



FELINE FRIENDLY?

How to introduce your new dog to your cat, without the fur flying!

Dogs and cats do not have to be enemies; in fact they can be the best of friends. They certainly don't naturally hate each other. The problem is that most dogs love to chase and most cats will run if they see a big, hairy hound hurtling towards them at speed!

If a puppy or kitten is given plenty of chances to meet other friendly adult dogs or cats, then there is every chance that they will get along well in the future. Sometimes though, this is not possible, or perhaps you have adopted a dog and you don't know how he is going to behave when he meets your cat. If this is the case then you'll have to be very careful during the first meetings to keep either pet from becoming frightened or injured – or they may never get along.

Put your cat first!

If you've already got a cat and are bringing a new dog into your home, you really have to think about how this will affect your cat. It is her home and she has every right to feel safe there.

- If you know that your cat is very frightened of dogs – or has had very bad experiences with them in the past, then think very carefully before getting a dog or bringing one into the home. It is not fair to put your cat through so much stress, if you know that she cannot cope with it.

Preparation before the big day

To ensure that the first meeting goes well, you may have to make some changes around your house. These things should be done in the weeks leading up to bringing your new dog into the home, so that your cat can get used to them.

- Make sure that there will be places in your home where your cat can go but your dog cannot. These are places where your cat can escape from your dog if she wants to, relax and get some peace and quiet.
- You may have to put a cat flap into an internal door or upstairs window, or install a baby gate so that your cat can have access to a dog-free room. You may also want to put the litter tray, food and water in here.
- You may want to put up some shelving around the house so that your cat can travel around out of reach of your dog. Her food and bedding can be placed on shelves so that she can come into rooms where the dog is allowed, but feel happy and safe.
- Make sure that your cat always has a clear escape route from any area that she may come face to face with the dog – just in case.
- Try to get some bedding that the new dog has used before bringing him home. Rub it around your cat's face and leave it in places where she can sniff it, so that she can get used to his strange smell before he comes to live in her home.

And for the dog.....

- If possible, spend some time with the dog before bringing him home to teach him some basic obedience commands. Make sure you find treats or a toy that he absolutely loves as this will make it easier to keep his attention when the cat is around.

- Prepare somewhere that the dog can use as his sleeping area, which is not in a place that the cat has to use on a regular basis. For instance, don't expect the dog to sleep in the kitchen if the cat has to pass through on her way to the cat flap. You may find it useful to encourage the dog to use an indoor kennel. Please see our factsheet on indoor kennels for more information.
- Remember that most dogs love cat food and will eat it if they can reach it – so you may have to move it from its usual place. Unfortunately many dogs also love cat poo, so the litter tray should really be somewhere out of sight. Although it's a perfectly natural thing for them to eat (in their eyes it's a high protein, yummy snack) - it's pretty disgusting to us humans and the best way to prevent it is simply to make sure that they cannot get to it in the first place.

The first meeting.... Teaching your dog to be calm and controlled

The most important thing to do is to make sure that your dog cannot chase your cat during these initial stages, as this can become a habit so very quickly. Make sure that you have well exercised the dog before you bring him into the house for the first time and that the cat has been shut away in a safe place until you are ready.

- The first time that they meet you must be in complete control of the situation. Put your dog on his lead (use a muzzle if necessary) and in another room put your cat in a carrier or indoor kennel.
- When both are quiet and relaxed, bring the cat into the room in her carrier.
- Place the carrier onto a high surface – a table for instance – so that your cat feels safe and keep your dog on his lead, so that they can see and smell each other but not get too close.
- Your dog may become very excited but you must ignore this. Wait until he is quiet and relaxed, then praise him and give him a treat.
- Do this for about 10 minutes and praise your dog whenever he ignores your cat.
- After 10 minutes take your cat out of the room and release her from the carrier when she is in a safe dog-free area of the house.
- Practice this 2-3 times a day for the next few days, until you can see that they are both relaxed when your cat is brought into the room. If your dog is still very excited when he sees your cat, you'll need to keep doing this a bit longer.

Helping your cat to feel confident around your dog

When your dog is completely relaxed and happy about your cat being brought into the room in her carrier, you can move on to the next stage. You will need to make sure that there are plenty of safe places in your room where your cat can jump up out of reach of your dog, if necessary.

- If you have an indoor kennel, put your dog into it. If not, put him on his lead, with a muzzle if necessary, and keep hold of him very firmly.
- Get someone else to bring your cat into the room in her carrier and put it onto the table or a high surface. Shut the door, so that neither pet can leave the room.
- Open the carrier, so that your cat can come out if she chooses to, but don't force her.
- If she comes out, praise her gently. If your dog is quiet and relaxed, praise him and give him a treat.
- Do this for 10 – 15 minutes and then return your cat to the carrier and take her out of the room.
- Practice this 2-3 times a day, until your cat appears to feel happy and safe and your dog is relaxed with your cat moving around the room.

Giving them both some freedom to meet properly

Once you feel that your cat is unlikely to run away from your dog and your dog is unlikely to chase, you can move on to the next stage.

- Bring your cat into the room and let her out of her carrier. Make sure that neither pet can run out of the room.
- Put your dog onto a long lead and let him wander around the room. Keep hold of the end of the lead, so that you can stop him if he tries to chase.

- As before, praise your dog for ignoring your cat and being calm.

Once you are at this stage, you will need to use your own common sense as to how you go on. If you feel that your dog will behave off the lead, then give it a go – although make sure that your cat has somewhere to escape, should she become frightened. However, if you are not sure, then keep him in the indoor kennel or on the long lead for a bit longer, so that you will have some control if things turn a bit nasty.

Remember that the main cause of problems between dogs and cats is that cats can become frightened and run. The sight of a cat running makes most dogs very excited and so they give chase. If by using this information, you can get your cat used to your dog so that she won't run away when she sees him; there is every chance that they can happily live together in your home.

Other points to remember

- Please note that although you may get your cat and dog to live nicely together in your house, your dog may still try to chase your cat if he sees her in the garden or out on the street. So make sure that the coast is clear and your cat is out of sight whenever you let your dog outside.
- It is also quite likely that your dog may still try to chase any strange cat that he sees.

We hope that this factsheet will help your dog and cat to live together and perhaps become great friends. **If you have any problems, then please do contact us for further advice or ask your vet to put you in touch with a behaviour specialist.**

You may also be interested in these other factsheets from Dogs Trust: Basic dog training and Dogs Trust Guide to behaviour problems

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