

Introducing Dogs to Cats, or Cats to Dogs!

Introduction

When you first bring your new dog home and attempt to introduce it to the resident cat, or visa versa, things can quickly go horribly wrong if the cat decides to run away (or react by hissing, swiping or growling), and the dog chases, starts barking or getting aroused in anyway - and both become fearful of each other.



Even dogs who have previously lived happily with a different cat can react very differently to a new cat, and the same can be said for cats who have previously been best friends with a dog. Regardless of your cat/dog's previous experience with the other and irrespective of their personality, ALWAYS err on the side of caution and introduce them slowly and carefully. A messy introduction is hard to rectify.

Before any physical introduction, scent can be used to create positive associations. This can be done even before you bring the new pet home. You can present some of their bedding to allow each to sniff and provide them with some tasty treats as they do so. Repeat this until neither the cat nor dog become aroused or sniff intensely at the bedding but simply sniff quickly for a treat.

To start introductions, firstly choose a room where the cat is already relaxed and where it has lots of hiding places. The dog may be aware the cat is in the room due

to noises or smells from under the door – in this case, start training the dog outside the room with the door still shut. If the dog gets 'stuck' lying by the door/sniffing intensely around the door, start with them on a lead or houseline furthest away from the door where they are able to concentrate on anything other than the cat in the other room! Whenever the dog looks away from the door, mark this behaviour with a "Good!" or clicker, followed by a treat. You can also make use of cues the dog already knows and reward them for responding. Keep sessions really short – a minute or two and then take the dog away for a break. Repeat these sessions until you are able to work the dog right up to and past the door without them getting focused on the door, and then with them off lead.

When you are ready to move into the room with the cat, it is vital that the dog is on a lead. If possible at this stage, use a baby gate on the doorway to maximize distance and for extra protection! Ensure the cat

is not near the door when it is first opened – if possible have someone in the room with the cat, feeding it something tasty at the other side of the room. It may be that the first sighting the dog & cat have of each other sends one of them off the scale in arousal – in this case shut the door immediately, give the cat a chance to



calm down and take the dog away, then go back to the previous stage with the dog outside the room with the door shut. This time, once the dog is relaxed with the door shut again, open the door just a jar until the dog is able to relax and gradually over several sessions open the door slightly more each time. Increase the value of the treats you are using for both the dog & cat once they are in visual access of each other. With a baby gate you can have the dog off lead, rewarding any choice to move away from the gate.

The cat should always be free to move and hide, although it's useful if someone else can be present to supervise any fast movements or movement towards the dog before the dog is ready. The cat can be fed treats while the dog is in the room. The distance should be dictated by whichever animal is more aroused or worried and should be at a level where they can remain relaxed and take food comfortably. Again, keep sessions very short and leave the room every minute or so for a while before re-entering. When re-entering the room, vary where you stand or sit with the dog (keeping

the necessary distance). Continue to reward any relaxed behaviour – remember this does not mean that the dog is lying down but they are not focused on the cat, or showing any signs of stress/arousal (bodily tension, trembling, panting, whining, lip licking, yawning – all of which are possible whilst lying down!). If at any time the dog becomes fixated, move away but do not drag the dog with you. Keep a squeaky toy in your pocket to quickly distract the dog and then reward them for moving away with you.

This stage may take several days/weeks of really short sessions throughout the day, but gradually the distance should be decreased to the stage of everyone being able to just sit calmly within the same room. The dog is still on the lead, but at this stage it can be dropped on the floor and a foot placed on it. The cat can also be given freedom out of the room while the dog is in the room and the cat can then have the choice to move into the room or not while the dog is in there. Continue to reward calm behaviour from the dog and reward any brave behaviour from the cat if it has been

nervous or hiding. If the cat is brave enough to approach the dog and the dog appears relaxed but there is uncertainty of a sudden reaction from the dog, a muzzle should be introduced as a separate exercise for this stage.

Eventually the lead can be trailing behind the dog for use only if needed and then the same process will need to be conducted in different rooms (though each room should be a quicker and quicker process) and in the garden. If you have more than one dog, the process should be done with each dog separately at first until they are both able to relax in the room when they can be taken in together. Cats of the same social group should be kept in the room together when introducing the dog. If you have a nervous/timid cat, they will always need their own room as a refuge where the dog is not allowed and any other sources of stress should be minimized. Speak to a behaviour counsellor that works with both dogs and cats if you require any advice prior to obtaining a new pet or with practical guidance on introductions.

