



**ONTARIO  
SPCA**  
AND HUMANE SOCIETY  
PROTECTING ANIMALS SINCE 1873

# HELPING CATS AND DOGS

## to get along

**W**hile some people identify themselves as a “cat” or “dog” person - many of us are both! Still, some of us may be delaying a multi-species family, concerned by the familiar phrase “fighting like cats and dogs.” The good news is that with sensible adoption decisions, positive and rewarding introductions, good management and a little training, many cats and dogs can live together peacefully.



### **Playing matchmaker: Key ingredients to a successful relationship**

If you have a cat and are planning to adopt a dog, try to find an animal with a known history of being accepting of cats and/or other small animal species. While adopting a puppy and raising her to know only appropriate behaviour around other animals is an option, adopting a dog who has lived with cats previously is usually safest (as with all animals, be prepared for a period of introduction). Shelters often know if

a dog has successfully lived with a cat or other animal, or they will test to see how the pet behaves in the presence of one.

Do breed research before selecting a dog. A dog’s desire to chase something that moves is innate, hardwired behaviour and some breeds have been deliberately bred to be aroused by movement more than others. There are, however, exceptions to every rule. Many dogs traditionally associated with high prey drives - such as herding dogs, terriers, sighthounds and huskies - get along fabulously with cats, so keep an open mind and work together with shelter staff to find the right match.

If you have a dog and are planning to adopt a cat, help teach your dog to behave appropriately around cats before you bring your new animal home. Work on improving your dog’s response to “sit,” “down,” “stay,” “come” and “leave it,” so she can respond reliably with distractions. If you need help, join a positive reinforcement training class. To learn more about finding a positive reinforcement dog trainer visit [www.ontariospca.ca/2-behavtips-dog1.shtml](http://www.ontariospca.ca/2-behavtips-dog1.shtml).

### **Setting the mood: Good management essential**

To help your cat feel safe while adapting to the sounds and smells of your dog, confine your cat to a small area, such as a bathroom or office, with his litter box, bedding and toys. Make frequent visits to keep your cat company!

For the first couple of weeks, keep your dog on leash in the cat’s presence. When your dog is

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ready to be let off leash, it is essential to give your cat “dog-free” zones he can retreat to for safety if needed (use baby gates or other barriers that limit your dog’s freedom).

Cats are generally safe around puppies, as a well socialized cat can put a puppy in its place; however, shyer cats may not be so bold and need to be separated until the puppy is older and learns self-control. Kittens, because of their



small size, should not be left unsupervised around dogs.

### **Taking it slow: Creating positive experiences**

Throughout the introduction process ensure your dog is leashed, supervised, and treated for good behaviour (you can help your dog respond reliably to requests by using treats to “lure” her into a sit or down etc.). Slowly build up the time the animals spend together and keep it positive. If you are constantly stressed or punishing your dog when your cat is nearby, such as keeping the leash taut, popping the leash or yelling at her -

your dog may come to associate these negative experiences with your cat and redirect aggression towards him.

Help your pets become accustomed to each other’s scents by rubbing a towel on your cat and putting it under the food dish of your dog (and vice versa), and switching beds or sleeping blankets between your pets.

In addition, you can start feeding their meals on either side of the door to your cat’s temporary room. At first their dishes should be placed at least a few feet apart on each side. If they remain calm, gradually move the dishes closer until they can eat comfortably standing directly on either side of the door. If either animal becomes stressed, move the dishes further apart and repeat the process at a slower pace.

### **Making the introductions: Keeping it friendly**

Depending on your pets’ prior experiences, genetics and personalities, the introduction process described below may take as little as one session, or as much as three to four weeks to complete. Note: If you have multiple dogs, it’s best to introduce the cat to one dog at a time.

1. Pick a spacious room. Have a helper place your cat in his carrier on a table (or their lap). Enter the room from the opposite end with your dog on a flat collar and leash.
2. Feed tasty treats with your dog and cat at a distance that both are relaxed (not barking, lunging or fearful).
3. Decrease the distance slightly between your cat and dog and continue feeding treats.
4. Once both are comfortable when the dog is in close proximity to the cat in her crate, return to the far end of the room with your dog and open

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the crate door. Keep your cat restrained, ideally on a harness and leash.

5. Repeat the process of bringing them gradually closer together while feeding treats as long as both remain relaxed and comfortable (both are restrained).

6. Return to the original distance (cat and dog far apart) and release the cat (dog is still restrained). If at any time during this process either pet becomes stressed or fearful (refusing to eat can be a sign of stress), go back a step and proceed more slowly.

### **Giving love a second chance: Cat - chase = treats**

While it can be challenging to change your dog's inappropriate behaviours around cats, it is possible in many cases. The key is understanding that it's the association between the cat, and the dog's experience that cats often run away, that make cats such high-arousal chase objects. By following the steps below you can help your dog replace the "cat=chase" association with "cat=yummy treat from mom and dad" association.

1. Find a comfortable spot to sit and relax with your dog on leash. Have a helper appear with your cat at a distance that your dog can remain calm (does not bark or lunge). As long as the cat remains in view feed bits of super tasty treats to your dog.

2. Have your helper disappear with the cat. Immediately, stop feeding treats to your dog.

3. Repeat step one and two until your dog looks to you for a treat every time the cat appears. At this point you can reduce the distance slightly and repeat steps one and two. Repeat, repeat, repeat! Go slowly and increase the distance at



any point your dog becomes agitated. End each session on a successful note.

### **True love or rocky road?**

When your cat is comfortable enough around your dog to come out from her "safety zone" and mingle with family, and your dog is reliably calm around your cat, you can take off your dog's leash and allow them to start sharing their home together. Remember to supervise closely until you are confident they are safe together. How long it will take to get to this step will depend on the animals involved.

If introductions go poorly, early intervention and advice from a professional (such as a dog trainer or animal behaviourist), is recommended to increase the likelihood that the conflict can be resolved and to reduce the risk of injury from a pet fight. Do not attempt to punish any of your pets as this can easily make the situation worse and make the pets more aggressive or fearful. Fortunately, with professional guidance most pets can learn to live together peacefully in happy harmony. It's not uncommon for dogs and cats to develop a friendship that lasts a lifetime!