

Introducing Cats and Dogs

It is important to be patient when introducing cats and dogs. Many dogs have a prey drive to chase small animals, which can intensify when the animals run. For this reason, it is important to go slow through the acclimation process to help make your cat feel as safe as possible and to allow your dog time to desensitize to your cat. Below are some steps to help create a calm, safe environment for your new pet.

Introductions:

This process can take several months or more. Move as slowly as possible through these steps, only moving to the next step if both animals are calm and relaxed.



1. Give your cat a "starter room" with a securely closing door; this room should be off-limits to your dog. Feed the cat and dog on opposite sides of this door to create a positive association between the two.
2. Before your dog and cat are allowed to meet, perform a scent exchange with both animals. Rub a towel on your dog and allow your cat to smell it then allow your dog to sniff a towel you have rubbed on your cat. You can leave the towels under each pet's food dish to help them create a positive association with each other.



3. Teach your dog to sit and look at you without your cat present. Also practice in the yard and on walks so your dog becomes better at this in the presence of distractions. As distractions get higher, you may have to start offering your dog better treats (like chicken, steak, or hot dogs).
4. Begin asking your dog for a sit and focus in the house with your cat as far away as possible. Keep your cat in a crate for safety and make sure to use high-value treats for your dog. If possible, have a second person give high-value treats to your cat at the same time. As your dog remains calm and is still able to focus on you and take treats, move the animals closer together. Reward your dog each time he sits and looks at you with your cat in view. Keep your dog on a leash and/or behind a baby gate during this phase for your cat's safety.
5. With both animals in the same room and your cat in a crate, practice a sit and focus with your dog. Continue to give high-value treats to both animals. If either pet is too anxious and/or will no longer take treats, move them further apart and try again.

6. With your dog on leash and you holding the leash, let your cat out of his crate. Continue to practice a sit and focus with your dog using high-value treats as your cat explores the room. If your dog is too focused on the cat and will not sit or take treats, move him further away from the cat and try again.

7. A cat's movement can elicit a different response from a dog than when the cat is not moving or in a crate. Repeat the above steps with your cat out of his crate and walking around. Keep your dog on leash until he is consistently ignoring your cat before attempting to drop the leash.



8. After you notice your dog consistently ignoring your cat while he is loose in the room, begin to allow both animals access to the same room with your dog off-leash and your cat out of his crate. Keep a baby gate in the doorway to allow your cat an escape route. Only keep them together for short periods of time initially, gradually increasing this as they acclimate to each other. Continue to supervise each interaction for the next few weeks.

Tips:

- Many dogs enjoy the taste of cat food but cat food is not healthy for dogs. Keep cat food out of your dog's reach by placing it on a counter or shelf.
- Litterboxes should also be off-limits to your dog. They can be placed behind baby gates or in closets with the door anchored on both sides; this will allow your cat access to the boxes but prevent your dog from reaching them.



- Set up a cat tree in the house. Make sure it is high enough that your dog will not be able to reach your cat if your cat is on it, and make sure it is heavy enough that your dog is unable to knock it over.

- Sometimes a cat will swat at a dog the first time they meet. It is important to note that while some dogs may move away from the cat after this, it can actually elicit a predatory response in other dogs. Keep your cat's nails trimmed to help avoid injury to your dog.



- Always keep your dog and cat separate for at least the first few weeks when you are unable to watch them. You can keep your cat in a room with a closed door and/or keep your dog in a crate with a secure latch.

- If your dog continues to obsessively pursue over your cat, especially after trying these techniques over several weeks or months, please call a professional dog trainer for further assistance.