



ARLGP FOSTER PROGRAM RESOURCES: Integrating a Shelter Animal into a Home with Other Pets

Phase 1: No Direct Interactions

Likely Timeframe: 2 days to 2 weeks

One animal has her own room (or crate) in the house. Shelter and resident animals may hear and smell each other, but not see each other. They may accidentally see each other from time to time during this phase but **the goal is for them not to interact**. Carry treats at all times in the event they see each other, to reward both animals for good (non-reactive) behavior. When one animal is loose, the other is contained, either fully in a room or within a crate or xpen that the other animal cannot reach. Use baby gates to prevent the loose animal from entering the room with the contained animal.

Phase 2: Controlled Interactions

Likely Timeframe: Highly variable depending on the animals. Could be anywhere from a couple of days (for example for friendly, well socialized dogs) up to a month or more (for example for a shy cat meeting a young dog).

Animals can see each other and approach but only under control. For dogs, use baby gates or a leash combined with high value treats to keep their focus on the person and to reward good (non-reactive) behavior. For cats, try stacking two baby gates to keep them separate. If either animal is reacting, you are moving too quickly. Increase distance and reward when they are not reacting. If both animals are not reacting, you can increase the duration of their interaction but stop the interaction before a reaction occurs (aka end on a positive note). **When you don't have time to train and supervise, the animals go back to Phase 1 and are managed in separate spaces.**

ALWAYS FEED ANIMALS SEPARATELY AND REMOVE BOWLS WHEN DONE.

Phase 3: Supervised Interactions

Likely Timeframe: 2-8 weeks

The animals can interact without barriers but only under supervision. Dogs should drag leashes so that they can be picked up if you need to remove them from the room. Have treats available at all times to reward good behavior (unless there is known resource guarding). Utilize crates and safe rooms as time out areas if either animal is reactive and for all feeding times. **When you don't have time to train and supervise, the animals go back to Phase 1 and are managed in separate spaces. Remove dragging leashes when animals are not under direct supervision!**

ALWAYS FEED ANIMALS SEPARATELY AND REMOVE BOWLS WHEN DONE.

Phase 4: Unsupervised Interactions

Likely Timeframe: 4-16 weeks. Note: Some animals may never be able to be left together completely unsupervised.

If both animals ignore one another, gradually start to leave them alone. Ex. Do some yard work but stay close to the house so you can hear any barking or reactivity. Leave them in short bursts for the first few weeks and then, if there are no issues, you can leave them for longer periods of time. If you aren't sure, keep them separate when you are not home. **Some animals should never be left alone unsupervised and that is OKAY. Leaving dogs (who are fully crate trained) separated in crates while you are away is completely fine and totally safe.**

ALWAYS FEED ANIMALS SEPARATELY AND REMOVE BOWLS WHEN DONE.

Notes on the timeline: For some animals, full integration may take several months. For others, it may take only a few days. Though the timeline may change, steps in the process are the same regardless of how calm or how reactive the interactions are between two animals. Move faster if the animals are completely non-reactive, **but do not skip phases.** Move more slowly if you see reactivity.

Goals:

1. The goal through each phase is to **not elicit negative responses**. Reactivity includes alarm barking, growling, lunging, hissing, any portion of the prey drive sequence including tracking, stalking, chasing, mouthing or biting. Most animals won't get the reactivity "out of their system" by exploding in the beginning phases and you will risk safety issues for the animals and humans. The goal is to **prevent** them from practicing reactivity until they feel safe around the other animals.
2. The primary goal is for animals to be completely bored with one another. Do not encourage play or other high-arousal activities until the animals have been fully integrated. Even after phase 4, play sessions should be monitored initially. Remember that animals only tend to play when they feel comfortable and safe with one another.
3. If either animal has other compounding challenges (ex. Guarding of food, toys or people, barrier reactivity, etc.), monitor those issues during and through phase 4 and keep separate for feeding, pick up toys, etc. to promote success.
4. In households with more than two animals, the process is the same. Start with the easiest pairing and then the next easiest and so on. The shelter animal should be integrated with all resident animals separately through phase 4 before he/she is left alone with the full pack (cats and dogs).
5. Exercise is crucial to the success of integration. Plan ahead for the first 2-4 months in the event you need to exercise dogs separately. Utilize brain toys at feeding times and when animals are confined to reward them for remaining calm. Walking dogs near each other regularly can be helpful through the process as long as there is no reactivity and you have a handler for each dog.
6. Enrolling the shelter dog into a positive-reinforcement based obedience class during the integration period will strengthen your bond, tire him/her out, give you guidance from a trainer and create a stable and controlled environment for the dog to learn to be around other dogs.