

INTRODUCING CATS AND DOGS



If you attempt to simply put a cat and dog together to “work it out” you’ll be creating a dangerous and potentially deadly situation. If your dog chases cats, squirrels, birds, rabbits etc and has a high prey-drive, or it has displayed aggressive behaviour towards cats we recommend you don’t get a cat.

On the other hand if you have a resident cat who has been aggressive toward dogs or has displayed extreme fear of them you will cause too much stress by getting a dog.

If none of the above apply you still need to consider the personality and size of your dog. If you have a large dog or one who has been allowed to play on the rough side, then an adult cat will be better than a kitten. If your dog is enthusiastic, only look for a confident cat. Your dog should be trained on a lead so that you can control any interactions. If it isn’t, delay getting a cat whilst you train it.

Introductions

- Before you begin, clip your cat’s nails to reduce any potential damage
- Take your dog for a good walk or engage in playtime so they are more relaxed and not excited
- Put the cat in a safe room with a baby gate
- Sit outside the room with your dog on a lead and reward him with treats and praise when he focuses on you and not the cat. You can also play with some toys. If the dog is not comfortable, move further away from the cat’s safe room, then as it gets more comfortable move a few inches closer again. Likewise if the cat starts to get stressed move the dog further away

**Clicker training is a great tool to use in this situation so you can click and treat the dog for a relaxed body posture or for turning his attention to you. If the dog gets tense and starts staring at the cat, divert his attention. When he breaks the stare, click and reward.*

- If the cat is too afraid if it can see the dog, put it in a partially covered carrier so it can watch the dog’s while feeling protected and work up to having it roam around the room. Continue to reward the dog for relaxed behavior. The cat will start understanding that the dog isn’t a threat and they may both feel comfortable enough to get closer and sniff each other through the baby gate
- Walk the dog back and forth in front of the safe room and reward him when he focuses on you and follows your cues. If he lunges at the baby gate, growls, barks or stops walking to stare at the cat, walk him away from the gate and then back again. Gradually the dog will learn that calm behavior allows him to stay closer to the baby gate but excitable behavior means you take him away. Don’t yell at your dog or jerk on the lead during this process – simply walk him away from the area and allow him to try again. If he gets reactive then walk away again. He’ll eventually get the idea that calm behavior is the best option
- You will need to do multiple training sessions. If at any time the dog tries to aggressively go after the cat, or the cat appears totally panicked or dangerously aggressive, then this is not a safe match. If you feel uncertain as to whether the situation might improve, contact a professional trainer to work with you

Making Progress

- During the introduction phase keep the cat and dog separated unless you’re there to supervise. Keep the dog on a lead until you’re absolutely sure both animals are comfortable with each other and at first don’t leave them unsupervised.
- Before you leave them alone together you need to modify your home. Provide plenty of escape options for the cat, such as a tall, sturdy scratching post or other elevated areas where they can go if chased. Even after the pets have become friends, a cat may not want to play when the dog does, so it must always be able to escape out of reach.