

Tips for Adding Another Pet to Your Family

You're thinking about adding a second pet to your family? Congratulations! We think that's a great idea, but we know you've probably got a few concerns about how to go about doing so. Here's some answers to the questions we hear most often on this subject.

I already have a male dog (or cat). Should I adopt another male or will the opposite sex get along better?

First of all, we assume the first pet is neutered, and if not, by all means do that before bringing in another pet. That simple "fixing" will solve many of the problems you'd otherwise encounter, such as males fighting with males or unintentional matings. Though the usual advice to get a second pet of the opposite sex, we've seen many same-sex second adoptions work well.

Is the age of the second pet I adopt important?

In some cases, it's definitely a good idea to introduce a second pet that's junior to the first pet. Younger pets are generally less assertive than adults, so you can keep the peace by bringing in a new animal that won't start immediate challenges over who rules the household. The exception to that idea is when you give a home to a mild-mannered "senior citizen" dog or cat. Such animals are often happy just to have a safe and loving place to live out its life, even if there are other livelier pets in the household.

How should I introduce the new pet to my other pets?

If you're bringing in a new dog, many experts suggest the introduction should be made on "neutral" territory, such as having both leashed dogs meet in a park. After they've had a chance to sniff and greet, then take both home. This way your first dog won't feel so threatened by an intruder who's moving in without warning. If you're bringing in a second cat, we suggest keeping the newcomer confined in a room apart from the first animal for a while. Let the pets sniff and become aware of each other without allowing any wild chases at the outset. When you do let the new cat meet the previous cat or dog, there may be some growling or spitting. With time, most pets work things out on their own. We tell new adopters to expect a period of adjustment of at least two weeks before things feel normal.

What can I do to help my pets be friends?

First of all, don't make a big fuss over the newcomer and ignore your previous pet. Instead, give equal attention or even a bit more to the first pet. Show that pet he's still tops with you by feeding him first (you'll have separate food dishes for your pets, of course) and greeting him first when you walk in. As time passes, your newcomer may be

the more dominant one in the pet hierarchy, but the animals will figure that out on their own.

What else should I consider?

Before adopting a second pet, be sure you'll be able to afford the extra expense. Even when spaying/neutering and first vaccinations have been taken care of prior to adoption, we know that the average cost of routine annual veterinary care for a pet is approximately \$200. If you can afford an additional pet, then there's just one last thing to consider: which of the many great animals in SAP's care is the one for you?