



Babies and cats: take baby steps

Many new parents are worried that cats and babies don't mix, however your cat will most likely give your baby a wide berth because of the associated smells and noises. It's best to let your cat prepare for the arrival of a baby by allowing it help you set up the baby's room and not locking it out.

Having said that, you do have to be aware that your cat may feel uneasy about the sudden shift in your focus and importantly your cat should never be left alone with the baby. To deal with the changes in your home you'll need to set boundaries for your cat while slowly introducing them to your little one. All contact between them should be supervised and if either one shows any signs of distress they should be separated and the introduction attempted at another time. If your cat is anxious don't force it to interact with the baby but it will start to associate the baby's smell with you and in time will relax.

Toddlers and cats: don't try running before you can walk

If your child can't yet grasp boundaries, but is old enough to walk, you need to be especially vigilant. When your toddler first sees your cat, all they see is a fluffy curiosity that they want to touch, pull and generally poke. Meanwhile, your cat may see your toddler as a loud threatening monster invading their personal space.

Don't despair - your cat and toddler can learn to get along. In fact, the two can form a friendship that will last a lifetime. The key is to teach your toddler to respect your cat's limits. If they can learn to move slowly, speak quietly; give your cat space when they're sleeping and eating; and learn never to chase them, your cat will come to view them as a friend. Help your toddler by approaching your cat like a person sneaking silently on tiptoes and moving in slow motion whenever you're near the cat.

Small children and cats

When your child can understand what you say, explain that the best way to befriend a cat is to pretend to be a cat. You can say something like:

"If you move slowly and quietly, our cat will think you're a cat, and they'll want to be your friend. If you're too loud or if you chase them, they'll think you're a dog and run away". Once they've grasped your cat's boundaries, you can teach them how to pat the cat. The basics are:

- Don't push your hand towards their face but sit down and wait for them to rub against you
- Always stroke from head to the base of the tail (not in reverse)
- Stroke behind their ears
- Tickle under their chin
- Play it safe and avoid their tummy
- NEVER pull their tail

Letting the friendship grow

The above advice can be applied in general to older children. As well as teaching them the basics you can deepen the friendship by involving your child in pet chores - teach them to feed your cat before school, change their litter and brush their coat. This will help them to bond.

If you have any questions or need more information please call us. You can also find lots of information online.

