

Cat To Dog Introductions

Dogs can kill a cat very easily, even if they're only playing. All it takes is one shake and the cat's neck can break. Some dogs have such a high prey drive they should never be left alone with a cat. Dogs usually want to chase and play with cats, and cats usually become afraid and defensive. Use the techniques described below to begin introducing your resident cat to your the new dog.

Practice keeping the dog on leash for the first week or so while the cat is in the same area! Other wise the cat should be set up in a room of its own for safety reasons.

Confinement: Confine your resident cat to one medium-sized room with its litter box, food, water and a bed. Feed your resident pets and the newcomer on each side of the door to this room. This will help all of them to associate something enjoyable (eating!) with each other's smells. Start this in small steps. Don't put the food so close to the door that the animals are too upset by each other's presence to eat. Gradually move the dishes closer to the door until your pets can eat calmly, directly on either side of the door. Next, use two doorstops to prop open the door just enough to allow the animals to see each other, and repeat the whole process.

Swap Scents: Switch sleeping blankets or beds between your resident cat and your new dog so they have a chance to become accustomed to each other's scent. Rub a towel on one animal and put it underneath the food dish of another animal. You should do this with each animal in the house.

We must make the dog understand that the cat is OK and to do this we must pair something the dog wants when ever the cat is present.

If your dog doesn't already know the skills of "sit," "down," "come" and "stay," you should begin working on them. Start your training in a separate area first - until the dog has a good knowledge of the skills. Small pieces of food will increase your dog's motivation to perform, which will be necessary in the presence of such a strong distraction as a new cat. Even if your dog already knows these cues, work to get him eagerly responding because you have great reinforcers (treats). Boil up some chicken or use some scraps of meat or meat baby food and let him get a quick lick from the jar. To override a distraction you need something really yummy. Have the dog on leash and reinforce him for being quiet and calm. Do this whenever you want to let the cat loose in the house. Remember to reinforce the cat too. So he will feel that the dog is OK!

Controlled Meeting: After your resident cat and new dog have become comfortable eating on opposite sides of the door, and have been exposed to each other's scents as

described above, you can attempt a face-to-face introduction in a controlled manner. Put your dog's leash on, and using treats, have him either sit or lie down and stay. Have another family member bring in the cat into the room holding it and giving it something good to eat. While the cat is in the room you should be busy keeping your dogs attention towards you and not letting the dog stare at the cat. At first, the cat and the dog should be on opposite sides of the room. Lots of short visits are better than a few long visits. Two or three minutes the first time is plenty if you want to end on a good note! Have your friend pick up the cat and put it back into it's room. Now take the dog outside and play for 5 minutes! Don't drag out the visit so long that the dog becomes uncontrollable. Repeat this step several times until both the cat and dog are tolerating each other's presence without fear, aggression or other undesirable behavior.

Let Your Cat Go: Next, allow your cat freedom to explore at her own pace, keeping your dog on lead and again keeping your dog busy by watching you and ignoring the cat. The dog is still on-leash and is in a "down-stay." Give your dog treats and praise for his calm behavior. If your dog gets up from his "stay" position, he should be repositioned with a treat lure, and praised and rewarded for obeying the "stay" command. If your cat runs away or becomes aggressive, you're progressing too fast. Go back to the previous introduction steps. This might take several weeks to months. But it can be done with great end results!

Positive Reinforcement: Although your dog must be taught that chasing or being rough with your cat is unacceptable behavior, he must also be taught how to behave appropriately, and be rewarded for doing so, such as sitting, coming when called, or lying down in return for a treat. If your dog is always punished when your cat is around, and never has "good things" happen in the cat's presence, your dog may redirect aggression toward the cat.

Directly Supervise All Interactions between Your Dog and Cat: You may want to keep your dog on-leash and with you whenever your cat is free in the house during the introduction process. Be sure that your cat has an escape route and a place to hide. Keep your dog and cat separated when you aren't home until you're certain your cat will be safe.

Precautions: Dogs like to eat cat food. You should keep the cat food out of your dog's reach (in a closet or on a high shelf). Eating cat feces is also a relatively common behavior in dogs. Although there are no health hazards to your dog, it's probably distasteful to you. It's also upsetting to your cat to have such an important object "invaded." Unfortunately, attempts to keep your dog out of the litter box by "booby trapping" it will also keep your cat away as well. Punishment after the fact will not change your dog's behavior. The best solution is to place the litter box where your dog can't access it, for example: behind a baby gate; in a closet with the door anchored open from both sides and just wide enough for your cat; or inside a tall, topless cardboard box with easy access for your cat.