



HOW TO INTRODUCE A DOG AND CAT

Some dogs do fine living with cats; others simply cannot live safely with felines. Sometimes, a dog can live with certain cats (depending on their age, temperament and activity level), but not others. Even if your dog has successfully lived with cats in the past, it is important to remember that each dog and each cat is an individual and therefore each introduction is different.

- When introducing your dog to a cat, pay attention to the body language of both animals.
 - If the cat's ears are pinned back or his tail is swishing back and forth, this is a good indicator that he is displeased.
 - You particularly want to be aware of dog body language that could be potential warning signs. If your dog has a strong prey drive she might become very focused on the cat. She'll stiffen, stare, and may start barking or whining. If you see these signs, do not let her near the cat.
 - Ideally, her body language will be loose and relaxed around the cat. It's OK if she pays attention to the cat, but you don't want to see her fixated on him.
- A dog's interaction with a cat can change depending on the environment. Just because your dog is OK with the cat inside the house doesn't mean she'll exhibit that same behavior outdoors.
- There are many different ways to introduce a dog to a cat. If the first method of introduction you try doesn't work or you don't feel comfortable with it, try a different option.
- Even if the dog has had experience with cats and the cat has lived with a dog before, proceed cautiously during the introduction. It's best to have two people present — one to intervene with each animal, if necessary. If you have more than one dog, introduce each dog separately to the cat.

OPTION 1: SLOW AND STEADY DESENSITIZATION

- If your dog is too fixated on the cat, you can try desensitization, the goal of which is to reduce your dog's reaction to the cat by gradually increasing her exposure to him.
 - Put the cat in a room with a tall baby gate across the door. The room you choose should be one the dog cannot access and doesn't need to access. The idea is to separate them and only allow them to view each other during specific times.

- In his room, give the cat all needed supplies: litter box, toys, food and water. Keep in mind that cats are good at squeezing through small gaps and are also good climbers and jumpers. So, make sure your cat can't get past the gate you put up. The gate needs to be a barrier that allows the cat and dog to see one another, but does not allow them to access each other.
- To begin desensitization, let the dog view the cat briefly through the gate, and then get the dog to focus on something else, such as playing with a toy or practicing cues. Sometimes it helps to keep the dog on leash so that you can move her away from the cat when you try to refocus her attention. Praise and reward the dog for being able to focus elsewhere. Continue to give the dog short viewings of the cat throughout the day.
- Sometimes, even seeing the cat at first is too exciting for the dog. If this is the case, close the door and begin feeding each animal on his or her side of the door: The cat eats his food in his room, right next to the door, and the dog eats her meal on the other side of the door. This allows each animal to associate the smells of the other with something good: food.
- You can also swap out the blankets and bedding of each animal, giving it to the other. That way, the dog can get used to the cat's smell and the cat can get used to the dog's smell, without overstimulating either of them.
- Hopefully, through this process of slowly letting the dog see the cat and get accustomed to the cat's presence, the dog will eventually become desensitized and lose interest in the cat. In some cases, the dog will lose interest in the cat within a couple of hours, but it can take days, weeks or even months. Each dog (and each cat) is an individual and will learn at his or her own pace.

With that said, though, it is possible that your dog may not ever be able to safely share space with a cat. If you don't feel you can trust your dog around your cat, you should keep them apart. Many dogs can injure or kill a cat very quickly, and your dog can also be injured by the cat. Your first priority should be ensuring that everyone stays safe.

OPTION 2: FACE-TO-FACE INTRODUCTION

- One person should hold the dog on a loose lead and watch the dog's body language. Someone else should watch the cat's body language. If the cat is not raising his back or hissing around the dog, he can be allowed to move around freely. A cat is rarely a threat to a dog, but some cats will be on the offensive when meeting dogs.
- If the dog is calm around the cat, you can ask the dog to sit, or lie down and stay, if she has been taught those cues, while the cat moves about freely, sniffing the dog if he wishes. The dog should be praised and rewarded if she ignores the cat.
- If the dog is too fixated on the cat (e.g., staring at the cat, has stiff body language, will not listen to you when you call her name) or if she lunges and tries to chase the cat, you should try a different strategy for getting them to share space.

INTRODUCING KITTENS AND PUPPIES

- If you are introducing a kitten to a dog, keep in mind that kittens may not have any fear of dogs, so you must watch the dog carefully. Because kittens are small and want to run and play, dogs with a strong prey drive may be very excited by a kitten's movements.
- Even if your dog is OK with your adult cats, it is important to watch her closely when she's with a kitten. If your dog is young and high-energy, she could hurt or kill the kitten simply by trying to play. So, for safety's sake, keep kittens and dogs apart any time you are not watching them.
- Introducing adult cats to puppies can sometimes be easy, since a well-socialized adult cat might be fine with a puppy acting like a puppy.
- However, if your rambunctious puppy is chasing your shy cat, it is up to you to intervene. Until the puppy is old enough to have more self-control and has had some training, you will want to manage their interactions. You don't want your puppy to learn that chasing the cat is a fun game.
- Baby gates can be used to keep the animals safely and comfortably apart. To help you keep an eye on your puppy, you can also put her on a leash. That way, if she begins to chase the cat, you will be able to easily direct her away from that behavior.

SEEKING HELP FROM A PROFESSIONAL

Animals with good past experience often adjust well and quickly to a new pet in the house. But if introductions don't go well, seek help from a professional dog trainer or behavior consultant. Don't ever use punishment: It will not help and it could make matters much worse.