

Introducing A Cat To A Dog

Dogs usually want to chase and play with cats, and cats are usually afraid and defensive. You can use any of the techniques described below to begin the introduction. If conflicts between animals continue or worsen, contact a certified animal behaviorist for help.

1. If your dog does not already know the commands “sit,” “down,” “come,” and “stay” you should begin working on them. Little tidbits of food 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 the commands, work with obeying commands in return for a tidbit.
2. After the animals have become comfortable eating on either side of the door, and have been exposed to each other’s scents as described, you can attempt a face-to-face introduction in a controlled manner. Put your dog’s leash on, and command him to either “sit” or “down” and “stay” using food tidbits. Have another family member enter the room and quietly sit down with the cat on his or her lap. The cat should be offered some special tidbits. At first the cat and dog should be on opposite sides of the room. Repeat this step several times until both the cat and the dog are tolerating each other without rear, aggression, or other uncontrollable behavior.
3. Next, move the animals a little closer together, with the dog still on leash and the cat gently held in a lap. If the cat doesn’t like to be held, you can use a wire crate or carrier instead. If the dog gets up from the “stay” position, he should be firmly repositioned, and praised and rewarded for obeying the “stay” command. If the cat becomes frightened, increase the distance between the animals and progress more slowly. Eventually the animals should be brought close enough to allow them to investigate each other.
4. Although your dog must be taught that chasing or being rough with the cat is unacceptable behavior, your dog must also be taught how to behave appropriately, and be rewarded for doing so (e.g. sitting, coming when called, or lying down in return for a tidbit.) If your dog is always punished whenever the cat is around, and never has “good things” happen in the cat’s presence, your dog may redirect aggression toward the cat.
5. You may want to keep your dog on leash and with you when the 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 the dog and cat separated when you are not home until you are certain the cat will be safe.

Precautions: Dogs like to eat cat food because it is very high in protein and therefore very tasty. You should keep the cat food out of the dog’s reach. Why dogs like to “raid the litterbox” is not well understood, but eating cat feces is a relatively common behavior. Although there are no health hazards to the dog from this habit, it is usually distasteful to owners. Unfortunately, attempts to keep the dog out of the litterbox by “booby trapping” it will also keep the cat away as well. Punishment after the fact will **NOT** change the dog’s behavior. Probably the best solution is to place the litterbox where the dog cannot access it, such as behind a baby gate.