

How to introduce new animals!

The best way to introduce 2 animals (whether they be 2 cats or a dog and a cat) is to follow this order of introduction:

Scent, Sight, then Touch!

Scent:

Before the two animals have met each other, start the introduction with scent swapping. Take one item from each animal (toy, blanket, etc.) and give the opposite animal the item with the new animal's scent. When giving the animal the item, give lots of praise, treats and attention so the animal associates the unfamiliar animal's scent with positive experiences. Continue this for about a week at least once a day (if you can, introduce a new item halfway through the week so the scent is fresh).

If your animals have already met one another (and the introduction is not going well) then separate the animals so they can no longer see one another. Then start with scent swapping. Keep them separated for the week while you do the scent swapping.

Sight:

Now that the animals associate the new animal's scent with positive experiences, you can let the animals see one another. However, they should only be allowed to see one another through a screen door or a barrier so they cannot physically contact one another. This will give the animals reassurance that they can safely see/smell the new animal without being afraid of physical interaction. Do this every day for a week. You can do multiple sessions a day but keep the sessions short (~5 min at a time). Again, give lots of praise and attention. You can also put food in front of each animal to distract them while they can still see each other.

Touch:

If all has gone well with the sight introduction then you can introduce the animals face to face with no barrier. Go slow, starting from a far distance and getting closer over a few days. Again give lots of positive reinforcement for good behavior and lots of encouragement!

The idea is to use shaping to slowly build up the introduction. Start with short interactions and work up slowly to longer interactions. You may have to adjust the timing depending on how the animals are reacting to one another. Just read their behavior and try to decide if more or less time is needed in each step!

The key is to build positive associations between the new animals! Go slow! It is better to take longer on each step than to rush the introduction.

Remember, always end interactions on a positive note!

Kristyn R. Vitale, PhD Candidate Kristyn.Shreve@oregonstate.edu

www.maueyes.com