

8 Mistakes Owners Make When They Bring Home a Younger Pet

Are you considering a new younger pet to help invigorate your older one - or to ease the blow of her passing? To help ensure a peaceful household, don't ignore these 8 important tips for helping your senior dog or cat accept a new family pet.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- If you're thinking of bringing home a younger pet as company for your senior dog or cat, it's important to keep the primary focus on your older pet's needs
- It's best to select a second pet that is most likely to get along well with your existing cat or dog. For example, it can be quite difficult to convince a senior cat to accept a new kitten or cat in the household. It's also important to consider the size of a potential new pet, and the gender
- Introduction of a new pet to your senior pet is an exercise in high-level diplomacy... especially when introducing a dog and a cat
- Each pet should have his own belongings, bedding, toys, and feeding areas. It's also very important that your senior companion is never ignored in favor of the new pet

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Many parents of a dog or cat who is getting up in years decide to add a younger pet to the family. Often, they are hoping the newcomer will invigorate the older animal, while also softening the blow when the current beloved pet passes.

Introducing a new pet to a home with a senior animal can be hugely successful, or it can be a decision everyone in the family ends up regretting. When an existing pet and a newbie don't get along, it can create lots of behavior problems and stress all around.

Before you make up your mind to add a new furry family member to the household, here are some things to keep in mind.

8 Tips to Help Your Senior Dog/Cat Accept a New Family Pet

1. **Keep your focus on the needs of your senior pet rather than the appeal of a new pet** — Your current pet has been your loyal companion for a long time, and she deserves to spend her golden years in peace and comfort. Some younger animals will be better for your current pet than others, so decisions about choosing a new pet should revolve around what's best for your old timer.
2. **Choose a second pet that has the best chance of getting along well with your older dog or cat** — For example, if you currently have a dog and want to adopt another, it's often best if dog #2 isn't or won't

grow bigger than dog #1. You don't want a young, energetic dog intimidating your existing pet because of a size disparity.

It's also recommended that you get a dog of the opposite sex, as males and females tend to get along better than dogs of the same sex.

Also look at personality. Pairing a quiet older dog with a more subdued, shy or type "B" dog is more honoring to your senior pet than the overbearing extroverted alternative.

3. **If your current pet is an older cat, consider getting a dog** — Adult and especially senior kitties are often entirely unaccepting of a new feline in the household. Cats get along best if they're adopted together as siblings, or are introduced at a young age. After that, things get dicey. Even kitties that have lived together for years can develop relationship problems as they age. Make sure you choose a dog with a temperament that is honoring to your senior feline.
4. **To successfully introduce a new dog to a senior cat, proceed with caution** — The first several meetings between a new dog and an existing cat should happen on the cat's terms — not the dog's. Make sure kitty has escape routes from every room and safe places to climb to and hide under that the dog can't access. Use baby gates or other barriers to keep the dog from entering certain rooms or areas in your home to establish safe spots for kitty.

Keep the dog on a leash and restrained so he's unable to lunge at or get close to your cat. Once your cat understands she's not in imminent danger, you can lead the dog a distance away and take off the leash. At the same time, distract the dog with a toy, some treats, or a short walk so he doesn't become intensely focused on the cat. At no time should your dog be allowed to corner or unintentionally intimidate your cat, and reward the dog whenever he focuses on you rather than kitty.

5. **Introducing a new kitten or cat to your senior dog** — Dogs tend to be more sociable than cats, so much of what I discussed in #4 applies here as well, regardless of whether the dog or cat is the newcomer to the household. The goal is to insure kitty feels safe despite your dog's eagerness for a meet-and-greet.

I recommend preparing a room for your cat before you bring her home – a room where she can be alone until she settles into her new life with you. It should be equipped with a litter box, bedding, a few cat toys, and hiding places. Feed her and water her in the room. Don't close the door, but limit access with a baby gate so she feels safe, but not isolated.

When you bring her home in her carrier, take it directly to her room. Put it near the litter box, unlatch and open the door, and spend a few minutes speaking softly to her. Let her venture out of the carrier on her own schedule, and likewise, let her get acquainted with your dog on her own terms and timetable.

6. **Make sure both pets have their own stuff** — Your dogs and/or cats should have plenty of their own toys and their own beds and sleeping spots. They may share or even make trades, but don't just assume they will – let it be their idea. If you have 2 cats, each should have a litter box, plus one to spare.
7. **Feed pets in separate areas** — This approach eliminates resource guarding and food fights. It also allows you to insure that each pet is getting the appropriate type and amount of food.

Also place a few water stations around the house so everyone has access to clean, fresh drinking water at all times.

8. **Give your senior pet lots of time and attention** — Getting a new pet acclimated to your home takes considerable time and energy – especially if the new furry family member is a puppy or kitten. While you're busy falling in love with your new pet, make sure not to ignore your senior companion. You never want him to feel abandoned or second best, so make sure the newcomer isn't sucking up every bit of your time and attention. Your first focus must be on your long-time companion, which also sets the stage for a healthy pack order.

It's a good idea to get other family members involved so that both your pets get plenty of attention, affection, exercise, and playtime.

Now, all this may seem like a lot of work, but you'll thank me down the road when your pets are getting along and your household is peaceful. Remember to plan ahead in both selecting and preparing for a new pet, take things slowly, and make adjustments as necessary along the way.

The good news is that many new pet housemates get along right from the beginning. Others grow to be friends over time. And some learn to co-exist by simply ignoring each other.

Sources and References

[VetStreet September 15, 2014](#)
