

Appendix 7

Introducing Cats and Dogs

There are many households where cats and dogs live together peacefully; however, this is not always the case, and situations can occur that are highly stressful and even potentially dangerous for the cats involved (Fig. A7.1). With careful consideration before acquiring a new pet, and with careful preparation and introductions, the chances of such situations arising may be lessened.

If You Have a Dog and are Considering Getting a Cat

First, consider if your dog is likely to be ‘cat friendly’. Unfortunately, there is no way to be completely certain that your dog will not attempt to chase or attack a new cat or kitten in the house, but your dog’s past experiences with cats and aspects of his general behaviour can provide some indication as to whether or not your dog is suitable to be around cats.

Did your dog live with a cat as a puppy? Dogs that have been socialized with cats when young, preferably under 12 weeks of age, are more likely to consider cats as friends when adult.

Has your dog lived with cats previously? How was their relationship? If the dog chased the cats he lived with before, the chances are that he will also chase a new cat or kitten. However, even if you already have a cat, or your dog has lived peacefully with a cat before, it is still no guarantee that he will not attempt to chase a new cat or kitten that is introduced into the home.

Does your dog chase cats, rabbits or squirrels when on walks? A dog that chases cats and/or wildlife may also be more likely to chase a pet cat in the home. This can be of most concern if the dog actually catches and kills small animals. If this is the case it would be unwise to attempt to bring a cat or kitten into the same household.

If You Have a Cat and are Considering Getting a Dog

Some cats will be better able to accept a new dog or puppy in the house than others. Most cats regard dogs as natural predators, however, how fearful the cat is, and its reactions around dogs can depend on its previous experiences and the behaviour of the dog.

Did your cat live with a dog as a young kitten? Cats that have been socialized with dogs when young, preferably under 7 weeks of age, are more likely to consider a similar sized or breed of dog as a friend when adult.

What is your cat’s previous experience of dogs? Has he lived with a dog before? If so how was their relationship?



Fig. A7.1. Although cats and dogs can live together in harmony, it is always wise to be aware that dogs can regard cats as playthings or even potential prey, and situations can occur that are potentially dangerous for the cats involved.

Is your cat fearful or aggressive around dogs? A cat that is frightened of all dogs, regardless of the dog's behaviour, is less likely to accept a dog into its home and is likely to suffer severe chronic stress if subjected to sharing its home with a dog.

Introducing a New Cat or Kitten into a Home with a Resident Dog

Choosing your cat or kitten

Choose a cat or kitten that has had positive experience with dogs of a similar breed or type as your own dog. Because of the extreme differences between dog breeds, a cat or kitten that has had good experience of one breed or type may not be as accepting of other dogs of a different size or appearance. Early experience (i.e. prior to 7 weeks of age) is of most importance; however, if you are acquiring an adult cat, the effects of this experience will be lessened if the cat has had very little or no experience of dogs since then.

Preparation

Teach your dog a 'look at me' command

It is a good idea to start to teach your dog this command long before bringing your new cat or kitten home, so that that he is already responding well by the time you first introduce your dog to your new cat.

- Have a pot of small, tasty food treats ready. It is best to start teaching the command while you are sitting down so that your dog does not have too far to look up at you.
- Wait for your dog to look at you or if necessary lure him by moving your hand up towards your eyes.
- As soon as he looks towards you, **instantly** ‘mark’ the good behaviour by using a clicker or by saying ‘Yesss’ and then give him a treat.
- Do not hold the treat ready in your hand; reward him with a treat from the pot. If during training you always have a treat ready in your hand, your dog may not respond later when you don’t have a treat in your hand.
- Repeat until he starts to look towards you readily and is obviously expecting a treat for doing so!
- Start to bring in your command word as he turns to look at you. This must be a word that you would be most likely to use when you really need it. It should also be something that can be said in a clear, bright and encouraging voice, such as ‘Watch’ or ‘Look’.
- Repeat so that your dog starts to associate the word with the action of looking towards you.
- During the training sessions, use the command to get him to look at you when he looks away.
- The ultimate aim is to get your dog to look towards you and away from the cat or kitten but we need to build up distractions gradually.

Building up distractions

- Put some fairly unexciting household object onto the floor close to you. As your dog approaches to investigate use your chosen command. As soon as he looks at you reward with a click or a ‘Yesss’ and then a treat.
- Repeat but with the same item further away.
- Repeat with a variety of different objects starting with boring items and gradually more interesting items, such as a favourite toy. Also do this in different places around the house and garden until the dog gets the idea that the most rewarding thing to do is to look away from the item and look to you instead.
- Then try getting his attention away from ‘bigger’ distractions such as a favourite toy or an ‘interesting person’ who has just walked into the room.

Scent introduction

A few days before bringing your new cat or kitten home take a cloth containing the scent of your home and dog to the place where the cat or kitten is resident, e.g. the breeder’s home or rescue centre. Ask for this to be placed with the cat or kitten. At the same time bring back home something containing the scent of the new cat or kitten for your dog to investigate and become accustomed to.

Assess your dog’s reaction when introducing the scent of the cat. Ideally the dog should remain calm and relaxed and not become agitated or excited.

Preparation of a ‘safe room’

Prepare a separate ‘safe’ room for the cat or kitten. This should be somewhere quiet, away from all other pets, children, loud noises and lively activity.

The room should contain all that the cat needs:

- Food.
- Water, placed away from the food.
- Litter trays, placed away from food and water.
- Comfortable and warm bedding.
- Toys.
- Hiding and ‘safe’ places, for example cardboard boxes, access under furniture and/or high places.

The safe room should also be somewhere that the cat or kitten will later have easy access to, but the dog will not. This can be achieved by using baby gates or by fitting a cat flap in the door that only the cat can use.

Meanwhile, in readiness for when the cat is allowed out of his ‘safe room’, ensure that around the rest of the house there are plenty of elevated places and escape routes that allow the cat to be able to get away from the dog or be out of his reach (Fig. A7.2). Make use of baby gates or similar so that the cat can access areas of the house that the dog cannot.

Bringing the new cat home

- Always transport the cat or kitten in a secure purpose-built cat carrier. Hold the carrier close to your chest rather than by the handle, as the ‘swinging’ motion when you walk may be disorientating and unpleasant for the cat or kitten.



Fig. A7.2. Make sure that there are plenty of areas around the house that the cat can access but the dog cannot.

- A cloth or item of bedding containing scent from the cat's current home should go into the carrier with the cat.
- If transporting by car, the carrier should be well secured using a seat belt or similar, to prevent it from moving around.
- When you reach your home take the cat in the carrier straight to the pre-prepared 'safe room'.
- Open the carrier and allow the cat or kitten to exit in his own time. Don't lift the cat out or make any fuss.
- Allow the new cat to explore the room and/or hide as he wants. Don't try to restrain him or remove him from a hiding place. Give him time.
- Keep the carrier containing the 'familiar scent cloth' open and in the room with him, or if he finds another preferred hiding place put the cloth there.
- Allow the new cat or kitten to become settled and relaxed in this safe room before allowing access to the rest of the house, and before meeting your dog. This may take a few days.
- Once the cat or kitten is settled and relaxed in his 'safe room' allow him out to explore other rooms of the house without the dog present. The best times to do this can be when the dog is out for a walk or securely shut away elsewhere. The cat should be allowed to become familiar with elevated areas, escape routes and hiding places, so that he is aware of where he can escape to if necessary when first introduced to the dog.

Introducing the dog and cat to each other

- Do not attempt introductions until the dog is responding well to a 'look at me' command and the cat is comfortable in the room where the introductions are to take place (this should **not** be the cat's safe room).
- Before introducing the dog, the cat should be allowed to settle in the room on an elevated area, from where he can feel safe and look down on the dog. You may need to encourage him up onto a suitable place using food treats.
- Bring the dog into the room on a lead that should be securely attached to a normal, comfortable flat collar or harness. The lead should not be held uncomfortably tight; it should only be used as a safeguard should the dog attempt to chase the cat. At no point should any attempt be made to punish the dog or pull him back harshly on the lead.
- Reward the dog for calm and relaxed behaviour while the cat is in the room, and use the 'look at me' command to re-direct the dog's attention towards you if he appears to be becoming more intently interested in the cat.
- At all times allow the cat to hide or escape if he so wishes and at no time attempt to restrain the cat or force him to get closer to the dog.
- Repeat until you feel that both are sufficiently relaxed in each other's company.

Introducing a Dog or Puppy into a Home with a Resident Cat

Choosing your dog or puppy

Choose a dog or puppy that has already lived with cats and got along well with them, without chasing them. Preferably choose a dog or puppy that has been well socialized with cats prior to 12 weeks of age.

Preparation

- Before bringing the dog or puppy home take a cloth containing your cat's scent to the dog or puppy and assess his reaction. Ideally the dog should remain calm and relaxed and not become agitated or excited.
- Also a few days before bringing your new dog or puppy home, introduce a cloth containing the scent of the new dog or puppy for your cat to investigate.
- In all areas of the house where the dog will be allowed, ensure that there are plenty of places where the cat can hide, get up high or otherwise get away from the dog. Make use of baby gates or similar so that the cat can access some areas of the house that the dog cannot.

After bringing the dog or puppy home

- Initially keep the dog or puppy and cat separate. The cat must continue to have access to most of its normal areas for feeding, sleeping, litter trays and access to outside if this is usual for the cat.
- Teach the dog or puppy a 'look at me' command and introduce the dog and cat as described under 'introducing a new cat or kitten'.

Using a Crate

It is sometimes recommended to use a crate, cage or indoor kennel to introduce pets. Confining a dog or puppy to a crate, while the cat is allowed free access and to become accustomed to the dog, can work well as long as the dog or puppy is used to being in a crate and will relax when confined. If not, then this could increase the dog's agitation and be potentially damaging to the relationship between the pets.

A cat must never be confined in a cage while a dog or any animal that could be perceived as a threat is allowed to approach the crate. If the cat is confined and unable to escape this is more likely to increase its fear of the dog.

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