



Introducing Your New Cat to Your Dog

Dogs can kill a cat very easily, even if they are 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 in the handout "Introducing Your New Cat to Your Resident Cat" to begin introducing your new cat to your resident dog. In addition:

Practice Obedience

If your dog doesn't already know commands "sit," "down," "come," and "stay," you should begin working on them. Clicker training is a good way to train your dog these commands. 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 commands, work on obeying commands in return for a tidbit of food.

Controlled Meeting

After your new cat and resident 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 sit or lie down and stay. Have another family member or friend enter the room and quietly sit down next to your new cat, but don't have them physically restrain her. Have this person offer your cat some special pieces of food or catnip. At first, the cat and dog should be on opposite sides of the room. Lots of short visits are better than a few long visits. 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 your dog at her own pace, with the dog still on-leash and in a "down stay." Meanwhile, keep giving 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.

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, high perches, 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 closer 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 litterbox 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 litterbox 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, inside a tall, topless cardboard box with easy access for your cat.

A Word about Kittens and Puppies

Because they're so much smaller, kittens are in more danger of being injured, or being killed by a young energetic dog, or by a predatory dog. A kitten will need to be kept separate from an especially energetic dog until she is fully grown. Usually a well-socialized cat will be able to keep a puppy in its place, but some cats don't have enough confidence to do this. If you have an especially shy cat, you might need to keep her separated from your puppy until he matures enough to have more self-control.

When to Get Help

If the introductions don't go smoothly, seek professional help right away. Animals can be severely injured in fights, and the longer the problem continues, the harder it can be to resolve. However with professional help, conflicts between pets can often be resolved.