

How to introduce your new dog to your cat, without the fur flying!

Top Tips:

- 🐾 Always consider the cat that is already living in the home
- 🐾 Preparation is the key to success, ensure you have looked at your home's layout and have identified areas of potential problems and have made the necessary changes before you bring the new family member home
- 🐾 Teach your new dog to remain calm and responsive to you by using tasty treats and a sit or down position. Dogs are less threatening to cats if they are stationary
- 🐾 Ensure the dog is well exercised but try to avoid too much excitement and chase games around the time and location where he will be meeting the cat
- 🐾 Safety first! The use of a lead or house training line is advisable for initial meetings
- 🐾 Whilst one person rewards the dog for calm behaviour, another can bring in the cat in the safest way for the cat and for the person. Remember a frightened cat will do anything to escape!
- 🐾 Keep initial sessions for introducing your pets short and focus on the calm behaviour
- 🐾 Don't go too fast and although you may feel they are going to be fine an extra few sessions can be the difference between success and failure
- 🐾 Some dogs may be frightened of cats but the same process should be taken. Never force an interaction as either party could panic and your process will have to begin all over again with the added recent negative association
- 🐾 Just because they have met once or twice in the house doesn't mean all is ok in the garden. You will need to include various locations around the house and garden to ensure there won't be a problem
- 🐾 Just because your dog lives with your cat doesn't guarantee his behaviour around other cats
- 🐾 If in doubt get help, it's much better to be cautious and thorough, than reckless and potentially endanger either the cat or the dog

Dogs and cats do not have to be enemies; in fact they can be the best of friends. They certainly don't naturally hate each other. The problem is that most dogs love to chase and most cats will run if they see a big, hairy hound hurtling towards them at speed!

If a puppy or kitten is given plenty of chances to meet other friendly adult dogs or cats, there is every chance that they will get along well in the future. Sometimes though, this is not possible, or perhaps you have adopted a dog and you don't know how he is going to behave when he meets your cat. If this is the case, you'll have to be very careful during the first meetings to keep either pet from becoming frightened or injured – or they may never get along.

Put your cat first!

If you've already got a cat and are bringing a new dog into your home, you really have to think about how this will affect your cat. It is the cat's home and the cat has every right to feel safe there.

- If you know that your cat is very frightened of dogs – or has had very bad experiences with them in the past, then think very carefully before getting a dog or bringing one into the home. It is not fair to put your cat through so much stress, if you know that she cannot cope with it.

Preparation before the big day

- To ensure that the first meeting goes well, you may have to make some changes around your house. These things should be done in the weeks leading up to bringing your new dog into the home, so that your cat has chance to get used to them.
- Make sure that there will be places in your home where your cat can go but your dog cannot. These are places where your cat can escape from your dog if she wants to relax and get some peace and quiet.
- You may have to put a cat flap into an internal door or upstairs window, or install a baby gate, so that your cat can have access to a dog-free room. You may also want to put the litter tray, food and water in here.
- You may want to put up some shelving around the house so that your cat can travel around out of reach of your dog. The cat's food and bedding can be placed on shelves or higher levels of furniture so that she can come into rooms where the dog is allowed, but feel happy and safe.
- Make sure that your cat always has a clear escape route from any area that she may come face to face with the dog – just in case.
- Try to get some bedding that the new dog has used before bringing him home. Leave it in places where the cat can sniff it, so that she can get used to the strange smell.

And for your dog...

- If possible, spend some time with the dog before bringing him home to teach him some basic obedience commands. Make sure you find treats that he absolutely loves as this will make it easier to keep his attention when the cat is around.
- Prepare somewhere that the dog can use as his sleeping area, which is not in a place that the cat has to use on a regular basis. For instance, don't expect the dog to sleep in the kitchen if the cat has to pass through on its way to the cat flap.
- Remember that most dogs love cat food and will eat it if they can reach it – so you may have to move it from its usual place. Unfortunately many dogs also love cat poo, so the litter tray should really be somewhere out of sight and reach. Although it's a perfectly natural thing for them to eat (in their eyes it's a high protein, yummy snack!) – it's pretty disgusting to us humans and the best way to prevent it is simply to make sure that they cannot get to it in the first place.

After a few days of allowing your new dog to settle and become relaxed, you can try introducing the animals.

Before every meeting during the training period

- Do not have any games of chase or fetch with the dog at any time before the meeting (and not again until you are happy that they are getting on), since this will encourage your dog's chase instinct.
- Make sure that your dog has had a nice, long, calm lead walk on the day of meeting.
- Feed your dog a really good breakfast in the morning and give him a few hours to digest before feeding another small but tasty meal 30-40 minutes before he meets the cat.
- Feed the cat too. Well-fed pets are more relaxed and less likely to react than hungry ones!

Introducing the animals

- Get some really tasty treats that your dog really likes (e.g. pieces of cheese, chicken, hotdog). Have him on a long, loose lead and ask him to sit or lay down. Reward him with the treats as long as he is calm and relaxed.
- Then allow the cat to enter the room. If your cat is happy being carried, it may be better if someone she likes can bring her in and sit down with her on their lap.
- If the cat wants to move away or jump up onto high surfaces – let her.
- Don't encourage your dog to look at the cat or to meet her – instead continue to reward him for sits/downs in a calm relaxed manner.
- If your dog looks to the cat but looks back to you when you call his name, immediately reward him with a treat, calm fuss and praise.
- If both animals seem calm and comfortable, allow your dog (still on the lead) to approach the cat. If safe, allow them to sniff each other and then calmly call your dog away whilst praising and rewarding.
- Repeat this whole procedure again every day, until you are happy and confident that they will tolerate each other.

If your dog barks or stares intently at the cat it means that it's likely to take a bit longer!

- Do not move him closer but instead continue to ask for relaxed sits/downs with lots of rewards, and try to keep his attention on you.
- Keep the sessions short and keep him on the loose lead.
- During the session, practice moving away from him and rewarding him for coming to you.

However well it goes, do not get complacent and don't leave the animals together unsupervised. Remember that the main cause of problems between dogs and cats is that cats can become frightened and run. The sight of a cat running makes most dogs very excited and they are likely to give chase. If by using this information you can get your cat to be relaxed around your dog so that it won't run away when it sees him, there is every chance that they can live happily together in your home.

Unfortunately we must accept that in some cases a dog will not tolerate a cat being around (or vice versa) and we must resort to control and management of these situations – i.e. keeping them safely apart, one way or another!

Other points to remember

Please note that although you may get your cat and dog to live nicely together within your house, your dog may still try to chase your cat if he sees it in the garden or out in the street. So make sure that the coast is clear and your cat is out of sight whenever you let your dog outside.

- If this is the case, you will need to repeat the introduction training as (above) in your garden.
- Although your dog may be happy to accept your cat, remember that it is quite likely that he may still try to chase any strange cat that he sees.
- If you are having problems with introductions, please contact your Training and Behaviour Advisor (if you have a Dogs Trust dog), or ask your vet for a referral to a reputable behaviour specialist.

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