

Helping Pets Adjust to Holiday Visitors
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During the upcoming Thanksgiving celebration, many families will have a number of visitors and guests in their homes. While this may be a welcome event for human family members, some pets may not be so thrilled.

Most cats are somewhat fearful and wary of unfamiliar people, at least initially. To help your feline family members feel comfortable with a house-full of people, make sure that your cats have several hiding places where they can get away until they are ready to meet your guests.

Don't allow small children, or adults for that matter, to pull cats out from under the bed or behind the couch. This is not only bad for the cats, but will probably result in someone being bitten or scratched.

While some dogs welcome visitors with furious tail wags and lots of licks, others can be either fearful or threatening. If you know your dog is not good with people outside the family, you might consider boarding her for a few days.

The hectic pace of a holiday visit is not the time to try to socialize a problem dog, as good socialization experiences require proper management and preventing the dog from becoming overwhelmed. Another option would be to put the dog in a bedroom with several favorite toys or chewies while guests are arriving, and allow her to come out and greet people after everyone is seated and quiet.

Just to be cautious, it is usually better to allow pets to approach guests when they are ready to do so, rather than forcing the animal to tolerate attention from people they are not yet comfortable with. Instruct guests to not reach for the pet, avoid direct eye contact at first, and perhaps crouch down or sit on the floor for the initial greeting rather than leaning over the dog or cat.

Holding out a finger for a cat to sniff is a good idea, but holding a hand out for a dog is not. Instead, allow the dog to come up and sniff a relaxed hand held in normal position, close to the body. Small food treats or toys often win over reluctant animals quickly. If the dog or cat thinks everyone coming to the door will have their favorite toy, they may make friends much more quickly.

When offering food treats, drop the food treat on the floor at first, near the pet, rather than attempting to reach toward him to feed him. If the animal seems comfortable, then offer a tidbit held in the palm, rather than in the fingers.

Visiting children should never be left alone, unsupervised with the pet for even a second. Unfortunate events that result in injury to either pet or child can happen in the blink of an eye. Don't assume that just because pets are good with the children in the family, that they will be equally tolerate of visiting children. This may not be the case.

By taking introductions slowly, and helping pets to believe that visitors mean "good things", four-legged family members can enjoy company as much as their two-legged owners.