from almost the beginning, and they often will just reach out and grab whatever is closest. Now, that could be the cat's fur, the cat's tail. The cat will lash out with claws. That's

not the cat's fault; that's just how cats react. So you do need to supervise even tiny babies with cats.

Cathy: Right, yeah.

Dr Righetti: And as they grow old, babies get mobile, of course. They start crawling or shuffling along on their bottoms. At that stage, the cat tends to sort of go, *Ah, what is this creature in my house? I'm going to disappear up higher. I'm leaving this room; I'll go somewhere else.* So they tend to keep a bit of distance. Now, as the toddler gets more mobile—up on their feet and so on, and starts running after the cat—that's when the cat can get a bit afraid and they may well lash out if they're cornered. So what we have to do there is make sure the cat has a safe place to get away, and that we're teaching the child—the mobile baby or the toddler—exactly how to interact. So we can start that at a very early age by taking the small child's hand and rubbing it along wherever the cat likes to be patted. Say, along the back—the direction that the fur is lying. But even better than that, what you could do is buy your baby or your child a little toy cat, and that could be their cat, and they can interact with that cat, and you can show them how to pat the cat. You know, in a way that they will enjoy because they'll be interacting with their toy, but it also teaches them the real way to handle an animal.

Cathy: That's a great idea!

Dr Righetti: Yeah. And rather than let your toddler pick up an animal—they all want to pick them up—have them sit down somewhere that they're really comfortable. And then if your cat's willing, place the cat on their lap, and then hopefully the cat will settle down if you give it a few pats along the way as well, or maybe give it a bit of its favourite food or something. You know, handfeed it while it's sitting on your baby's lap, or just snuggle up together if you're feeding the baby or you're just sitting and having a cuddle or you're both snoozing—let the cat come up and sit beside you while it's all really quiet so you're creating this positive environment for everyone around your cat and baby.

Cathy: Wow, that's great, Jo. You've packed a lot in there. That's fantastic. Thanks for those great tips.

Dr Righetti: Well, you can tell that I've done it several times myself.

Cathy: Well, how many cats have you got? You've got four?

Dr Righetti: Currently, I've got four cats—three very young ones and one very old one.

Cathy: Yes.

Dr Righetti: And I have three sons as well who have always lived with cats, so we've had cats right throughout their lives. We've done every combination.
<Laughs>

Cathy: You're definitely talking from experience there as well. Look, I'm sure expecting parents with kittens or cats will find these tips very helpful and just make them feel a little bit more confident and relaxed when their baby comes and brings them home.

<Dog barks>

Dr Righetti: <Laughs> And there's a dog in the background. How typical of a dog, saying, *Let's not just talk about cats.*

Cathy: Ah, well we'll be talking about dogs next time.

Dr Righetti: Excellent.

Cathy: We'll be chatting about introducing your new puppy or adult dog to your baby or child in episode seven. What could possibly go wrong? We'll found out in episode seven. Thanks, Jo.

Dr Righetti: Thanks, Cathy.

-ENDS-

Contact Us

Email: info@pets4life.com.au

Website: www.pets4life.com.au