

DOG-CAT INTRODUCTIONS

Many families would like to have both a dog and a cat. Many dogs feel the same way; a cat can be quite entertaining for a dog. Cats often don't like the idea at all - especially cats who've ruled their home for years.

If you'd like your cat and dog to become buddies, it's best to get both when they're quite young, and they can bond. Otherwise, set your sights on a harmonious household - not close friendship.

Some dogs are not appropriate for a cat-friendly home, they are too predatory. Some cats can never acclimate to a dog, especially shy or withdrawn cats, or cats that have been traumatized by a dog.

The success of a dog-cat introduction depends on the owner and how much time and effort he or she is willing to expend. Essentially, you allow the cat to control most of the interactions, and you make the dog the onlooker.

CONTROL THE ENVIRONMENT

You have an opportunity with a new dog to convince him or her that you are the ultimate authority on everything - including cats. You do this by controlling the dog's environment from the moment you bring her home.

First, set up a tie-down (attach a short, unbreakable leash to an immovable object). A wall is best, but an extremely heavy piece of furniture is okay. Before the two animals ever meet, acclimate the dog to this area. Give her treats, bones, or chewies there, and make a nice bed for her.

Once she's happy with her tie-down, bring the cat in when the dog is NOT there (her scent will be). Let the cat explore and examine the area where the dog has been. Provide a perch, out of the dog's reach, where the cat can comfortably watch the dog's area. Give him some treats, catnip, or other toy in that area. You may even want to feed him there for a period of days or weeks. It's best if you can acclimate both animals separately for at least a couple of days.

COUNTER-CONDITION

When both cat and dog appear to be comfortable with their spots, tie the dog down, and give her something delicious to chew on. Then bring the cat in, and place him on his perch. It's not usually wise to hold him, he may well feel trapped and try to escape, injuring himself and you and exciting the dog in the process. Leave the door open this first time, so the cat can leave as he wishes to (he probably will).

Some dogs respond well if - as they begin to bark - you tell them "quiet" and squirt some water in their face. Others don't care at all.

An important component of counter-conditioning is making the association of something pleasant with something unpleasant. Thus, you might withhold attention from both parties until they're in the same room with each other, then give both of them lots of attention. Or, feed them when they can see each other (make sure the cat is very safe, and the dog is tied down), and don't feed them when they are apart. Or use toys - anything, in short, that interests them.

Many dogs and cats get along very well as long as the cat doesn't run. If he runs, the dog automatically chases. Try to avoid that kind of situation, at least in the first few weeks.