



Introducing Your New Rescue Dog to Your Resident Cat

Dogs and cats can usually live together peacefully, although creating a harmonious "blended family" requires some planning, patience, and careful guidance on your part. 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. Sometimes all it takes is one shake by the dog, and the cat's neck can break. Some dogs have a very high prey drive and should never be left alone with your cat.

When you introduce pets to each other, one of them may send "play" signals that can be misinterpreted by the other pet. If those signals are interpreted as aggression by one animal, then you should handle the situation as "aggressive".

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 "with a bottom cat door" or just 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' eyesight and heart function.
- Figure out if your new dog understands basic commands, such as "sit", "stay" and "leave it". This will be helpful with the introductions.

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) – this will allow you to make a quick correction if he starts to chase the cat.
- Put your cat in her carrier if she's typically skittish; otherwise, let her walk around. 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. Pet and talk to your dog soothingly. It's not time for dog to approach cat just yet. Give your dog and cat some treats and praise as rewards. (You can also place your dog in their crate and allow the cat to roam around and smell the dog in a safe environment).
- If your dog bolts toward your cat, correct him with the leash, and use the "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 to 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 INCIDENT-FREE VISITS, IN WHICH BOTH ANIMALS DEMONSTRATE TO YOUR SATISFACTION THAT THEY ARE COMFORTABLE WITH EACH OTHER.

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. If there are any accidents, simply clean it up using an enzymatic cleanser or white vinegar.

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 for a few days. Gradually make the no-leash sessions longer. Do not leave the cat and dog alone until you're sure they're both fully comfortable with each other and there will be no trouble.

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.

Swap their bedding, so that they will get used to the other's "smell".

Be sure that the animals are healthy and that you are aware of any medical problems, otherwise this could prolong the introduction process.

If you are introducing a dog into a household with a kitten, use extra caution. A kitten is more likely to be injured by a young, energetic dog or a predatory dog.

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, be more cautious, as a puppy will not understand that the cat does not want to play.

Your pets can be severely injured in fights, and the longer the problem continues, the harder it can be to resolve. Conflicts between pets in the same family can often be resolved with professional help... punishment will not work, and could make things worse.

If you need help (the introductions aren't going well) please contact Charlie's Foundation and we will put you in contact with a trainer versed in these matters.

Now, with all of this in mind, hopefully everything goes very smoothly for you and your pets... so relax and give those guys some space and lots of hugs!



