

Introducing Your New Dog to Your Resident Cat

Despite the common belief that cats and dogs are enemies, many times cats and dogs can enjoy living together and become life-long friends! It is extremely important to set them up for success and carefully plan and monitor their first introduction. Below are some helpful Do's and Don'ts to create a successful first introduction.



Do's

1. Try and choose a dog that is known to be friendly towards cats. Sometimes, adoption agencies may know if the dog has successfully been exposed to cats before. If this is unknown, be aware that the match might be unsuccessful. Consider their individual personalities as well. A calm and elderly cat will likely not be happy living with an energetic dog that loves to run and chase things. A small kitten can easily be injured by a large and silly dog that plays roughly. Likewise, if you have an active cat that likes to swat at things bringing home a fearful or older dog may not lead to a successful match.
2. In the beginning, keep your cat and dog separated in different rooms where they cannot see each other. This allows the cat and dog to become accustomed to each other's smells and sounds. Use lots of yummy treats and praise during this phase if either seems curious or nervous.
3. Begin training and practicing the dog's basic obedience commands before introducing them to your cat. Commands like "Sit," "Down," "Stay," and "Leave It" are extremely helpful. Did you know that at St. Hubert's, we offer Basic Obedience training classes that teach all of these behaviors?!
4. Once the cat is displaying relaxed behaviors with the dog present but not seen by the cat, you may begin supervised introductions. First, feed the dog a nice big meal and give him lots of exercise! Only attempt an introduction if the dog is feeling calm and relaxed. It's also a good idea to trim your cat's nails beforehand, just in case! When ready for the introduction, keep the dog on leash and make sure the cat can escape or hide without being followed by the dog. Use baby gates, cat perches, and places for the cat to hide. Allow both the cat and dog to be in the same room. Give both the cat and dog lots of yummy treats and praise! If the cat chooses to run or hide, that's okay! Give this phase more time and lots of patience.
5. Slowly increase the time of the supervised interactions with the dog always on leash. While the cat and dog can see each other, you can try feeding them dinner or playing with them separately. We want to teach the cat and dog that good things happen when they are near each other!
6. Once the cat and dog seem happy and relaxed during these sessions, you can begin to take the leash off of the dog.
7. Cats and dogs should only be left unsupervised after observing a significant amount of positive and relaxed supervised sessions and if you are certain they will not injure each other when alone.

Introducing Your New Dog to Your Resident Cat

Don'ts

- Don't allow a loose cat and an off-leash dog to meet for the first time. There is no control over their interactions and this can lead to disastrous results.
- Don't allow the dog and cat to "work it out on their own" or let the dog chase the cat, even if it appears to be playing. This is stressful for both animals and can create a potentially dangerous situation.
- Don't rush the process or force the cat to interact with the dog! You must work at the cat and dog's pace. Taking the steps too quickly can create negative associations for the cat or dog. These associations are VERY difficult to reverse!
- Don't allow your dog near the litterbox. Your cat may feel vulnerable while using the litterbox and could potentially stop using it if a negative experience with the dog occurs. Also, it is unsafe for the dog to ingest cat litter.
- Don't use punishment or harsh corrections on your dog during introductions. This can suppress the dog's warning signs of aggression in the future.



Warning Signs



- Dogs that show obsessive behavior towards the cat or the area where your cat is located are potentially unsafe to live with your cat.
- Dogs that growl, lunge, or obsessively bark at your cat are potentially unsafe to live with your cat.
- If the dog shows aggressive behaviors like chasing, pinning, snapping at, or picking up the cat, this dog is unsafe to be around cats.
- If your cat continually growls, hisses, swats at, or attacks a calm dog. You may need help from a professional trainer.
- If your cat stops his normal eating or drinking behaviors, stops using the litterbox, or refuses to come out of hiding. You may need help from a professional trainer.