



Life Together – Cats & Dogs

Behavior exhibited in the shelter can be very different from the behavior that will ultimately occur in the home. This is true of so many behaviors but especially true of a dog when he meets a cat in the home. While shelters can try to test and predict a dog's attitude towards cats, what the dog may show here is very often misleading and inaccurate. For instance, while a dog may be calm just looking at a cat, what if the kitty runs or jumps? Those actions can trigger a very different response. And how does the dog respond to proximity, being closer to the cat instead of at a distance? Finally, some dogs are fine with resident cats but may chase cats that they see in the yard.



So, given we may know little about how your dog will *really* be with cats, the best bet is a careful introduction...

Making the Introductions

Introductions should be done carefully, safely, and gradually. Start with the animals strictly separated. Work on some training with your dog so that he will *sit* and *down* on cue. Also make sure that your kitty has had some time to acclimate to all parts of the house without the dog around before any actual introduction so that she knows places she can go when necessary.

After a few days of this, try a short introduction. The dog should be kept on leash or crated at all times in the presence of the cat. Do not allow the dog to chase, as it will give him opportunity to practice and perfect a potentially dangerous routine and could also prove quite harrowing for the cat. Instead, have a handful of tasty treats with you so that you can reward the dog for polite, quiet behavior as the cat moves about freely. Do *not* punish your dog for excited behavior, as he may start associating the cat with unpleasantness. Instead, ask for some basic calm behaviors such as *sit* or *down* and reward him. If, at any point, the cat becomes overly stressed or afraid, it can take hours for her to return to a state of calm. It's best to terminate the interaction and try again another day, next time more gradually.

Be the master of all initial interactions between the animals. This means keeping them separated when you are not home or not actively supervising. It can also be helpful to establish safe zones for the cat. Using baby gates with a cat door can be a great way of giving a cat an escape when needed. Cats particularly enjoy the refuge of vertical space, so I decided early on not to allow my dog on the furniture; this left the furniture as a safe zone to which the cats can escape should they want some distance. Cat trees or nooks in bookshelves also make good, high refuges.