

Cat-Dog Introductions

Children's cartoons have long taught us that cats and dogs are not friends. It is important to remember that cats are both predator and prey. Dogs, on the other hand, are predators. This is not to say that dogs are naturally aggressive towards other animals—just that they typically have a natural tendency to chase and hunt small, moving objects. These basic facts do not enable cats and dogs to be natural companions, but they certainly can coexist peacefully and grow to enjoy each other's company... with the right introduction.

- **Consider the Individual**

The most important thing to consider in any animal introduction is each individual animal. In this case, that means both the dog and the cat. When looking for your newest pet, pay close attention to the temperament and consider how it will compliment or clash with your established pet. For example, a timid cat will deteriorate with a hyper dog, and a rambunctious kitten will pester the life out of a geriatric dog.

- **Separate Initially**

New cats in a home need to be kept in a “base camp” room and dogs are best crate trained until they are reliably housebroken. Introduce the scent of the other animal to each other during this separation period. Let your cat and dog sniff each other's beds, etc. The more each pet can “meet” through senses without physically or visually meeting, the better.

- **ALWAYS SUPERVISE**

This cannot be overstated. Always, ALWAYS supervise your cat-dog interactions until you know they are trustworthy. Even then, supervise and separate. Keep your dog on leash while the cat is around so you can separate quickly in case of a scuffle. When you cannot supervise, keep the cat and dog in separate areas of the house and/or use baby gates to manage cat and dog spaces.

- **Prepare Each Pet**

Cats are territorially-sensitive. Since the dog will accommodate a good deal of the floor space, provide vertical space for the cat. Wall shelves, perches, and cat trees are crucial to give your cat a sense of ownership and security as the dog wanders below. Provide dog-free areas where your cat can access his/her needs (food, water, litter box, sleep). Elevated space, cat doors, and baby gates can allow for this. Prepare your dog through one simple word: Training! Enroll your dog in training classes and teach basic cues to keep your dog's attention and practice impulse control.

- **Reward Good Interactions**

Teach each pet that the other's presence is a good thing! Feed both cat and dog on opposite sides of a baby gate. This allows them to build positive associations with each other. Reward your leashed dog when he/she looks at the cat calmly and drop a cat treat when your cat looks at the dog. If good things happen when the cat/dog is present, then they are a wonderful thing that is good to be around!

If you have any issues with your cat-dog introduction/interactions- or any other behavioral issue- contact the HAWS Behavior Department at (262)542-8851 ext. 204. HAWS offers 2 complimentary behavior consultations for the life of your HAWS adoptee. We are here to help!