

INTRODUCING DOGS AND CATS

Often dogs and cats don't get on well, partly because their communication styles differ too which can lead to confusion: A dog wags his tail to show happiness and eagerness to play; a cat lashes her tail to indicate displeasure or anger. You can help them to share a home by keeping each pet's best interests and instincts in mind. Patience is essential it can take many months to establish a peaceful friendship.

Dog and cat introductions must be done slowly and with great care. This is to help ensure the safety of both animals, but especially the cat, who may not take kindly to sharing its new territory with a strange smelling, looking and sounding animal. It is paramount that you do not force the animals together. Never force them to meet by carrying the cat towards the dog. Not only will this terrify the cat, but you could be bitten or scratched by him as he struggles to get away. Instead we suggest that you let them investigate each other in their own time.

How do I introduce my new cat to my dog?

Introductions with cats are best done indoors; the dog should always be on a secure lead whenever the cat is present until you are sure that they are comfortable together and there is no danger to the cat's safety. Whilst the lead prevents the dog from chasing the cat, time must also be spent actively rewarding the dog for not chasing or being overly bold towards the cat. Creative uses of food and/or toys are great rewards for not barking or trying to chase the cat and it is also beneficial to walk the dog before mixing. All meetings between the dog and cat should be supervised by you. Never leave them in a room together unattended. We also suggest you place a barrier, such as a baby gate, between the area the dog will occupy and the cat's safe area, so that the cat can come and go at will without the dog being able to follow.

How can I make the introductions a positive experience?

A good tip for getting each accustomed to the presence of the other is to use food. Place a bowl of cat food in reach of the cat but out of the dog's reach. At the same time, give the dog a stuffed Kong or chew. Eating is a pleasurable experience and so the association between the other animal and food may help smooth any relationship problems.

When can I let them live together normally?

Gradually, as the cat becomes more used to the dog, you can allow more interaction. Let the dog approach the cat for a sniff and then call him away. Do this on a lead to prevent any sudden disasters and ensure that you can call the dog away from the cat by giving him a tasty treat every time he looks away from the cat and towards you.

Try to ensure that the dog is never allowed to chase your cat. Dogs can find this very exciting and rewarding and it can be difficult to stop once this behaviour has been started. Your aim is to reward the dog for ignoring or turning away from the cat.

After a couple of weeks you will have a good idea whether you feel it is safe to let the dog off the lead when the cat is present. If the cat is a very shy or timid cat, it may take longer. Try to be patient and do things slowly and with care. Even the most dog friendly dogs can sometimes take time to accept a new cat's arrival.