

Behavior FAQ: Dogs and Cats That Don't Get Along

By Suzanne Hetts, PhD, CAAB, and Daniel Estep, PhD, CAAB, of Animal Behavior Associates, Inc., reprinted with permission from HelpingKitty.com

Dogs that haven't been raised with cats usually see them not as friends, but as prey. Cats that are unfamiliar with dogs are usually afraid of them. The best chance dogs and cats have of learning to be friendly with each other is if they are raised with or socialized to each other before 4 months old.

If your dog and cat are having trouble getting along, your dog is probably chasing or threatening your cat. If your cat runs away, this usually excites your dog even more. It's rare to have a cat who can successfully intimidate a dog, but it does happen.

When introducing cats and dogs, the first priority is to ensure the cat's safety. While cats may scratch dogs, they usually don't kill them, but dogs can, and have, killed cats. While you are allowing your dog and cat supervised contact with one another (perhaps your dog is on a leash), to ensure your cat's safety you may need to muzzle your dog. If your dog is muzzled and the introduction goes wrong, this will protect your cat from being bitten.

Many problems can be prevented with proper introductions that are done very gradually. Never put a dog and cat together and let them work it out. Instead, keep your dog and cat separated except when you are working on the steps in the introduction process. Introductions must be micromanaged and there is no set time for how long they take

It's important to monitor both pets' quality of life. It's not okay for your cat to be in danger or too afraid to come out of the basement or the bedroom for fear of being harassed or harmed by the dog. Your dog should not be constantly on edge, trying to find the cat.

These situations call for carefully managed introduction or reintroduction programs and providing your cat safe house time with your dog confined or outside in a safe yard.

FIND A BEHAVIOR CONSULTANT TO HELP

Many problems are easily corrected through modification training, particularly if problems are addressed early. Find an animal behavior consultant in your area through one of the following Web sites: [American College of Veterinary Behaviorists](http://www.acvb.org), [International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants](http://www.iaaap.org) or [Animal Behavior Society](http://www.abssociety.org). Learn more by reading "Guidelines for Choosing a Trainer or Behavior Consultant."