

Introducing a dog to a cat

Congratulations on adopting a dog from the BVSPCA! It is most important to understand that some dogs do fine living with cats while others do not and a big part of that comes down to how you introduce them. Even if you've had dogs that have successfully lived with cats in the past, please remember that each dog and each cat is an individual and therefore each introduction is different.

Initial Set Up and Introduction

When introducing a dog to a cat or vice versa, it is very important to think about how to do their first introduction. By letting a loose cat and an off-leash dog simply meet each other in an open room for the first time, you are not setting them up to succeed. We recommend having at least two people present in case things don't go how you planned.

Set Up:

- Create a "safe place" for your cat where the dog cannot get to such as a bedroom or a bathroom with a door that can be completely closed or a baby gate the dog can't jump over.
 - o This space should include your cat's litter box, food and water, and toys along with a place for them to hide.

Beginning Intros:

- For the first couple of days, keep the dog and cat separated and rotate each other's freedom throughout the house. This is to get each animal comfortable with each other's scent as well as help the dog adjust to the house. When no one is home the two animals should not be left alone, you should confine one or both animals.
- After a few days of getting them used to each other's scent, place baby gates at the entrance of the enclosed space if you aren't using them already.
- Keep your dog on a loose leash and allow them to approach the gate. Anytime your dog is sniffing in the area of the cat and then looks away or back at you, click or say "YES" and give your dog a treat. This teaches your dog that NOT fixating on the cat is what gets them treats.
 - o If your cat is hiding or avoiding the gate, start feeding your cat wet food or treats near the gate at the same time every day. You'll then utilize this time to train your dog with the cat.
 - o Make sure to keep training sessions with the dog short and positive! 15-20 minutes should be the max time training.
- If your cat is hyper focused on the cat or is reacting to the cat, calmly walk your dog further away from the cat and try again.
 - o Do not yell at or punish the dog for barking or seeming fixated at the cat as this increases the negative association of the cat.
 - o If your dog is still hyper fixated or reactive from a distance switch to giving the dog a treat every time it looks at the cat and try tossing the treat on the ground rather than from your hand. This allows your dog to "chase" the treat and be active rather than being stationary and frustrated.
- You'll want to work on this process over several days.

Building on Success:

- As you work on this over a few days, if your dog knows a down cue, you can start asking for a down near the cat and giving treats for looking at and looking away from the cat in the down position.



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- It's also a good idea to work on a recall with your dog in the presence of the cat. Allow your dog to approach the gate but remain a safe distance away before calling the dog to you and away from the cat for a high value treat.
- You can then begin working on teaching your dog to settle in the presence of the cat. Have these training sessions become less formal and instead, reward your dog anytime they're relaxing around the cat behind the barrier.

Removing Barriers:

When your dog is to the point where they can relax and notice the cat but not fixate on it, you may be ready to start removing the barrier. When you're at this stage it's important to go slow and prepare for possible setbacks. Keep your dog on leash and make sure there is an easily accessible place for your cat to hide. You also want to make sure that your cat can easily retreat to the "safe room".

When you first remove the barrier, have your dog in another room before removing the barrier. Feed your cat in the same place you normally would. While your cat is exploring the food/treats, bring your dog out on leash. Work on the same exercise of letting your dog look at the cat and the reinforcing them for looking away. Gradually allow your dog to get closer if your cat seems comfortable and your dog is not overly fixated or reactive. If your dog approaches the cat, allow him to sniff the cat before joyfully calling the dog away for a treat. Repeat a few times before ending the session and putting your dog away with a high value item such as a bully stick, bone, or stuffed Kong as a reward.

Continue this over several days until your dog can be in the same room while on leash without fixating or chasing the cat. You can then experiment with either using a longer leash (10ft or more) or with dropping the leash periodically. Make sure to practice calling your dog away BEFORE your dog begins to chase the cat or the cat becomes fearful/defensive. Again, short sessions are key here!

Need Further Help? Reach out to our behavior team at behavior@bvspca.org for further assistance.