

## **CAT TO DOG INTRODUCTIONS**

Dogs can kill a cat very easily, even if they're only playing. All it takes is one shake and the cat's neck can break. Some dogs have such a high prey drive they should never be left alone with a cat. Dogs usually want to chase and play with cats, and cats usually become afraid and defensive. Use the techniques described above to begin introducing your new cat to your resident dog.

### **Swap Scents**

Switch sleeping blankets or beds between your new pet and your resident animals so they have a chance to become accustomed to each other's scent. Rub a towel on one animal and put it underneath the food dish of another animal. You should do this with each animal in the house.

### **Switch Living Areas**

Let your cat have free time in the house while confining your other animals to the cat's room. And vice versa. This switch provides another way for the animals to experience each other's scents without a face to face meeting. It also allows the newcomer to become familiar with her new surroundings without being frightened by the other animals, continue with this for several weeks. You can also use a physical barrier that allows visual access such as a screen door or a section of lattice work.

### **Avoid Fearful and Aggressive Meetings**

Avoid any interactions between your pets that result in either fearful or aggressive behaviour. If these responses are allowed to become a habit, they can be difficult to change. It's better to introduce your pets to each other so gradually that neither animal becomes afraid or aggressive. You can expect mild forms of these behaviours, but don't give them the opportunity to intensify. If either animal becomes fearful or aggressive, separate them, and start over with the introduction process in a series of very small, gradual steps, as outlined above.

### **Precautions**

If one of your pets has a medical problem or is injured, this could stall the introduction process. Check with your veterinarian to be sure that all of your pets are healthy. You'll also want to have at least one litter box per cat, and you'll probably need to clean all of the litter boxes more frequently. Make sure that none of the cats are being "ambushed" by another while trying to use the litter box. Try to keep your resident pets' schedule as close as possible to what it was before the newcomer's appearance. Cats can make lots of noise, pull each other's hair, and roll around quite dramatically without either cat being injured.

With your dogs:

### **Practice Obedience**

If your dog doesn't already know the commands "Sit," "Down," "Come" and "Stay," you should begin working on them. Small pieces of food will increase your dog's motivation to perform, which will be necessary in the presence of such a strong distraction as a new cat. Even if your dog already knows these commands, work with obeying commands in return for a tidbit.

### **Controlled Meeting**

After your new cat and resident dog have become comfortable eating on opposite sides of the door, and have been exposed to each other's scents as described above, you can attempt a face to face introduction in a controlled manner. Put your dog's leash on, and using treats, have

him either sit or lie down and stay. Have another family member or friend enter the room and quietly and sit down next to your new cat, but don't have them physically restrain her. Have this person offer your cat some special pieces of food or catnip. At first, the cat and the dog should be on opposite sides of the room. Lots of short visits are better than a few long visits. Don't drag out the visit so long that the dog becomes uncontrollable. Repeat this step several times until both the cat and dog are tolerating each other's presence without fear, aggression or other undesirable behaviours.

### **Let Your Cat Go**

Next, allow your cat freedom to explore your dog at her own pace, with the dog still on leash and in a "down stay." Meanwhile, keep giving your dog treats and praise for his calm behaviour. If your dog gets up from his "stay" position, he should be repositioned with a treat lure, and praised and rewarded for obeying the "stay" command. If your cat runs away or becomes aggressive, you're progressing too fast. Go back to the previous introduction steps.

### **Positive Reinforcement**

Although your dog must be taught that chasing or being rough with your cat is unacceptable behaviour, he must also be taught how to behave appropriately, and be rewarded for doing so, such as sitting, coming when called, or lying down in return for a treat. If your dog is always punished when your cat is around, and never has "good things" happen in the cat's presence, your dog may redirect aggression toward the cat.

### **Directly Supervise All Interactions between Your Dog and Cat**

You may want to keep your dog on leash and with you whenever your cat is free in the house during the introduction process. Be sure that your cat has an escape route and a place to hide. Keep your dog and cat separated when you aren't home until you're certain your cat will be safe.

### **Precautions**

Dogs like to eat cat food. You should keep the cat food out of your dog's reach (in a closet or on a high shelf). Eating cat feces is also a relatively common behaviour in dogs. Although there are no health hazards to your dog, it's probably distasteful to you. It's also upsetting to your cat to have such an important object "invaded." Unfortunately, attempts to keep your dog out of the litter box by "booby trapping" it will also keep your cat away as well. Punishment after the fact will not change your dog's behaviour. The best solution is to place the litter box where your dog can't access it, for example: behind a baby gate; in a closet with the door anchored open from both sides and just wide enough for your cat; or inside a tall, topless cardboard box with easy access for your cat.

### **A Word about Kittens and Puppies**

Because they're so much smaller, kittens are in more danger of being injured, of being killed by a young energetic dog, or by a predatory dog. A kitten will need to be kept separate from an especially energetic dog until she is fully grown, and even then she should never be left alone with the dog. Usually, a well socialized cat will be able to keep a puppy in its place, but some cats don't have enough confidence to do this. If you have an especially shy cat, you might need to keep her separated from your puppy until he matures enough to have more self-control.

### **When to Get Help**

If introductions don't go smoothly, seek professional help immediately (call our Behaviour Helpline at 403-723-6019). Animals 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 won't work and could make things worse.