

## **Introducing Dogs and Cats**

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In order to make a good match and keep both the cat and dog safe, it's important to do your homework so you can try to create a compatible match. Once you've picked a companion you'll need to do a careful, gradual introduction. If you attempt to simply put a cat and dog together in order for them to "work it out" you'll be creating a dangerous and potentially deadly situation.

### **Make a Good Match**

Think about the personality and disposition of your current pet. If you have a dog who has been allowed to chase squirrels, cats, birds, rabbits, etc, and has a high prey-drive, then adding a cat to the household would probably not be a wise idea. If you know from past experience that your dog has displayed very aggressive behavior toward cats then that also is a sign that getting a cat would be too dangerous.

If you're thinking about getting a dog for your cat and you know from past experience that your cat has displayed very aggressive behavior toward dogs or has displayed extreme fear when a dog is in sight, then you might be adding too much stress to her life with the addition of a dog.

If you have a large dog or one who has been allowed to play on the rough side, then consider adding an adult cat to the home and not a small kitten.

Try to match complementary personalities. Don't get a timid cat for a rambunctious dog. Don't match a nervous dog with a revved up kitten. Look for personalities and dispositions that will go together nicely, rather than being on opposite ends of the scale.

### **The Introduction**

Before you begin actually introducing the two pets, clip your cat's nails to reduce any potential damage should the unthinkable occur. Take your dog for a good walk or engage in playtime so he'll be more relaxed and not revved up.

Now for the actual intro: Put your dog on a leash. Don't attempt to do an introduction if your dog isn't leash-trained. You need that extra measure of control. Place the cat in a room with a baby gate to prevent the dog from gaining access should he slip out of your grasp. Sit outside the room with your dog and reward him with treats and praise when he focuses on you and not on the cat. You can have toys for him as well. Clicker training is great tool to use in this situation so you can click and treat the dog for a relaxed body posture or for turning his attention to you. If the dog gets tense and starts staring at the cat, divert his attention. When he breaks the stare, click and reward.

If the dog is not comfortable, move farther away from the cat's safe room. As the dog gets more comfortable you can then move a few inches closer.

Stay at a distance that's comfortable for the animal who is most stressed out. If the cat is too afraid to be in sight of the dog, put the cat in a carrier in her safe room and partially cover the carrier so she'll feel hidden. This way, she can watch the dog's relaxed body language while feeling protected.

Work up to having the cat roam around the room while the dog is on leash. Continue to reward the dog for relaxed behavior. This also sends cues to the cat that the dog isn't a threat. This allows them both to feel comfortable enough to inch closer and engage in some sniffing behavior.

Walk the dog back and forth in front of the safe room and reward him when he focuses on you and follows your cues. If he lunges at the baby gate, growls, barks or stops walking to stare at the cat, walk him away from the gate and then back again. He'll learn that calm behavior allows him to stay closer to the baby gate but rambunctious behavior causes him to have to leave the area. Don't yell at your dog or jerk on the leash

during this process – simply walk him away from the area and allow him to try again. If he gets reactive then walk away again. He'll eventually get the idea that calm behavior is the best option.

### **Making Progress**

During the introduction sessions (and it will take multiple training sessions), if at any time the dog tries to aggressively go after the cat, or the cat appears totally panicked or dangerously aggressive, then this is not a safe match. If you feel uncertain as to whether the situation might improve, contact a professional trainer or certified behavior expert to work with you.

During the introduction phase keep the cat and dog separated unless you're there to supervise. Keep the dog on a leash until you're absolutely sure both animals are comfortable with each other. Never leave the cat and dog unsupervised – even for a few seconds if you're not sure they have established a safe relationship.

Environmental modifications should be made to ensure ongoing safety, even after the cat and dog are allowed to be loose. Provide plenty of escape options for the cat, such as a tall, sturdy cat tree or other elevated areas where she can go should the dog chase her. Even after the pets have become friends, a cat may find a dog's play solicitation attempts to be disconcerting. The ability to escape to higher ground must be an option that is always available.

### **Need More Help?**

You can find specific step-by-step information in any of Pam Johnson-Bennett's books, including *Think Like a Cat*.