

Cat to Dog Introduction

Dogs and cats can learn to get along with one another in the same household. They may never relish each other's company, but they can learn to tolerate each other. It is easier to introduce a puppy to a kitten since they are both young and have not had bad experiences (yet!) with the other species. However, even older dogs and cats can learn to live with each other with a few simple rules.

1. NEVER ALLOW YOUR PUPPY OR DOG TO APPROACH YOUR CAT. You may think that your dog just wants to be friends, but your cat will allow just so much sniffing before she decides to high tail it out of there, and with Fido right on her feline heels. Dogs like to chase small creatures, that is part of their hunting instincts, so it is not that your dog is being bad, he is following his instincts and besides, he may just find it plain old fun. Keep your dog in a down/stay position whenever your cat is in the room. That way Fido is under control while Fluffy can gain some confidence around him. If you do not have verbal control over your dog, meaning you can stop Fido dead in his tracks when you tell him NO or OFF, then keep him on a leash in the house until you can learn to verbally control him. Just let your dog drag a six to ten foot leash around the house behind him so you can stop him easily. You can also use a squirt bottle set on a straight stream (bullet) to douse Fido in the face should he try to get on the case of Fluff. Praise your dog as soon as he stops chasing your cat. If you cannot get a handle on Fido's behavior, a good quality training class can put you back in control of Fido so Fluffy can enjoy her home too! Do not allow your dog to chase ANY small animals, that will only undermine training Fido to leave your cat alone.
2. ALLOW YOUR CAT TO APPROACH YOUR DOG. By all means, allow Fluffy to walk up and investigate your dog but watch carefully so Fido does not attempt to chase your cat. By allowing this to happen, your cat will gain trust in you and your dog, that nothing bad is going to happen to her. Fluffy will begin to realize that sharing a house with a dog (who is not allowed to approach her) isn't so bad at all!
3. ALLOW YOUR CAT TO HIDE IF SHE WANTS TO. Do not force a meeting between the two. Allow Fluffy to investigate Fido on her own time, you just make sure Fido is not allowed to chase her at ANY time. Give her a quiet room to escape to with her food, out of reach of Fido as well. It may take as long as eight to ten weeks before your cat will adjust to sharing her home with a canine pal.
4. KEEP FIDO and FLUFFY SEPARATED WHEN YOU ARE NOT HOME. Until you feel that Fido is not going to terrorize your cat at any time, then do not leave them alone. Either put your cat in a room with the door closed (make sure your cat has her litterbox in there as well as some toys and water) or put your dog into confinement (such as a crate placed in your house).
5. REWARD ANY POSITIVE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE TWO. Every time Fido lets Fluffy approach him or lets Fluffy walk by him without chasing her, PRAISE, PRAISE, PRAISE such as saying in a happy voice "GOOODDD DOGGG! WHAT A GOOOD BOY YOU ARE!"
6. GIVE FIDO AN OUTLET FOR HIS CHASE BEHAVIOR. Teach Fido to chase a ball, Frisbee, tetherball or squeaky toy rather than your cat. Regular exercise can help your dog remain calm around your cat.

Information derived from the Santa Clara Humane Society. If you have any questions, problems or concerns, please call the Humane Society of Santa Clara Valley's Animal Behavior Helpline at 408/727-3383, ext. 753.