



Pawsitive Experience
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Dog to Cat Introductions

Before Adopting

It is important to do your homework to find out whether your dog is a good candidate to live with a cat and vice-versa.

The best dog candidates are gentle dogs who are fairly mellow and can settle down easily. Most dogs have some prey drive, meaning they like to chase things, but if your dog is obsessed with chasing squirrels, he may not be the best prospect. Prey drive is hardwired and will never completely be trained out. Whether you are getting a purebred puppy or a mix, research the breed to find out if it does well with cats. For example, terriers were bred to chase down and kill small animals. This inbred prey drive is important for them to do their job. For these types of breeds, it is best to get a dog bred for show, not work, as the prey instinct is not as usually as strong in show dog lines.

When looking for a cat or kitten, find one that is mellow and easy going. You also want a cat who is not a “scaredy cat” and who runs at every little new sight or sound. Their fleeing can trigger the chase instinct in dogs. For some dogs, a cat that holds its’ ground and uses its’ claws will get instant respect, but keep in mind that this will make some dogs more aggressive, as they aren’t discouraged by a few cat scratches.

After Adopting

- Even before you bring a cat home, reinforce training with your dog. Recall, stay, and the leave it commands will be important tools to have.
- Have a safe room for your cat to go to. Baby gates and cat doors work well for this. Make sure there is a high safe place for them to go to. Make that an attractive place for them and put food, water and a bed there if possible.
- Until you see both the cat and the dog calming down and interacting, have your dog on leash, use a tie down (leash attached to a wall or heavy furniture), or a crate, and let your cat have the house to move about.
- Redirect your dog to Kong toys or chew toys so he loses interest in your cat.

- Give your dog lots of exercise. A tired dog is a good dog and this will help him relax.
- Reward all good behavior. Interrupt bad behavior. Bad behavior means they get put on leash, in their crate, or a tie down. You can use a time out and confine them alone for a while -- about 30 minutes. Harsh punishment will just make him resent the cat. Sometimes a squirt bottle works. If your dog starts to stalk and give chase, you can try to say “leave it” or “NO” and give a squirt in their face. You then must tell them what you want them to do, like lying on their bed, and redirect them with something else for them to do.
- Look for improvement in behavior. If you are not seeing improvement in a month and you see your animals are stressed or in danger, you may want to reconsider whether this relationship will work. A trainer with experience can help you.

I have first hand knowledge of all I described above. I got my Australian Shepherd at 13 months of age, cat tested her and she passed, but she became very aggressive towards my cat about the third day home. Lizzie also killed all the gophers in our yard, a bad sign meaning her predatory behavior was very intense. We worked it out and they live together now in harmony. You can get there, too.

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