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Dog Care

Introducing A New Dog to Your Cat and Other Small Pets

Many dogs live peacefully with other animals, such as cats, rabbits, birds, and rodents. Not all dogs, however, are suited for a multi-species household. Introducing a dog to a small animal is potentially risky and needs to be planned carefully.

Your Best Bet

You can be more confident that a dog will accept other animals in the home if the dog has lived with other animals in the past. Puppies who were raised with cats or other small pets are much less likely to prey on them. For instance, if your puppy grows up with rabbits, as an adult he will be less likely than a dog who did not grow up with them to chase and kill a rabbit. However, some dogs will learn to accept a particular rabbit, but not other rabbits. There are also dogs who are completely trustworthy with the family cat, but would chase and kill any other cat.

Warning Signs

Watch for certain behaviors in the dog that indicate he might not be compatible with small animals:

- The dog has killed another animal.
- The dog is aggressively possessive over food, toys, chew bones, or even the water bowl.
- When on walks, the dog is obsessed with chasing squirrels, rats or rabbits.
- When excited, the dog becomes unruly, uncontrollable, and doesn't listen.
- When on walks, the dog stares intently at other animals, and perhaps even stalks them.

Introduce Gradually

For introductions, the general rule is to proceed slowly! Enlist the assistance of a family member or friend so there is a person to control each animal in the room. If you don't have someone to help, confine the small pet (cat or other small pet) in a cage or behind a secure gate. Have the dog on a 4- or 6-foot leash. Have tasty treats (chicken, liver, cheese, etc.) for the dog within reach. Practice each step for a minimum of 10-15 minutes. Remain at this level until the dog is able to stay relaxed and focused on you for at least five minutes at a time. If the dog is unable to remain calm do not progress to the next step.

1. Have the small pet settled in one room, at the far end from the door, attended by your assistant. Bring the dog in the room and remain by the door. Sit down on the floor with the dog and engage the dog to interact with you. Ask the dog to sit, stay down, and any other commands he might know. Keep his interest. Praise him for paying attention to you. Stroke him if this helps him to relax. If the dog is more interested in the other pet and will not attend to you, use treats to entice the dog to turn away from the pet to face you.
2. With the dog paying attention to you, have your assistant entice your small pet to walk a few feet back and forth. If the pet will not move willingly, the assistant can support the animal comfortably and hold him just above the floor. Move the animal a short distance. Permit the dog to look, and then try to redirect the dog back onto you. Use treats if necessary. Help the dog to stay calm and relaxed, even while watching the pet move about.
3. Move the dog one to two feet closer to the pet. See that the dog stays calm for five minutes, and then have the pet move around a bit. The dog should look at the pet while remaining calm, and then, turn and listen to you while you talk to him. Praise and/or offer

him a treat. Allow the dog to look at the pet again and gain his attention back to you. Continue until the dog is comfortable looking at the pet and looking back at you, all the while remaining calm and controlled.

4. If possible, allow the pet to move freely about the room. Do not do this if the pet is inclined to approach you. Can the dog still remain calm and relaxed? Can the dog see the animal moving about and still switch his attention back to you? If so, great! If not, stay at the previous step longer. If, at any time, the pet attempts to approach within the dog's range, have the assistant move the pet away. To be safe, you do not want the dog and pet sniffing for the first time while the dog is sitting or lying next to you, especially if he knows there are treats nearby.

5. Stand up and allow the dog to move to the end of his leash. Continue to speak to him intermittently to be sure he will pay attention to you. If the pet approaches the dog, allow them to sniff noses. Keep the dog's leash loose so he doesn't feel that he is restrained. However, be very vigilant because if the dog lunges at the animal, you need to be close enough to pull the dog away before contact is made. If the other pet is so small or fragile, and/or the dog so large or powerful that the dog could kill it or inflict serious damage with one bite, have the dog wear a muzzle when they first meet. While the dog is sniffing the pet, call him to you. If he turns and comes away from the pet, fabulous! If he needs a bit of coaxing, that's okay--as long as he is able to focus on you once you get his attention. If the dog becomes totally engrossed in the animal and won't come away, then go back to a previous step and work at that level a bit longer before trying this step again.

6. The final step is to allow the animals to interact more freely. Begin with short periods of time together, especially after the dog has been well exercised. Keep a close eye on the dog. To be absolutely risk-free, muzzle the dog until you are confident that he will not harm the other pet. As you gain more confidence, give the animals more time together. Make sure there are plenty of escape routes and safety refuges for the small pet, such as kitty condos, shelves and areas behind furniture to which the dog cannot reach.

7. We've heard numerous anecdotes of dogs who were fine with a small pet until the animals were left alone together. We recommend that you keep the dog crated or otherwise confined away from the other pet during your absences. It is not sufficient to keep the small pet caged and the dog loose. The dog could harass and frighten the pet, or even break into the cage.

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