

# INTRODUCING DOGS AND CATS

## Before Adopting

If there is no known history of successful cohabitation, the best thing to do is gather history on the animals and “audition” them with the other species before proceeding. Dogs who are not well socialized to cats are likely to react to cats as though they were either other dogs or prey objects. This means they will direct play, investigation and posturing at cats or will give chase. Sometimes they will do both, partly depending on what “role” the cat plays.

Before taking the plunge, it’s important to know whether the dog is a good candidate to live with a cat and vice-versa. The best possible indicator is confirmation that the dog has successfully lived with a cat before and the cat has successfully lived with a dog before.

If the dog is gentle, relaxed and friendly and is not much of a predatory type (i.e. doesn’t chase cats or squirrels when outdoors), they are a good prospect to develop a relationship with a cat. Predatory types are much more stressful for cats and must be constantly managed when around the cat if they are to live with one. Predation is not something a dog can be easily trained not to do as it is deeply ingrained.

When you audition a dog with cats, do it on leash to avoid putting too much stress on the cats and prevent any flat-out chasing. If possible, use cats with dog experience — they are less likely to flee or be stressed. It’s also good to try out the same cat on more than one occasion and to try out different cats to see if the dog reacts differently.

Good signs are cautious investigation and wagging, along with respect (i.e. backing off) in response to the cat’s defensive signals. Bad signs are fixation, attempts to chase, out-of-control straining at the leash, whining, barking and agitation. Many dogs fall somewhere in the middle, which will make your decision less clear. (This is why you want to do several auditions with a variety of cats, so you have a better sense of your dog’s actions.)

Sometimes, with diligence, perseverance and professional help, a dog with intense predatory drive can be taught to direct it at other outlets and to stick to carefully trained rituals and routines when around the cat. However, this is tricky and does not work in every case. Dogs that are less intense are better prospects.

It is important to know that dogs can and do sometimes injure and kill cats. Dogs that kill cats are almost inevitably highly predatory so often they can be picked out. A pair or group of predatory dogs poses the greatest risk. It’s also important to know that most dogs that chase cats are not in this category. They chase but do no physical damage if they catch or corner the cat. However, this is still psychologically stressful for the cat, so you will want to keep this in your consideration.

There is a range of temperament in cats, too, and this will influence the success of dog-cat cohabitation. In general, relaxed, laid-back cats and kittens are the best prospects to accept a dog. They are also at lower risk to flee and trigger chasing, which will allow a social relationship — rather than a predator-prey one — to develop. Shy, skittish and

declawed cats are more challenging prospects. Declawed cats feel more vulnerable and are more likely to behave aggressively when cornered. Cats who have not been socialized to dogs will almost always behave defensively, often by fleeing or aggressing the first time they encounter a new dog. If the dog does not come on too strongly, and if the cat is given dog-free zones to retreat to, many cats will gradually get used to the dog and sometimes even become bonded.

## **After Adopting**

If you've decided to blend a dog and a cat in your household, here are some tips:

- Have safe zones — rooms or even high places — that the cat can access but the dog cannot. Baby-gates, cat doors and clearing high surfaces can accomplish this. It is important that the cat can retreat to regroup and relax away from the dog and then venture back into dog territory at their own pace. The cat should have access to food, water and litter in this area so no interactions with the dog are forced.
- Never force either animal into proximity by holding them, caging them or otherwise restricting their desire to escape. This is stressful and does not help. (Aside from it being inhumane, stress is a common reason for cats to break litter box training.)
- For the first introduction, have the dog on a loose leash in case they attempt to give chase. Watch both the dog's and the cat's body language. If it seems to be going well and the dog is calm, let the cat move about freely to sniff the dog. Reward the dog with praise and treats if your dog ignores the cat. Drop your dog's leash and if it all goes well, take the leash off your dog, but continue to supervise them closely.
- If the dog is behaving in a friendly and/or cautious way, try to not intervene in their interactions, except to praise and reward the dog for their good manners.
- Interrupt any intense chasing and try to redirect the dog's attention to another activity. (This is actually very difficult.) If the meet does not go well, you will need to manage the dog with the leash around the cat until you have worked out a routine or divided up the house.
- Start introducing the dog and cat slowly, using the following steps:
  - Place a tall baby gate across the doorway in a room the dog does not need to access. Make sure your cat is not able to get past the gate, either, since this is intended to be a barrier where your dog and cat can see each other but not have no contact.
  - Let the dog view the cat briefly. Try to get your dog to focus on something else, such as a toy. If necessary, keep your dog on a leash so you can move your dog away if they get riled up. When your dog focuses elsewhere, praise and reward your dog generously. Repeat this thought the day.



- If the above steps are too much for the dog, close the door and feed each animal on their side of the door. Swap out blankets or rub a towel over each and exchange, so the cat can get use to the dog's scent and vice-versa.
- In the first few weeks, observe the trend: Are things getting better or worse? Monitor interactions until there is a pattern or plateau in their relationship.
- If the dog is the newcomer, be sure to give plenty of extra attention to the cat so she does not associate this change with reduced attention and affection. Similarly, if the cat is the newcomer, it's a good idea to make sure the dog associates the new guest with good things for them. Always shoot for positive associations.
- Dogs should never have access to the cat's litter box(es) — it's very stressful for the cat, and the dog may eat the cat's feces and litter. Most dogs will also eat cat food the cat leaves behind — we suggest feeding cats in their safe zones, where the dog doesn't have access.