

INTRODUCING YOUR NEW CAT TO YOUR CURRENT DOG

Many dogs and cats get along well, especially if they've had experience or grown up with each other. Dogs that have never lived with cats are more likely to treat cats like other dogs and try to play with them; alternatively, they may treat cats like prey animals and try to chase or even kill them. Similarly, cats that have never lived with dogs can see them as predators and run away or become defensive and aggressive. Keep in mind that a dog can easily kill a cat, even in play. But if your dog is gentle and friendly (and isn't a the predatory, squirrel-chasing type), they may be a good candidate for successfully living with a cat. In general, kittens and laid-back cats tend to get along best with dogs.

It's up to you to protect your new cat and set up introductions carefully so that they feel safe and have a pleasant experience getting acquainted with your dog. Here are key guidelines:

- **Make it a low-stress first meeting.** First impressions last, so you want the initial meeting between your dog and your cat to be as stress-free as possible, especially for your cat. Refresh your dog's obedience skills before you bring your new cat home. Two key skills for your dog to obey are coming when called and stopping at your command. These will help you control your dog if they get overexcited around your cat.
- **Make introductions at the doorway.** At first, confine your new cat in a room with their food, water and litter box. Introduce your cat and dog by the doorway to that room. Fill your pockets with treats that your dog and cat love, like chicken, tuna, cheese. Keep the door open but block it with something like a baby gate. Walk your dog slowly by the doorway several times each day for a couple of days. Praise and treat your dog for calm behavior, and then toss the cat a treat as well. This way, your cat will associate your dog with delicious treats.
- **Use treats in training.** If your dog overreacts to the cat, get their attention focused on you. Avoid using leash corrections. Instead, ask them to do basic obedience skills, like sit and down. Reward them with tasty treats for their obedience around something as exciting and distracting as your new cat! Your cat should be free to approach the baby gate to get closer to the dog or to retreat if they want to. Toss them a treat any time they approach the gate.
- **Go at your cat's pace.** Taking it slow will help to avoid a bad first impression, so let your new cat set the pace. If they want to hide under furniture when you and your dog walk by, let them. In this case, your introductions will take longer — maybe several weeks longer. Cats can take months to form relationships with other animals. Never attempt to force any interactions by holding your cat, putting them in a crate or carrier or restricting their movement in any way.

- **Then, move into the living room.** If your cat doesn't seem afraid of your dog as you pass by the doorway of her room, you're ready to introduce them in your living room. Make sure your cat can get away from your dog during the introduction. They should have the freedom to retreat, hide, or jump up on something higher than the dog.
- **Keep your dog under control.** Keep your dog on a leash during these introductions for the first couple of weeks. Allow the leash to be loose, but hold onto it in case your dog tries to chase your cat. Use your dog's recall and obedience skills if your dog starts nosing or following your cat and they seem agitated. When you ask your dog to come to you or leave your cat alone and they obey, reward them with a tasty treat.
- **Separate your dog and cat.** When you're not around or can't directly supervise, keep your cat and dog confined in separate areas of the house.
- **Reward good behavior.** If your dog seems friendly or cautious, not much intervention on your part is required except to praise and reward your dog for their good manners.
- **Interrupt, but don't punish.** Interrupt any chasing, barking or agitated behavior from your dog by moving them away from your cat. Ask them to do some easy obedience skills for food rewards. Avoid scolding, yelling or jerking on your dog's leash. A positive approach is crucial because you want your dog and cat to learn a pleasant association with each other's presence. You *don't* want them to learn that everyone gets tense and angry and bad things happen when the cat or dog is around. Dogs are more likely to engage in chase or prey behavior when they're tense or aroused.
- **Trim your cat's nails.** Most cats will accept a young dog and correct them when necessary. Be sure your cat's nails are trimmed before bringing them home so that they don't hurt your dog if the former corrects the latter.
- **Prevent litter box raids.** Your dog shouldn't have access to your cat's litter box. If they do, it will be highly stressful to your cat. Also, your dog may eat the feces and litter.
- **Feed your cat up high.** To prevent your dog from eating your cat's food, try feeding your cat on a high surface, like a window sill, dresser, shelf or cat tree furniture.