

Introducing Fido to Fluffy or Living with Dogs & Cats

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. But 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 your dog 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 whenever your cat is in the room. That way the dog is under control while the cat can gain some confidence around him.

If you do not have verbal control over your dog, meaning you can't stop him 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 10-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 the dog in the face should he try to get on the cat's case. Praise your dog as soon as he stops chasing your cat.

If you cannot get a handle on the dog's behavior, a good quality training class can put you back in control of the dog so the cat can enjoy her home too!

Do not allow your dog to chase ANY small animals. That will only undermine training your dog to leave your cat alone.

2. ALLOW YOUR CAT TO APPROACH YOUR DOG.

By all means, allow your cat to walk up and investigate your dog but watch carefully so the dog 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. Your cat 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 your cat to investigate the dog on her own time; you just make sure the dog is not allowed to chase her at ANY time. Give her a quiet room to escape to with her food, out of reach of the dog as well. It may take as long as eight to 10 weeks before your cat will adjust to sharing her home with a canine pal.

4. KEEP THE DOG AND CAT SEPARATED WHEN YOU ARE NOT HOME.

Until you feel that your dog is not going to terrorize your cat at any time, do not leave them alone. Either put your cat in a room with the door closed (make sure your cat has her litter box 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.

Everytime the dog lets the cat approach him or lets the cat 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 YOUR DOG AN OUTLET FOR HIS CHASE BEHAVIOR.

Teach your dog to chase a ball, Frisbee, tether ball or squeaky toy, rather than your cat. Regular exercise can also help your dog remain calm around your cat also.

