**Introducing a new pet to other household pets**

The first thing to expect when you bring a new pet into the household is a period of transition for the existing pets in your home. Expect that some pets might hide whilst others might try to push the new pet around. In some cases, the original pets might try behaviours designed to get your attention such as barking, pawing or stealing things. The important thing is that this normal period of adjustment should last no more than one or two weeks.

You can make the transition easier for new pets by using gradual introductions. To start with, the new pet should be kept separate from the other pets whenever they are not closely supervised. The original pets should have access to the same areas of the house as they previously had. The new pet should be placed in a neutral area (e.g. bathroom) with toys, water and anything else that it may need. The new pet shouldn't be in an area that is highly desirable for the other pets. These tend to be areas where people spend a lot of time with the pets such as the bedroom, or where the pets normally choose to stay when they are alone, such as near the food dishes. If, say, your current dog is always crated, then you can easily accustom it to a new dog by crating the new dog across the room where it can be seen by the original one. As the dogs get used to each other you can gradually move their crates closer together until they are side by side.

Make sure to pet-proof the area where your new pet is confined, that is, put toilet seats down, put electric cables out of the way, move fragile items and put child-guards over mains electrical sockets.The best time to perform gradual introductions is when the animals are calm; incidentally, this applies to all learning situations for pets: a relaxed environment is much more conducive to learning than a stressful one. Start by petting the original pets and telling that it is okay: but only if it genuinely *is* okay! Don't reward hissing, growling, or biting. If you tell a pet that it is "okay" when it is upset, you are not calming the animal - in fact you are actually rewarding the inappropriate behaviour and encouraging it to do it again in future.

Next step, if the animals in the household are calm and either ignore each other or act friendly, then you can feed them within sight of the new pet. The distance should be close enough that they can easily see and watch each other but not so close that they become upset. You can gradually reduce this distance by a few centimetres each day. If there is ever an aggressive encounter then just increase the distance between bowls back to a previously safe distance. Feeding and petting the animals when they are in each others' presence teaches them that good things happen when they are together and calm. If a pet does react violently at any point then immediately banish that animal to a neutral zone and try again when it is calm. If it happens again, then banish it for the rest of the day or evening and try again later in the day or the next morning.

Be aware that some behaviours are not violent but are still not conducive to good inter-pet relations. Be on the look out for more subtle problem behaviours: in dogs, hackles going up, staring, snarling, side-by-side posturing with growling or lip curling, or pinning the other animal by grabbing its neck; in cats (who are the undisputed masters of subtle threats) look out for direct stares and elevation of the rump and tail base with or without puffing out of the fur. Interestingly, this behaviour is perceived by another cat as a *more* intimidating threat than snarling, hissing or pouncing.

If you need to separate animals in a hostile situation, do not put your hands or body between the animals, or you could easily be injured. Use cardboard, brooms, loud noises such as whistles/foghorns or water pistols to separate animals. If you can identify the aggressor then banish that animal to neutral turf. If you can't identify the aggressor then banish all the animals to their own bit of neutral territory.

If the new pet is sitting close to the others and everything seems to be going well then tell all the pets they are good and reward them with treats. This works well with two people: one with the new animal and the other withheld rest of the pets. Make sure the people take it in turns to hold the new pet and give treats so the new pet doesn't associate rewards with just one person.

During these introductive days or weeks, make sure each pet in the household has 5 or 10 minutes alone with you every day, so you can give one to one attention, such as grooming, playing with a toy or just petting. You can even start these periods of individual attention in the days before the new pet arrives; if you can establish a regular schedule then the pets will learn to anticipate this and their overall anxiety may decrease when the new pet arrives.

Once the pets are reacting positively with each other or not reacting at all when restrained you can start to let them out of your sight. Put a bell on the new pet's collar so that you always know where it is and can get an early warning of potentially problematic interactions. To reduce competition for resources in these early days, increase the number of water bowls, litter boxes, beds and toys.

Patience and observation are the keys to success. Expect there to be a change in the dynamics between individuals: a new "king pin" may come to the fore, and this is perfectly normal: the old "boss" may even be grateful to have been relieved of his or her duties! Also accept that often the pets never become BFFs, but are fairly happy to live separate lives under the same roof. Don't try to push the animals for relationships they clearly do not want as this could easily backfire, undoing the good work you have done.

In some instances it can be harder than normal to successfully introduce new pets, with aggression persisting despite all efforts. More advanced behavioural techniques may need to be used, and talking to your vet, and/or consulting an animal behavioural specialist may be the best course of action. As a last resort, a technique called "flooding" can be used. This can be extremely effective, but must be done correctly to avoid serious trauma to the pet. In very extreme cases in which all therapies, including medication, have failed it is kindest and safest to try to find a new home for one of the pets.

In summary: at the beginning separate the pets when unsupervised; crate one or more of the pets; pet proof the home; gradually introduce the pets using food and rewards; introduce the pets during quiet times using leads and harnesses; use water pistols, foghorns or whistles to interrupt aggression; be aware of the early warning physical signs of impending aggression and know how to safely interrupt this behaviour; put a bell on the new pet when you are ready to introduce it to the household unsupervised.

These methods are good for new pets, but can also be used with *existing* pets that have begun to have some problems interacting with each other. In this situation the pet that is the victim should be fed, walked and given attention before the aggressor. This reinforces the right to some valued status. If confinement of one of the pets becomes necessary, then it is the aggressor that is confined to neutral territory or even a "lower quality" room. Make sure *not* to to confine the aggressor to a room where it would rather spend time, as this will send the message that the bad behaviour was worthy of reward. Use the same sorts of gradual introductions under controlled circumstances as you would with a new pet. Put a bell onto the aggressor to keep track of it. At the first sign of aggressive behaviour startle the aggressor with the whistle or other item. Timing is everything. Anything more than 30 - 60 seconds after the event is too late. In the case of a cat, startle the aggressor as soon as it stares at the kitten; don't wait until it has pounced, as this is too late. Remember that the startle must be just sufficient to disrupt the behaviour but not excessive such that the animal becomes terrified. At the same time, reassure the victim. Once everyone is completely calm, not before, engage them in activities that are incompatible with aggression: in other words feeding and petting. If the aggression persists, then banish the aggressor until later in the day or the next morning.

I write this as my family is about to welcome a new Chihuahua puppy to a household of cats. Good luck to any of you who may be embarking on similar endeavours!