

Introducing dogs and cats can be a rewarding experience when done with patience and care. With proper and positive introductions, many dogs and cats can form strong, positive relationships, bringing joy and harmony to the household. Over time, they can learn to respect each other's space, and with a little guidance, they can even become the best of companions. It's all about giving them time to adjust, creating safe spaces, and celebrating their unique personalities.

Bringing the New Pet Home

Once home, the introduction process has to be as slow and well-planned as possible.

- The mindset of “letting them work it out,” while it may have worked for some, it is not only impractical but also inhumane.
- The first step is to establish a safe space for your newcomer and practice a scent tour.
 - A safe space can be defined as a secure separate room where the new animal can rest, eat, and relax.
 - You can do this by swapping out each other's blankets, bedding or toys, and/or switching places for the animals to get used to each other's scent.
- Allow the animals to interact through the door **for at least a week**.
 - Have them engage in eating at the same time behind opposite sides of a door, gate or other barrier for the week.

Now that your new pet has a temporary place to call home, it's time to move on to the rules of engagement.

- Every step of the meeting should be controlled and supervised.
- Scent before sight is how they will get to know, and begin to trust, one another.
- As you are working on opposite side of the door feeding, as well as scent and sight swapping, remember to reward both parties for good behavior anywhere near the presence of the other.
- When introducing sight between both animals, use a gate or barrier.
- Next will be face to face introductions which should occur when your animals are at ease: loose body language, natural ear position, calm movements (If you cannot identify that your animals is at ease please call HAWS).

Face-to-Face Introductions

Once the pets appear more at ease, or when you can be home all day and are feeling relaxed, let the new animal out. Keep all dogs on a loose leash.

- Do NOT force the animals to be together! When first introducing pets, it would be a good idea to reward the dog with treats when it looks at the cat and doesn't react. Keep the dog on the opposite side of the room.
- Do not restrain the cat. Keep visits short and repeat this step several times. Allow the cat to explore the dog on their own. Make sure the cat has an escape route. You can also reward the cat with treats by throwing them towards the cat when you see appropriate behavior.
- Do NOT leave the pets alone together while they are acclimating. Supervise them at all times.
- It will help to provide the cat with an opportunity to get up above the dogs, so they do not feel threatened. A perch or cat tree can provide a vertical location for cats to observe a dog's behavior from a distance.

- Reward the dog for good behavior around the cat. If you are always punishing the dog when the cat is present, he will start to associate negative things with the cat.
- While working on these first steps, it is smart to practice training with your dog. Your dog needs to be well trained enough to reliably sit or stay when asked, even if the cat dashes across the room.

It is perfectly normal and expected that these animals growl, chase, swat and hiss at each other. This may go on for several days or weeks. Do not punish the animals: if it appears things are not getting better reach out to HAWS.

Do not expect your cats and dogs to become best friends overnight. Friendships take time to develop.

Is it Play or Are They Prey? Starting to Coexist

“Play” is not necessarily the same for a dog and a cat.

- Dogs are predators by nature and cats are sometimes their prey.
- The problem, however, is that much of our interaction with both dogs and cats involves heightening the prey drive - using wand toys with feathers or squeaky toys with soft insides.
- In expecting our dog to respect the cat, we now want to control that same prey drive by teaching the dog to discriminate chasing a cat from chasing a ball or toy! This may take some time.

A well-exercised dog: Teaching a strong “retrieve” with a toy or a ball is a way to help your dog expend energy and learn what is appropriate to chase.

- Dogs perceive rules for living with a cat indoors differently from outside: It is hard, close to impossible, to control the temptation to chase outdoors.
- Giving your dog enough physical and mental enrichment will also help with behaviors.
- A tired dog is a well-behaved dog.

Now we can proceed with coexisting in the home. Only proceed if the following are true:

- When the cat is on ground level ensure the cat is not puffy, hissing, howling and/or flicking tail when the dog is present.
- If the dog doesn’t display chase or vocal behaviors when face to face you can allow them to coexist.
- Ensure the cat has a route to disengage and be unbothered by the dog.

As guardian of both your cat and dog, they will look to you for love and care.

- You must show the cat that you are in control of the dog so that she will not be bombarded.
- You must show the dog that he is loved while he shares his family with this strange creature called the cat.
- If your animals aren’t getting along, you need to step back and give them time and their own safe spaces again. If you thought your process was slow...go even slower.

This situation is unlikely to get better without your positive intervention.

Behavior Resources: Consultants are available for private training or consultations (on-site or in-home) at (262) 542-8851, x 204.