

Integrating a Shelter Animal into a Home with Other Pets

Phase 1: No Direct Interactions

Likely Timeframe: 1-2 weeks

One animal has her own room (or crate) in the house. Shelter and resident animals may accidentally see each other from time to time during this phase but **the goal is for them not to interact**. Carry treats at all times in the event they see each other, to reward both animals for good (non-reactive) behavior. When one animal is loose, the other is contained, either fully in a room or within a crate or xpen that the other animal cannot reach. Use baby gates to prevent the loose animal from entering the room with the contained animal.

Phase 2: Controlled Interactions

Likely Timeframe: 2-4 weeks

Animals can see each other and approach but only under control. For dogs, use a gentle leader and high value treats to keep their focus on the person and to reward good (non-reactive) behavior. For cats, a baby gate keeps them separate. If either animal is reacting, you are moving too quickly. Increase distance and reward when they are not reacting. If both animals are not reacting, you can increase the duration of their interaction but stop the interaction before a reaction occurs (aka end on a positive note). When you don't have time to train and supervise, the animals go back to phase 1 and are managed in separate spaces.

Phase 3: Supervised Interactions

Likely Timeframe: 4-8 weeks

The animals can interact without barriers but only under supervision. Dogs must drag leashes so that it can be picked up if you need to remove them from the room. Have treats available at all times to reward good behavior. Utilize crates and safe rooms as time out areas if either animal is reactive.

Phase 4: Unsupervised Interactions

Likely Timeframe: 6-16 weeks. Note: Some animals may never be able to be completely together unsupervised.

If both animals ignore one another, gradually start to leave them alone. Ex. Do some yard work but stay close to the house so you can hear any barking or reactivity. Leave them in short bursts for the first few weeks and then, if there are no issues, you can leave them for longer periods of time. If you aren't sure, keep separate when you are not home.

Timeline: For some animals, full integration may take four months. For others, it may take 48 hours. The process is the same regardless of how calm or how reactive the interactions are between two animals. Move faster if the animals are completely non-reactive. Move more slowly if you see reactivity.

Goals:

1. The goal through each phase is to **not elicit negative responses**. Reactivity includes alarm barking, growling, lunging, hissing, any portion of the prey drive sequence including tracking, stalking, chasing, mouthing or biting. Most animals won't get the reactivity "out of their system" by exploding in the beginning phases and you will risk safety issues for the animals and humans. The goal is to **prevent** them from practicing reactivity until they feel safe around the other animals.
2. The primary goal is for animals to be completely bored with one another. Do not encourage play or other high-arousal activities until the animals have been fully integrated. Even after phase 4, play sessions should be monitored initially. Remember that animals only tend to play when they feel comfortable and safe with one another.
3. If either animal has other compounding challenges (ex. Guarding of food, toys or people, barrier reactivity, etc.), monitor those issues during and through phase 4 and keep separate for feeding, pick up toys, etc. to promote success.
4. In households with more than two animals, the process is the same. Start with the easiest pairing and then the next easiest and so on. The shelter animal should be integrated with all resident animals separately through phase 4 before he/she is left alone with the full pack (cats and dogs).
5. Exercise is crucial to the success of integration. Plan ahead for the first 2-4 months in the event you need to exercise dogs separately. Utilize brain toys at feeding times and when animals are confined to reward them for remaining calm. Walking dogs near each other regularly can be helpful through the process as long as there is no reactivity and you have a handler for each dog.
6. Enrolling the shelter dog into a positive-reinforcement based obedience class during the integration period will strengthen your bond, tire him/her out, give you guidance from a trainer and create a stable and controlled environment for the dog to learn to be around other dogs.