

Introducing Cats and Dogs

Quick Tips - Take it one *sense* at a time - Provide a stress free environment - Allow normal feline/ canine communication and behavior - Redirection is your friend

Normal Canine communication and behavior: - Play Bows (front legs down, hind quarters up) - Prey (chasing, pursuing) - Cautious Interest or Avoidance - Whimpering All of these behaviors are normal, but need to be managed. Never allow your dog's play to become out of control, and never allow them to chase their new feline housemate. Use redirection, or keep your canine friend on a leash until the situation is easier to control.

Normal Feline communication and behavior :

Hissing, growling, staring, swishing tail, ears down.

Redirection is your friend. If you see tension building, redirect your cat with treats/toys and move the dog further away until the cat relaxes.

The Introduction: Dogs and cats need to be introduced very slowly and cautiously in order for there to be a successful acceptance of one another.

Step 1—SANCTUARY: Make sure your cat has a 'sanctuary' room. This is a safe place that your dog cannot access. We recommend keeping this room as a dog free zone permanently by installing a tall sturdy dog gate with a small opening for the cat to enter and exit the room. This room needs to have your cat's litter box, food, bed and toys, as it will be housing them for anywhere from a few days to a few weeks. Have "hiding spots" in this room for your cat. Boxes make great hidey holes for cats that are feeling a little shy and intimidated for the first few days. Both animals will be curious— sniffing under the door. See "Normal Feline/Canine Communication and Behavior" information above and what to do if it escalates. Never allow the under the door interaction to escalate (barking, growling, etc).

Step 2—ONE SENSE AT A TIME: After your new cat starts feeling comfortable in their environment, you can start feeding special treats/meals to each animal on either side of the door. See how close you can get the bowl to the door, but don't push it. Over the next few days, you'll gradually decrease the distance between the two animals and the door. The intent is to get each animal eating on either side of the door without any problems. If at any point either animal refuses to eat, you have moved too close too quickly. Back up to the last place they were comfortable eating and move more slowly. This stage should take several days to a week. When both animals are eating comfortably next to the door and acting as if the other animal was not on the other side of the door you are ready for the next step.

Room Swap: switch one animal out with the other. Allow your dog to explore your cat's sanctuary, and your cat to explore your house. Start by taking your dog outside or to a nearby room. Allow your cat to exit the room. Only if the cat chooses to leave the room and is confidently exploring should you sneak the dog in for a quick smell around the door to the cats room. Remember that a cat can (and will) perceive a new dog as threatening even if your dog is not an actual threat to the cat. This gives them an opportunity to smell each other's area and gives the cat a chance to find escape routes from the dog. By this time, the rest of the house should have easily accessible elevated surfaces for your cat to escape the dog if she feels threatened. (They should not see each other yet, this is only to prepare the cat for that stage)

Only do this for an hour at a time maximum and at most twice a day. We also suggest rubbing each animal down with a cloth, and placing the cloth somewhere in the other animals area of the home. This helps them to acclimate and investigate the scents in an non stressful environment. You will know the cat is ready for the next step when the cat chooses to come out of the room confidently and fairly quickly. The cat should be happily moving about the house, looking out windows, and acting comfortable in all areas of the home before moving to the next step. The dog should be very nonchalant about cat smells before moving to the next step.

Step 3—INTERACTION: Once both animals are comfortable in each other's areas, and are not exhibiting stress/fear signals you can open the door to the sanctuary and allow them visuals. It's always a good idea to go slowly; open the door a crack, then a little more, then a little more still. Begin when your dog is already calm and relaxed. Keep your dog on a loose leash—only tighten the leash if you are pulling your dog back/away from the introduction. With your dog on the leash, sit as far from the cat room door as possible that still allows visual contact between them. Ask the dog to be sitting or laying facing away from the cat. Reward your dog frequently and continuously for remaining calm and focused on you. If the dog glances calmly towards the cat, say 'yes' calmly and give the dog a high value treat. Continue to reward the dog for calmly looking at the cat and remaining in a neutral position. Do not allow your dog to stare at the cat. If you see tension building in the dog be sure to *redirect* with toys or treats or move further away from the cat. If this doesn't help, do not continue and try again tomorrow. If everyone remains relaxed, allow your cat to explore the household while keeping your dog on leash to ensure safety. It is extremely important that you do not lead the dog over to the cat! Allow the cat to approach the dog (who is still on a leash) only when the cat decides to approach. If the dog is allowed to chase the cat, ever, this will potentially set up a permanent flee-chase pattern in your home which can be very dangerous for the cat. You will know the cat is ready for the next stage when the cat calmly approaches the dog or calmly rests in the same room with the dog. The dog is ready for the next stage when the dog shows no excitement and remains uninterested in the movements of the cat.

Before moving on to the next step, while your dog is on leash in the "training" spot, have another person begin to play with the cat in the sanctuary room with the door open. This will help you train the dog to remain calm even when the cat is moving. Follow all the steps above and reward frequently and continuously for calm behaviors using your dog's favorite reward. You will know you are ready for the next step when your dog shows no interest in the cat and can calmly glance at the moving cat.

Step 4—HAPPY HOME: Now that both animals are calm being in the room with one another, and the dog is comfortable calmly watching the cat play, it is time to let the dog drag the leash. It is suggested that you do not drop the leash and let the dog roam freely until you are 100% certain the dog has little interest in chasing or approaching the cat. Keep the dog on the dropped leash for a few days until you are sure the cat is not bothered by the dog. Continue to reward the dog frequently for remaining calm and disinterested in the cat. Remember that communication between species is a trial and error process for them and that they may need your help with interpretations. As long as each species is reacting appropriately to the other species signals, allow them to learn from each other. Never leave them out alone together when you are not at home for at least a few weeks after this point. If something happens, you want to be present! Do not get rid of the sanctuary room! Allow your cat time to become comfortable and keep in mind that the time spent up front on this relationship is time worth spending.