

Introductions: Setting your cat and dog up for success in a multi-pet home

Despite common beliefs, many cats and dogs live quite peacefully in homes. Certainly there are cases where a dog's high prey drive will result in him/her not being an ideal candidate to share a home with a cat, so take note of any signs of aggression. Common, and sometimes missed, signs of aggression include a stiffening of the body, showing teeth, hard stares, snarling or lip curling, air snapping and lunging.

Training, why?

Individual training isn't as scary as it sounds, and it is extremely helpful when introducing cats and dogs. The primary reason being that cats and dogs do not share the same 'language', thus often misreading each other's signals. That can be a rocky start to their relationship, and yours as well! For example, a play bow from a dog is a signal he wishes to initiate play. To a cat, the act of play bowing is not always seen as play but rather an intrusion into her personal space which is often dealt with by hissing, swatting and even running. Dogs usually enjoy running around and chasing each other, so he may think he is playing by chasing your running cat. While your cat is running out of fear, the dog will interpret this as the cat engaging in play. While dogs being afraid of cats may make for amusing viral videos, in most cases it can be anything but funny for your dog. Setting some ground rules will help ensure everyone is relaxed and safe.

The basics:

There are many routes one can take in terms of basic obedience training for your dog including an in home trainer, a public class or taking the DIY road with a book (just make sure to thoroughly research the author and methods). Dogs are receptive to learning and pleasing, however tasty treats never hurt. Arm yourself with irresistible treats and lots of love and patience. Just as with cats, dog-appeasing pheromone spray is available and can be extremely helpful when dealing with a nervous dog.

Basic behaviors that are helpful for your dog to know are commands such as sit, stay, (lay)down and watch me/focus. Make sure to practice in various places and scenarios so you are confident your dog will ignore environmental stimuli and focus on you. As an added security measure you can have your dog wear a harness and leash or a drag line during introduction phases, until he/she learns your commands.

Make sure your cat has a nice high place to stay, such as a cat tree, in the room where the family spends most of their time or where you would like your pets to spend time together. This will ensure that the cat has an escape route should she feel unsure. This will also provide a place for her to go where she will realize that she can be in the same room with the dog without being bothered.

Also, be sure to trim your cats nails prior to introducing him/her to a dog, just to keep your dog safe in the event your cat becomes too stressed and swats.

Click, everyone is ok!

Although this won't happen immediately, clicker training is an excellent way to communicate with both your dog and cat. Clicker training is useful for showing your dog that when he is relaxed in the presence of your cat he will get treats, but also for showing your cat that she can be in the same room with the

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dog and not be his primary focus. As an added bonus, any time you spend training your pets is time that you are also bonding with them and increasing their confidence.

You can click/reward for calm behavior for both of your pets. If your dog lays on his side and focuses on something other than your cat, reward him! Even if he just wants to play, his good intentions are not known by your cat. He needs to understand the preferred way of interacting with your cat, and your cat needs to understand that your dog gets it. If your dog is the 'innocent bystander' and the cat does not see it that way, you can attempt this through a gate or semi-closed/covered hallway and gradually decrease the distance between the dog and cat.

Over several training sessions your cat will realize that your dog is no longer intruding her space or making her uncomfortable, and this will ease her stress. She will realize there isn't a need for swatting or any other defensive behaviors since the dog is no longer viewed as a threat. The amount of time needed to get to this point will vary based on your pets, do not worry if you aren't moving as fast as you like as it is up to them in terms of pacing.

It is important that neither of your pets stares at or stalks the other too intently. They should be able to look at each other and look away without issue. If you feel one is too focused on the other, you can use the clicker to distract your dog or a toy to distract your cat. Both clicker training and play therapy are methods you can use to turn a negative situation into a positive one.

For more information on clicker training please visit <http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/clicker-training-your-pet>.

Give me those treats!

While dogs are more often thought to be more treat/food motivated, treating for calm behavior in the presence of each other works for both cats and dogs. You can use small amounts of canned cat food as treats if that is your cats preference. The point you want them both to understand is that they can coexist in the same room nicely and they will be rewarded. Having the right treats will make a difference in terms of attentiveness in your pets, so test out a few to see what they each prefer and use those only in the presence of each other.

Off limits:

To prevent regression or even litter box issues, the litter box should be off limits to your dog. Not only is it unsafe for your dog to play around and possibly ingest litter, but it can create a very negative association for your cat with her litterbox. She may become startled if she is using the litterbox and (depending on where their relationship is at) is greeted by a friend or foe. Depending on how tolerant your cat is in terms of distance the dog needs to be from her box, you may need to set up a room just for your cat. You can use training and a gate to keep your dog from entering the room, which will also help your cat feel safe enough in the room.