

Pediatric Therapy Network

What to Do When Bringing Your Animal Home for the First Time

The First Day



Go home. You should take your new pet straight home (plan ahead and make sure supplies were purchased ahead of time). The sooner you get home the faster your new pet will be able to settle into their new life.

Leash up. It is critical that new adopters keep their dogs on a leash at all times during transport. If possible, bring a second person to maintain a firm hold of the leash, especially if the pet will not be crated during the ride.

Enjoy the outdoors. You should remain outside once you arrive home until the new pet urinates, and hopefully defecates. The pet will begin to learn immediately the expectations for relieving itself.

Control the environment. It's advisable to keep your new pet on a leash while introducing it to the new house. Once you both feel comfortable, you can remove the leash.

Introduce slowly. If possible, introduce your pet to each family member separately. That way they will have the opportunity to get to know the sight and smell of each individual without being overwhelmed.

First Two Weeks



During the first two weeks, your pet may be unable to be relaxed or act in a natural way due to their very new surroundings. Pets may be confused as they struggle to become familiar with their new owners and home. Cats tend to hide or isolate themselves. Dogs grasp at routines in order to gain a sense of structure and to predict what happens and when.

What to do:

- ◆ Introduce and maintain schedules for feeding, walking and play.
- ◆ Revisit crate training, even if the dog is housebroken. Reward outdoor elimination with praise, a game or a treat.
- ◆ Confine the dog to one room in the house, such as a kitchen. Initiate supervised introduction of one additional room every other day.
- ◆ Introduce cat-play using lure toys. Avoid using a laser pointer, which generates frustration.
- ◆ Provide the cat with its own space for feeding, as well as access to two litter boxes.
- ◆ Refrain from taking a dog to pet supply stores or on lengthy trips.

The First Month



Owners may discover that, after walks, the dog will eliminate in the home. Most animals feel comforted when the area smells like them. It's not uncommon for dogs to mark in various interior areas. Cats begin to engage in increased exploratory behavior, usually when the family is sleeping.

What to do:

- ◆ Take the dog for walks close to home. Upon returning home, spend five to 10 additional minutes in the front or backyard, where the dog is likely to eliminate again. If it doesn't eliminate, return to the crate for 10 minutes before taking the dog out again. Repeat until pet eliminates outdoors. Follow up with a treat or a game.
- ◆ Invite friends to the home so the dog can be greeted and given treats by friendly strangers.
- ◆ Do not force any pet to be held or petted by people from whom they are not actively soliciting attention.

Months Two & Three



Dogs begin to feel more confident and express themselves more freely, so there may be increased barking or growling. Both are forms of communication to express likes or fears. (Similarly, cats may begin to scratch furniture and solicit more attention.)

What to do:

- ◆ Take note of what the dog is barking at and when it occurs. The dog may require social support, such as company, when, for instance, it is out at night in the yard.
- ◆ Assure dogs that situations are safe by offering a gentle touch or treat, and then lure the dog away from the area, or prevent access to areas where barking occurs most frequently.

Month Four



At this time, dogs and cats become more comfortable in their new environment. Owners may begin to see a decrease in behavior issues.

What to do:

- ◆ Refrain from punishing or physically correcting any pet during the first four months.
- ◆ If owners are experiencing issues that are particularly challenging, they should contact their vet or a positive-based professional trainer or behavior consultant for guidance.