

Helping Your Companion Settle Into a New HÂM Space

A calm, gradual way to introduce a newly made resting, feeding, care or storage space - without forcing the moment.

THE PRINCIPLE

**Familiar first. Voluntary next.
Routine before expectation.**

A new piece should become part of the room at your companion's pace. Familiar scent, free choice, calm rewards and an easy retreat route help the space feel understandable before it is asked to perform a new function.

BEFORE THE NEW SPACE ARRIVES

Preserve what already feels safe.

The easiest introduction begins before the piece is placed. Keep the first day quiet, predictable and recognisable.

PREPARE THE ROOM

- Choose the final position before your companion explores it, so the space does not keep moving.
- Keep a clear approach and exit. Do not block the new area with deliveries, tools or packaging.
- Reduce competing noise and activity during the first introduction.
- If the piece includes doors, drawers or moving parts, secure them open or closed before exploration.

BRING CONTINUITY

- Use a familiar washable mat, blanket or scent-safe item where appropriate.
- Keep existing feeding and resting routines stable while the new space is introduced.
- For multi-companion homes, preserve separate resources and do not make the new space a point of competition.
- Have small, familiar rewards ready if your companion comfortably accepts them.

DO NOT

Do not place your companion inside, close them in, remove every familiar alternative, or use the space as punishment. The first goal is recognition and choice - not immediate use.

THE FIRST 72 HOURS

Let curiosity do the first work.

Progress is not a straight line. A calm glance, a sniff, a paw placed inside or choosing to rest nearby can all be useful early signs.

01

Open access

Let your companion approach and leave freely. Keep doors or panels still. Reward calm interest away from pressure.

02

One function

Introduce one purpose at a time. Begin with rest, feeding or care - not every feature on the same day.

03

Short repeats

Use brief, successful visits. Stop while your companion is still comfortable and return later.

A SIMPLE RHYTHM

Observe -> invite -> reward calm choice -> release

Repeat only while body language remains loose and voluntary. If the response changes, shorten the session or return to the previous comfortable step.

DIFFERENT COMPANIONS, DIFFERENT INVITATIONS

Design around the individual, not a stereotype.

Use these as prompts, then prioritise the routines and body language of the companion in front of you.

DOGS**Proximity and routine**

Many dogs settle more easily when the space remains connected to household life. Pair exploration with familiar rest times, keep thresholds easy to enter, and avoid closing the space before comfort is established.

CATS**Control and vantage**

Many cats value choice, height, cover and multiple routes. Keep litter, rest, food and water relationships appropriate for the individual, and avoid trapping a cat in a newly introduced enclosure.

OLDER OR SENSITIVE**Lower the effort**

Consider grip, threshold height, joint comfort, hearing or vision changes, temperature and medication routines. Ask your veterinarian about any mobility or pain concern.

MULTI-COMPANION**Prevent competition**

Provide more than one valued resource, preserve separate retreat routes, and introduce companions individually before shared access where appropriate.

READ THE RESPONSE

Comfort is visible in the whole body.

Look for patterns rather than judging one moment. Context, health, history and species all affect what you see.

OFTEN COMFORTABLE

- Approaches and leaves without hesitation
- Loose posture and normal breathing
- Explores, rests, eats or grooms normally
- Returns voluntarily after moving away
- Can disengage and respond to the room around them

PAUSE AND REASSESS

- Freezing, repeated escape attempts or hiding
- Persistent panting, vocalising or refusal of usual rewards
- Guarding the space or blocking another companion
- Sudden toileting, appetite or sleep changes
- Any sign of pain, breathing difficulty or injury

WHEN IN DOUBT

Stop the introduction and restore a familiar option. Sudden or persistent changes can have medical as well as behavioural causes. Contact your veterinarian first for health concerns; ask for a qualified, reward-based behaviour professional when additional support is needed.

A FLEXIBLE FIRST WEEK

Use the pace, not the calendar.

The days below are a framework, not a deadline. Stay at any stage longer, step back, or stop if your companion is not comfortable.

DAY 1	Notice	Open access, familiar scent, no demand to enter or use the space.
DAYS 2-3	Invite	Reward voluntary approaches and brief contact. Keep an easy exit.
DAYS 3-4	Add one function	Introduce rest, feeding or care separately at a familiar time.
DAYS 5-6	Build duration	Extend only if your companion returns willingly and stays relaxed.
DAY 7+	Integrate	Let the new space become part of the normal room routine without removing choice.

The measure of success is not whether the space is used on schedule. It is whether your companion can approach, use and leave it with increasing ease.

SUPPORT AFTER PLACEMENT

The room is part of the design process.

If the piece is not being used as expected, share what is happening rather than trying to force a result.

SEND HÂM

- A short video or sequence of photos showing approach and use
- The time of day, household activity and who else was present
- What happened immediately before and after the response
- Any recent change in health, routine, furniture position or household members

IMPORTANT BOUNDARY

HÂM can help interpret how the spatial brief, access, placement and fitted elements are working. HÂM does not diagnose health or behaviour conditions. For sudden change, distress, aggression, pain, appetite change or toileting change, contact your veterinarian. Seek a qualified reward-based behaviour professional when specialist support is appropriate.

METHOD NOTE

This guide uses gradual introduction, voluntary choice and reward-based handling principles. It is general guidance and should be adapted to the individual companion and advice from their veterinary team.

REFERENCE: AVSAB HUMANE DOG TRAINING POSITION STATEMENT (2021)

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