



METRO NASHVILLE
ANIMAL CARE & CONTROL

Introducing a New Dog to your Resident Cat at Home (Tips for a successful meeting)

Dogs and cats can live together peacefully, although creating a harmonious "blended family" requires some planning, patience, and careful guidance on your part, and realistic expectations. In some cases, your dog and cat will become best friends. When introducing a new dog into your house, you must remember that dogs can kill a cat very easily, even if they are only playing. Some dogs have a very high prey drive and should never be left alone with your cat. **Dogs should be kept on leash and supervised around cats for multiple weeks or even months, and the cat should always have a way to escape and avoid the dog.**

Setting It Up!

Before bringing a dog into a home with an existing cat, be sure to do the following:

- Create a safe place for your cat, where the new dog cannot get to it (use a baby gate or a cat door). Your cat should have a "safe" location in every room, even if it is only the top of a bookcase.
- Put your cat's litter box in a safe area. Many dogs eat cat feces, and if the dog ambushes the cat in the litter box, the cat may become afraid and relieve himself elsewhere in the house.
- Keep the cat's food and water dishes in a safe area as well. Cat food is too rich for dogs, and dog food lacks vital nutrients for cats.

The Introduction:

- Beforehand, exercise your dog and feed him a nice meal; this will help the dog to get into a relaxed mood.
- Put the cat in a safe place, and let the dog roam the house for about 30-45 minutes; this allows for the dog to "meet" the cat by smell only. Then take the dog out for a walk and let the cat "meet" the dog by smell only.
- Put your dog on a short leash, or you can attach the dog's leash to your belt (for the first few weeks, if necessary) – this will allow you to make a quick correction if he starts to chase the cat. It will also allow you to bond with your dog... everywhere you go he goes! Be ready with lots of treats for good behavior.

- The cat's first reaction will likely be to hiss and/or run... this is perfectly normal.
- Let dog and cat check each other out at a distance. It's not time for the dog to approach the cat just yet. Give your dog and cat some treats and praise as rewards.
- If your dog bolts toward your cat, correct him with the leash, and use the "no," "sit" or "leave it" commands. If he shows any signs of excessive excitability, calm him. If this doesn't do the trick, cut the visit short and try again later. Praise the dog (or give a treat) the moment that he complies and stops trying to get the cat.
- Repeat these short visits several times a day, gradually giving your dog more leash as appropriate.

DO NOT MOVE TO THE NEXT PHASE UNTIL YOU HAVE SEVERAL CONSECUTIVE DAYS OF CONTROLLED LEASHED INCIDENT-FREE VISITS, IN WHICH BOTH ANIMALS DEMONSTRATE TO YOUR SATISFACTION THAT THEY ARE COMFORTABLE WITH EACH OTHER AND CALM. THIS MAY TAKE SEVERAL MONTHS.

Proceed with Caution: Once your dog and cat consistently get along during leashed visits, you're ready for the next step. Let go of the leash but be prepared to grab it or step on it if he attempts to go after the cat. If the cat swats the dog on the nose, distract the dog with a toy, but don't punish the cat. Many times, all it takes is one swat from the cat for a dog to learn his lesson. Be sure to speak in a calm and soothing voice and use both animals' names. Do not yell because you can escalate the excitement and tension.

Take your dog off the leash and supervise the two closely. If you see problems, and they don't resolve with a few simple voice commands, go back to the previous phase. Gradually make the no-leash sessions longer with your direct supervision. Until you know that your dog and cat will be OK when feeding, a trick you can use is to separate them, on either side of a door. This will allow them to associate something enjoyable with the other's "smell" while eating.

A dog's interaction with a cat can change depending on the environment. Just because your dog is OK with the cat inside the house doesn't mean she'll exhibit that same behavior outdoors. She might fixate on the cat and start stalking him when they are outside together.

Desensitization

If your new dog is too excited and exuberant around your cat, you can try desensitization, the goal of which is to reduce your dog's reaction to the cat by gradually increasing her exposure to him. To begin desensitization, let the dog view the cat briefly through a baby gate, and then get the dog to focus on something else, such as playing with a toy or practicing cues such as "sit" or "look." It helps to keep the dog on leash so that you can move her away from the cat when you try to refocus her attention. Praise and reward the dog for being able to focus elsewhere. Continue to give the dog short viewings of the cat throughout the day. Through this process of slowly letting the dog see the cat and get accustomed to the cat's presence, the dog will eventually become desensitized and lose interest in the cat. In some cases, the dog will lose interest in the cat within a couple of hours, but it can take days, weeks or even months. Each dog (and each cat) is an individual and will learn at his or her own pace.

Puppies

When introducing a puppy to a household with a cat, a well-socialized cat will typically be able to deal with a puppy. If you have a shy cat who does not correct the puppy, be more cautious, as a puppy will not understand that the cat does not want to play and may think chase is a game. If introductions don't go smoothly, seek professional help immediately. Conflicts between pets in the same family can often be resolved with professional help - punishment will not work and could make things worse.

Kittens

If you are introducing your kitten to a new dog, keep in mind that kittens may not have any fear of dogs, so you must watch the dog carefully. Because kittens are small and want to run and play, dogs with a strong prey drive may be very excited by a kitten's movements. Even if your dog is OK with your adult cats, it is important to watch her closely when she's with a kitten. If your dog is young and high-energy, she could hurt or kill the kitten simply by trying to play. So, for safety's sake, keep kittens and dogs apart any time you are not watching them.

Prey Drive

You particularly want to be aware of dog body language that could be potential warning signs. If your dog has a strong prey drive (the inclination to seek out, chase and potentially capture animals seen as prey — usually smaller animals such as cats or rabbits), she might become very focused on the cat. She'll stiffen, stare, and may start barking or whining. If you see these signs, do not let her near the cat.

Additional Resources:

http://www.waysidewaifs.org/site/DocServer/INTRODUCING_YOUR_NEW_DOG_TO_YOUR_RESIDENT_CAT_15.pdf

<https://resources.bestfriends.org/article/how-introduce-dog-cat>