

Congratulations and thank you for choosing to adopt a rescue dog. If you are reading this, chances are you also have a feline friend at home. The question is, will they get along?

Here at NCCR, Binx the cat has the honorable job of assessing each dog's compatibility with cats. If a dog passes Binx's test, this tells us that the dog has good self control and is a good candidate for a home with a cat, but that does not guarantee that the dog will be good with *all* cats. Cats, like dogs, are unique. Has your cat ever been around a dog? If so, how did your cat react? While it does help if your cat has been around dogs before, your new dog will look, smell, and act differently from any dog your cat may know or have lived with.

Most cats will be afraid or cautious of a new dog. This may result in hissing, raising its hair and arching its back, attempting to scratch the dog, and running away. All of these reactions can illicit the prey/chase instinct in a dog. This is where most dog and cat introductions go awry.

So what can be done to help smooth the way to a good relationship? Here are some tips to help you successfully introduce your new pets:

Safety first. Until they've become accustomed to each other, be sure to keep them separated if you can't be there to supervise. Arousal or over-excitement in a dog can easily tip over into aggression and a dog may injure or even kill a cat. A cat's claws also pose a danger to a dog's eyes, especially if the dog is a small breed or a puppy.

- Help them become familiar with each other in small steps. Animals grow accustomed to the sight, sound, and smell of each other as they get to know one another. It's that familiarity that leads to acceptance.
- When you first bring your dog home, keep your cat in a closed room or behind a baby gate. Let the dog sniff and explore the places the cat usually occupies. After an hour or two, reverse the situation and confine the dog or take him outside while the cat checks out the dog's scent. Repeat this process several times throughout the first day or two.
- The first time you let the cat into the same room with the dog, keep the dog on a leash so that he cannot rush or chase the cat. Encourage the dog to turn his attention to you by using small treats or a favorite toy as a reward. The goal is to create a positive association... see the cat, look to Mom or Dad for positive reinforcement. But be careful not to inadvertently reward the dog for harassing the cat. If he lunges at the cat just before he turns his attention back to you, ask him to sit or lay down first, and *then* reward that behavior.

Management is the key to success. If the dog is allowed to threaten or frighten the cat--or in some cases the dog may be frightened of the cat--then it will take longer to create harmony. Let them progress at their own pace; never hurry or force the situation. Our hope is that your chosen companion animals will be with you for a very long time and that is definitely worth the extra effort.