



## **Friends of Homeless Animals Advice Sheet**

### **Introducing Dogs and Cats**

Can dogs and cats live together in harmony? Sure, they can. What does it take?

A few helpful hints and LOTS OF PATIENCE!

If you have cats and you're bringing home a new dog for the first time, here are some hints.

1. Make sure the dog doesn't have a prey drive toward cats before you adopt. The dog is sure to be curious about cats, but if their first natural instinct is to attack or if they think of the cat as a food source, you're not likely to be able to train that instinct away. Test your prospective dog with cats first. It needn't be your cat, but see how the dog reacts to cats in general. At FOHA, be sure to ask to perform a "cat test" with any dog you may be interested in adopting. The FOHA volunteers are experienced in the signs to watch for and are happy to help!

2. It is beneficial if the dog already knows some commands -- sit, stay, off, leave it. If the dog has not had training, you need to start training from day one. You also need to make sure the dog understands that you are in charge -- you're number one dog in the pack order.



3. If you are thinking of adopting a dog, you are going to want to change some aspects of your cat's daily routine before the dog arrives. For example, you may need to move the cat's feeding area to a place where the dog won't be able to reach. The same holds true for the litter box. Make sure your cat is going to have some safe places where he/she can get away from this new doggy "intruder."

4. When you first bring your new dog home, let him/her take 10 to 20 minutes to explore the whole house. The dog is going to be curious about all the new sights and smells. After the dog has done some exploring, confine the dog to one room or floor of the house. This will allow your cat to have free reign of the house and investigate where the dog has been.

5. Your cat has smelled where the dog has been, so you might want to give the dog an opportunity to experience the cat's smell. The safest way is to pet your cat and then let the dog smell your hand. Safe for you, cat, and dog. You can let kitty sleep on one blanket and doggy on another; then exchange blankets so they can get a sense of the other's scent. Say your dog's name while you play with the cat and vice versa. You want them to associate the other animal's name with such pleasurable things as playtime, treats, and pets.

6. Yes, dog and cat will be living together, hopefully in harmony, but you need to take some time -- a lot of time -- to let them meet and get used to each other's presence. You may even want to wait as much as a day or more before letting cat and dog even see each other. Take a cue from your cat. He/she will let you know when curiosity has gotten the best of him.

7. For their first formal introduction, keep the dog on a leash. You need to be in control. Start with dog and cat at opposite sides of the room. As you move them closer together, maintain control of the dog. If the dog lunges toward the cat, command to sit. Reward the dog for compliance, even if you have to help him/her. Progress slowly and reward good behavior. Your new

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dog will come to learn that leaving the cat results in a positive experience, that leaving the cat alone is more enjoyable than chasing it.

8. Your cat might respond with hissing and spitting. As unfriendly as this may seem, it's a natural reaction for many cats. Don't scold kitty for lack of manners. Even if your cat bops the new family member on the nose, don't scold the cat. Use play and treats to keep the dog's mind off the uncomfortable encounter. Don't punish or give attention to the cat. It is your cat's right to protect itself and to let doggy know who he's dealing with.

9. Don't force the cat to meet your new dog until he/she is ready.

10. Make sure kitty can have some down time away from the dog. Stress for kitty can lead to both physical problems (such as urinary tract infections) and behavioral issues. Your patience and understanding will be key to a successful transition.

All of the above hints can help if you are presently a dog family planning to bring home a new cat. Now, I don't know of many cats with a prey drive to eat a dog for a snack, but some cats let fear or anxiety get to them when encountering dogs. Shelters might know if an adoptable cat has been around dogs before. But if you don't know your new cat's opinion of dogs and kitty's not telling you, there are a few things you can do to make the situation less "hairy."

1. Make sure your dog/dogs know the commands to sit, stay, leave it. Leave it is very important should your dog decide that the best way to introduce himself to the cat is by a tour of his mouth.



2. A new cat could be overwhelmed by the new surroundings, not to mention that barking, so confine kitty to one place with his/her food, water and litter box. There will be much interest on the opposite side of the door, so let pleasurable experiences, like petting, feeding, and treats, take place near the door, where the dogs are likely to congregate outside to try get a glimpse of the action behind the door.

3. Use tips above, such as exchanging blankets, to let each animal experience the new scent. Let the other animal's name be associated with pleasurable experiences.

4. As above, let the introduction take place slowly. Depending on your dog's level of training, you may choose to not use a leash. Remember, progress slowly and reward both species for good behavior.

5. Give kitty lots of time to acclimate to her new surroundings. A day or two under the couch does not mean failure. Give plenty of time before deciding this isn't going to work. You don't want a second-hand cat or dog to be bounced around to home number three or four or...

6. Always feed dogs and cats separately. Dogs will be particularly interested in cat food, as it is higher in protein and often quite smelly and tasty. Cats should not eat dog food, as it lacks some essentials they need and could lead to deficiencies.

7. Some dogs are overly interested in the cat litter box and its contents. To prevent unpleasant consequences, consider using a litter box with a top too large for the dog to investigate. You could put the litter box in a bathroom or laundry room and install a cat door large enough only for kitty to enter, thus keeping doggy at bay. Or use a screen or baby gate to ensure that kitty can get where he/she needs to be and dogs cannot enter.



Patience, patience, patience. That feeling that Fluffy or Fido has always been a part of your family may not come quite so quickly if you have other animals who have to acclimate themselves to the idea of a new fuzzy friend. If you are patient, though, most dogs and cats can come in time to live together. Some even live together in harmony. Some day when you least expect it, you might find your cat and dog snuggled up together on the couch. Then get out the camera for that Kodak moment. Who knows when they'll both be quiet at the same time ever again.

