

Introducing a New Dog to a Resident Cat

When you bring your new dog home do not let him have full access to the house. Confine him to one or two rooms using baby gates. Let your cat investigate this newcomer at her own pace. She will most likely sneak a peak and then run off. Eventually she may become brave enough to go up to the baby gate for a closer look; when she does, praise her and give her a treat for her daringness. Keep the dog confined until the cat is comfortably moving about the house and approaching the baby gate to investigate.

Next you will set up some controlled meetings. Put the dog on lead and walk him into the room where the cat is, or sit in a room with the dog on leash and entice the cat to come into the room with a dish of tuna fish. Do not allow the dog to act inappropriately toward the cat (barking, lunging). A mild correction ("no") and a request to "sit" should suffice. If the correction is too severe the dog will associate getting into trouble with the cat. Reward calm behavior from the dog using praise and food treats. The whole point of these sessions is for the dog to learn not to chase the cat and the cat to learn that she is safe around the dog.

If the dog continues to bark and/or lunge at the cat you may need to purchase a headhalter (gentle leader or Halti). A headhalter allows you to control the dog's movements and stop any barking at the cat. If you decide to use a headhalter, you will need to desensitize your dog to wear it first by putting it on several times a day - giving treats when its on. To use the headhalter during introductions - gently pull the leash towards you if the dog lunges at the cat, which stops the lunge. If the dog barks at the cat, gently put UP on the leash to tighten the nose loop of the headhalter to close his mouth and stop the barking. If done correctly this does not cause any harm to your dog - just gentle pressure to let the dog know that he/she is being inappropriate.

Expect a certain amount of hissing, swatting, and growling from your cat. Do not punish her for this or she will associate the dog with the punishment. Be patient, let her get used to the idea of this big goofy dog sharing her home.

Repeat these controlled meetings until both animals remain calm and relaxed with each other. Don't let the dog have free run of the house unless you are present until you are sure they are fine together. This could take weeks to months. Don't expect too much too soon.