



CAN YOU BRING A CAT HOME ...



... IF YOUR DOG THINKS THE CAT IS "PREY" OR HIS NEXT MEAL?

By Michael Wombacher

Cats and dogs don't get along, right? After all, who hasn't seen a dog chasing a cat across the street, or a brave cat, back arched, fur bristling, backing down some hapless mutt with a fiendish hiss and a swipe of its claw? Those examples alone should make it an

open-and-shut case. You have to choose: are you a dog person or a cat person?

Well, not necessarily. While there does appear to be a natural animosity between dogs and cats, it can be overcome. Let's explore incorporating a dog into a home with a resident cat.

Be assured that your cat won't like it. No sir, not one bit. However, he can learn, in due course, to deal with it, and even come to like it.

We should make a distinction between a puppy and an adult dog. In some ways, it's easier with a puppy since you probably won't have your pup just tearing around the house on its own. With your pup in a pen or on a leash with you (see my previous articles on housebreaking), your cat won't feel as threatened as with a large new dog tooling around the house. That means he is less likely to hide for six weeks than he might be with an older dog.

In this scenario, bring kitty near the puppy's pen or crate and offer him some irresistible delicacy in the presence of the pup. This will focus him on something positive and put him at ease. Closely observe your pup. If he's curiously sniffing and exploring, praise. If he's barking, jumping, and pawing at his pen, reprimand him by giving him a squirt of water or a taste deterrent like Bitter Apple right on his kisser. He has to learn to behave himself more calmly around kitty for trust to develop.

Once the pup can learn to act calmly, put him on a leash and bring him out with kitty. See how it goes. Are they curious about each other? Afraid? Wound up? If your pup is too rambunctious, try to settle him down by physically

holding him in a down position while kitty sniffs around him. Teach him to calm himself around kitty. If you are successful at this, you may find that over time they can develop a playful relationship. But take your time. Remember the tortoise and the hare – slow and steady wins the race.

If you are bringing an older dog into the house, much of the above still applies, but we have to be more careful and closely observe the dog. I'd suggest keeping the dog leashed initially whenever kitty is nearby. If he's the calm, unflappable, easygoing type, increase the interactions to the degree that kitty is up for it (it can take cats months to acclimate to the

presence of an uncouth mutt in its environs). If the dog is lunging, chasing, and out of control, correct him. This can be done with a squirt bottle (as above) or a training collar. Don't use shake cans, as they're likely to scare kitty to death.

If your adult dog or puppy is incorrigibly lunging or trying to chase the cat, try this: Bring both doggy and kitty into a room. Tether the dog to something solid so that he can make it no further than a third of the way into the middle of the room. Put kitty on the other side of the room and block of any escape routes under furniture or out of the room. Perhaps have kitty skip a meal or two before this encounter. Then put a plate of chicken, fish or anything else that your cat loves in the middle of the room. Cats are not stupid; Kitty will soon figure out that she can get to the good stuff but the dog can't, and soon she will try. Now, if your dog makes a move on the cat, he gets corrected repeatedly until he won't budge. In the meantime, Kitty will become more trusting of the situation and venture out. Over time and with repetition, the dog will learn to relax and not jump at the cat, and Kitty will come to relax around Fido. From that foundation, a nice relationship may well develop going forward.

Lastly, if it is clear that the adult dog you have brought home is powerfully prey-driven you have some tough choices to make. You have to be clear that the stakes are high. Prey instinct's purpose is to kill, and there is nothing positive that you can do to turn off or even dampen a dog's prey instinct.

In this case, only compulsion (read: force) will work reliably, all objections of "positive only" trainers notwithstanding. The question is, do you want to put yourself, your dog, and your kitty through that? Sometimes, as in the case of a new couple getting together (one with a cat, the other with a dog), it might be worth a try. But know that it's a rough ride and definitely hire a professional to help.

In sum, dogs and cats can and do get along famously; however, first introductions can be tough and take time. Be sensible and patient, and perhaps ultimately you too will be able to post cute videos of your dog and cat playing on YouTube. 🐾

About the Author:



Michael Wombacher has more than 20 years of professional training experience and his training approach focuses on channeling a dog's natural drives and instincts into behaviors acceptable in the human pack, primarily through the principles of positive reinforcement, as well as through methods that appeal to the dog's canine sensibilities. Visit www.doggonegood.org or email mike@doggonegood.org for more information.