

How to Introduce Your New Dog To Your Resident Cats



Call the 'Adopters Only' Hotline at 942-7297 or visit www.hawaiianhumane.org for more advice & Information.

Dogs and cats, especially those who were not socialized with the opposite species when they were young, will require time to adjust to each other. Dogs may want to chase and play with cats, and cats can be afraid and defensive. Slow introductions help prevent fear and aggression problems from developing. Keep your dog and cat in separate rooms when you are not there to supervise introductions.

When you introduce pets to each other, one of them may send "play" signals which can be misinterpreted by the other pet. If those signals are interpreted as aggression by one animal, then you should handle the situation as "aggressive."

Practice Obedience

Make sure your new dog understands a few basic commands before introducing him to your cat. Work with him on Sit, Down, Come and Stay. Use tidbits of food to increase your dog's motivation. Be sure he obeys the commands consistently, with a food motivator, so that he will perform even in the presence of a cat.

Arrange a Positive First Encounter

Place food tidbits on either side of the door that is separating the dog and cat. Each animal will approach the door to get his treat and will smell the other animal. They will begin to associate the other animals' smell as a pleasant experience. Work up to feeding them their regular meal on either side of the door.

Swap Scents

Switch sleeping blankets between your new dog and your resident cat so they become accustomed to each other's scent. Rub a towel on one animal and put it under the food dish of the other. Do this with each animal in the house.

Switch Living Areas

Let your dog have free run of the house while your cat is confined to one room. This will give your dog

time to smell the cat's scent. Then confine your dog while the cat roams free and sniffs the house.

Controlled Meeting

After the dog and cat have become comfortable eating on opposite sides of the door and with each other's scent, try a controlled face-to-face introduction. Put your dog's leash on and, using treats, have him sit or lie down and stay.

Have someone else bring in the cat and be careful about who you select as you want the cat to remain calm. Quietly sit down and offer her a special food treat. The cat should not be tightly restrained and should be allowed to retreat if the situation is stressful. Be sure she can escape to her own room or hiding place.

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. Repeat brief meetings until both animals are tolerating each other without fear, aggression or other undesirable behavior. Bring them closer together with each visit.

Let Your Cat Go

Next, allow your cat to explore the dog at her own pace, with the dog on leash and in a down-stay. At the same time, 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, praised and rewarded for obeying. If your cat runs away or becomes aggressive, you're progressing too fast.

Positive Reinforcement

Although your dog must be taught that chasing or being rough with your cat is unacceptable, he must also be taught how to behave appropriately, such as sitting, coming when called, or lying down in return for a treat. If your dog is punished whenever your cat is around, and never has good things happen in the cat's presence, he may become aggressive toward the cat. Consistently reward your dog

when he is calm and obedient in the cat's presence.

Directly Supervise All Interactions

You may want to keep your dog on leash and with you whenever your cat is free in the house during the introductory period. 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 so keep your cat's food out of your dog's reach. Eating cat feces is also common for dogs. Although there are no health hazards to your dog, it's probably something you won't want to tolerate.



It's also upsetting to your cats to have their litter box "invaded." Place the litter box where your dog can't access it (behind a baby gate, in a closet with the door open just wide enough for your cat, or inside a tall, topless cardboard box with easy access for your cat). Booby trapping the box to keep your dog away should be avoided as it will also keep your cat away, and punishment after the fact will not change your dog's behavior.

A Word About Kittens And Puppies

Because they're so much smaller, kittens are in more danger of being injured or killed by a young, energetic or predatory dog. Kittens should be kept separate from an energetic dog until she is fully-grown, and even then, supervision may be necessary.

Usually, a well-socialized cat will be able to keep a puppy in its place. However, if you have a shy cat, you may need to separate her from your puppy until he matures enough to have more self-control. Conversely, an over-confident or aggressive cat can injure a puppy or small dog. Cat scratches can damage a dog's eyes or lead to infections and abscesses on the body.

When To Get Help

If introductions don't go smoothly, seek professional help. Talk to your veterinarian or ask for a referral to a behavior consultant who understands both dog and cat behavior.

Animals can be severely injured in fights, and the longer the problem continues, the harder it can be to resolve. Conflicts between pets in the same family can often be resolved with professional help. Punishment won't work, though, and could make things worse.

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