



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

Cathy: Hello, I'm Cathy Beer from Pets4Life and this is episode eight of the Paw Perfect Introductions podcast. The lovely Dr Joanne Righetti from Pet Problem Solved is on the line to share her tips to introduce your new kitten or adult cat to your baby or young child. So it's all about kids and cats. Hi Jo, how many pets do you have around you at the moment?

Dr Righetti: Well, my dog is right by my side and my cats are scattered throughout my house sort of doing their own thing as cats do. But I do have four cats, and you may even hear my eldest one, who's now 17—Mew. She likes to come and give a loud meow when you least expect it. <Laughs> The others are a bit quieter but they may come causing quite of a bit of a ruckus when they start to play around my feet. <Laughs>

Cathy: Yes

Dr Righetti: Always fun.

Cathy: Yes, Mew made an appearance or had a meow in episode five.

Dr Righetti: <Laughs>

Cathy: So we know to expect anything and everything with our pets. So like episode seven where we talked about introducing a new puppy or adult dog to a baby or young children, this is also a common scenario where families with a baby or young children decide it's time to get a kitten or adopt a cat. It could be adopting a kitten or adult cat. So Jo, how can parents ensure a smooth introduction between a baby and a new kitten? Should we look at that combination first?

Dr Righetti: Yeah. Obviously, you need to make sure you've got enough time and energy. If you've already got a baby, you're probably exhausted, but I understand that you want to nurture things and perhaps getting a kitten—sometimes kittens choose us. You know, a friend says, "Well, this litter's just popped up—can you take a cat?" And you think, well, that's kind of what happened to me when I had a young baby. I ended up with a cat within the first couple of weeks of my child's life.

Cathy: Oh, wow!

Dr Righetti: Yeah, yeah. So things happen and you get them. But it is hard work, so you should be ready for that commitment to a kitten that's going to be around for 12-20 years. But what you can do is just make sure your home's set up for the cat. Having all the food dishes, the bed—sometimes, mind you, cats just choose where they want to sleep themselves. And having space that your cat can get away. When you bring a young cat home—or a new cat home, I should say, it could be young or old—you actually want to keep them indoors. Even if you intend to let them outside—and you don't have to; cats can be happy indoors—but you need to keep them inside for quite awhile so they get used to you and get used to their home environment. So you've got to be set up for that and you've got to make sure that your baby or young child is very safe from any cat that might be a little bit afraid and lash out with claws or teeth, which are very sharp, of course. So you've got to really supervise any interactions between your new cat and your young child.

Cathy: So is there any difference between a kitten and an adult cat?

Dr Righetti: Probably just the way they behave. An adult cat is probably a bit more serene and sedate and they need the spaces to snooze. So give them spots up high. Cats love to be up high, but especially when there's children around, because then if they can get higher than the child, then the child can't disturb them, and they can snooze the day away. So having shelves, having windowsills, having boxes so the cat can go in—and instructing the child on how to approach the adult cat because your cat may never have met a child before. You know? And you'll be on a learning curve, that's for sure, finding out exactly what's going on with your new cat. But basically, a cat, if you give it spaces to snooze, you give it its meals regularly, the adult cat will be happy. The kitten, you really have to entertain, and that's all about playing games, letting the cat chase you around. If you're really busy, you're doing your housework, tie something on a string—like a cat toy to your waistband and walk around your house, and the kitten will play with you automatically. So it's about setting some time aside to be with the kitten and of course, you know, I would sit down with your child and involve them if they're old enough—involve the children in playing with the cat, too. But again, under supervision so that no one gets hurt.

Cathy: Up until what age do we need to supervise that interaction?

Dr Righetti: It's all very personalized so it's about getting to know your individual animal, and of course knowing your child. So generally, we say that children shouldn't be left alone with pets until they're around seven, maybe even 10 years old. But we do have to still supervise even after that sometimes. And it just depends on their personalities. But there's a lot of ways that we can interact while we're there with them. You can ask your child to sit down and you can bring your new cat over to sit in their lap while they're nice and quiet. The cat will probably enjoy that—having a bit of a stroke or getting to get a little cat treat or something. If your child's very young, you can model how to stroke a cat. You

can get some games out and play on the floor, you know, ping-pong ball, an empty toilet roll holder—cats love all these things. Get your child, if they're a bit older, to paint or decorate a cardboard box. Cut some windows out for your cat—make a little cubby house for the cat. It's all great fun between children and cats, so have a ball together.

Cathy: What if you can't supervise? I mean, we talked in episode seven about crate training a puppy, but also having short periods in a crate so a puppy can have its own space. But also, when you can't supervise that interaction with a young child—you know, that everybody's safe and secure and happy... But what could you do with a kitten or an adult cat?

Dr Righetti: Well, you could crate train a cat, too. It's less common, of course, because cats have a good ability to get out of the way and away when they've had enough of us all. And even just having a pen or another room that your cat can go to—one that you can actually close the door and give it some space away from the child, and also instructing the child to leave the cat alone if it's in its special area, that you would rather it have some time alone. You absolutely can in an area, and it just gets to be a cat—gets away from children, and gets away from us, too. Cats will probably thank you very much for that.

Cathy: Okay, so you either have to create that space to ensure that separation when you can't supervise, or, as you say, the kitten or cat will probably naturally find or go up to a higher level—a shelf or something—and get away anyway.

Dr Righetti: Yeah, they're very good at finding spots to get away from us all. Feel a bit superior and sit up high, looking down on us all. <Laughs>

Cathy: Yes, that's right. Well, thanks very much, Jo for those great tips. We'll have to wrap it up now. Sadly, this is the last episode of our Paw Perfect Introductions podcast series, and I wish you a big thank-you Jo for thanking your time out of your busy schedule and sharing your expertise and tips for smooth introductions between cats and dogs and families.

Dr Righetti: Cathy, it's been a pleasure. I'm so glad that you're doing this to help people out. It's so important. Introductions are really the first date of that wonderful relationship we have with our pets and the rest of our families, so thank you for this opportunity.

Cathy: Oh, great. Thanks, Jo.

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