

Introducing A Dog To A Cat So They Can Get Along

The following should be progressed through in stages. Each stage progression depends on the dog's behavior and readiness (calm behavior) to move to the next stage. Each stage may last longer or shorter, also depending on whether or not the dog is ready to move to the next stage of introduction and socialization with the cat.

Stage One: Simple association with cat in cat carrier

The first introduction of a dog meeting the cat should be done while the cat is in a cat carrier. Keep the leash on the dog. Only reward calm interest. Allow the dog to sniff with interest, but not with heightened arousal, or barking, pawing, whining, or anything that looks like he wants to get a hold of the cat. If the dog shows any of the undesirable behaviors, give a firm "NO!" and tell your dog to sit or lay down.

Have treats ready to reward him when he is calmly sitting or laying by the carrier. Try to get your dog to lay down by the carrier and give praise for this behavior.

Plan to leave the cat in the carrier for the evening or for an extended time period. Your dog does not have to sit or lay by the carrier if he loses interest in the cat. Loss of interest is a good thing. You want your dog to become accustomed to the cat's presence, learning the cat's scent and that the cat belongs in the home.

Continue to praise and reward good behavior and correct unacceptable behavior.

Follow this stage for about a week, depending on your dog's success at being calm and lack of interest. Obviously, you will have to quarantine your cat(s) in a different bedroom or area during this stage. This bedroom or area should not be in a place where the dog can see the cat.

Stage 2: Mingling in the Bedroom

You will want to have two people present for this.

Bring the dog into the bedroom and keep the door shut so the animals cannot run away. Keep the leash on the dog so that you can grab it if needed. The cat should have a cat tower or something she can climb up onto to retreat to when she gets too scared.

Again, continue with praise and corrections where needed.

Have one person keep hold of the leash while keeping the leash loose and relaxed. The loose leash communicates to the dog that everything is ok. Be ready to give a firm leash correction or to pull back if needed, but try not to tug or keep the leash tightly pulled while the dog is just sniffing.

The other person should hold the cat. Allow the dog to sniff with calm interest. This might require many corrections, and or getting the dog to sit or lay down. Firmly tell the dog "Gentle" if he pushes forward too forcefully. You might also have to give leash corrections along with verbal corrections. The sniffing can last for only several minutes or more depending on both the dog and the cat.

Allow the cat to go to her cat tower or high place. Keep a watch on the dog to continue appropriate verbal and leash corrections. You can also give treats as rewards.

Plan to stay in the room doing something like working on the computer or anything just to spend at the minimum of 30 minutes at a time for each socialization.

This stage make take you a week to two weeks of doing this daily, depending upon the length of time for each session and the progress made with the dog being calm and losing interest.

Move to the next stage when your dog is able to sit in the room and not want to chase when the cat moves around in the room. Calm interest with alert ears are fine, but not fixated interest where the dog looks like he will lunge.

Stage 3: Mingling in the living room

Consider this stage a bigger version of the bedroom socialization. This time, the cat moves around the house freely while the dog is near you. You should keep the leash on the dog. It might be helpful to just connect the leash to your belt loop or waist. This way, you can correct any over-interest and your hands can be free most of the time.

Make sure all doggie doors, bathroom doors, and bedroom doors are closed before you bring the cat into the living room. You want to give them the opportunity to be around each other while you can supervise them.

If the cat just wants to hide somewhere out of sight, it can be helpful to have someone who is not connected to the dog, hold the cat somewhere near the dog. For example, if you are connected to the dog while you are watching TV on the couch, have the other person hold the cat.

The goal again, is to have the dog disinterested and calm. When the dog is lounging around with you and he is aware of the cat without wanting to get up and go sniff, that is good!

Eventually, enough time of this stage should get the dog used to the cat and give you enough feedback as to whether or not you can trust the dog alone with the cat.

You may need to do this stage for 1-3 weeks.

If you have any doubts about leaving the dog and the cat alone together, then be cautious until you feel sure that the cat will be safe.

Good Luck! And please seek the advice of a professional dog trainer if you are having difficulty getting your dog adjusted to your cat. Each dog is different, so get help if you need it!

Mitzy Barney

