



## Cat/Dog Households

People often wonder: Can pitbulls live with cats? The answer is "yes!" as many can and do. Certainly, there are some dogs whose prey drive is too strong, but for many dogs, pitbulls included, a multi-species household is possible, given the establishment of solid obedience, clear expectations, and training for both species.

The following information offers suggestions for successfully managing a cat/dog household. However, it is important to recognize the differences between the two species, their body language and perception of each other. I have cats and dogs, both equally important to me and worth training to behave around one another. I sometimes hear of people allowing their dogs and cats to do things that are unsafe for both species. Unsafe behavior includes: allowing the dog to pick up, mouth, or paw at the cat, allowing the dog to chase, bark, or lunge at the cat, or allowing the cat to swipe at, nibble, or bite the dog. It is too easy for a dog to injure a cat, even during play. In addition, owners need to remember that cat scratches and bites can cause serious injury or illness to a dog.

Here are some ways to safely desensitize cats and dogs to each other and integrate a multi-species household...

**Consider crating your dog in a high traffic area of the home.** Give him/her something to do in the crate like a stuffed Kong or meaty bone to chew on. Make sure the crate door is secure. Allow the cat to enter the room and see the dog in a non-threatening manner (i.e., not moving).

**Treat your cat for being confident** and exploring the room while the dog is in the crate. Don't make the cat come in, let him/her explore and 'find' you in the room with dog crated and treats abounding. You might feed the kitty a dish of yummy canned food in the presence of the dog while the dog is crated.

**Have the dog on leash** with you holding the leash, allow him/her to see kitty from the next room. Click and treat the dog for good behavior. Good behavior means: quiet, calm, and relaxed. The dog can look as long as he is quiet and/or in a relaxed posture. Do not allow or reward whining, screaming, barking, lunging, or stiff posturing. For a more detailed explanation of desensitizing a pitbull to a cat, see Cinimon Clark's recommendation, [click here](#).

**Make good things happen for BOTH animals** when they are in the room together. As the cat and dog become desensitized to each other and you are comfortable with them both loose, make sure to reinforce calm, appropriate behavior with praise, treats, favorite toys, or a combination of these reinforcers.

**Use baby gates** to keep the dog in one area and let the cat roam around the house. If the dog was added into an existing cat household, the house should not become the 'dog's house' now that he/she arrives. I want to note that the use of baby gates for separation is for when you are home; please do not use baby gates to separate them when you are not there. Gates can too easily be jumped, pushed over, or chewed through by a pitbull.

**Teach a solid sit/stay.** Reinforce the dog for staying still around the cats. The cats need to see that the dogs are not always these big scary monsters chasing them or moving.

**Teach a solid down/stay.** Again, you are reinforcing the dog for 'still' behavior around the cats. Teaching these cues can also help at feeding times. If you feed all the animals at the same time and in the same location, cue the dogs to 'down' and 'stay' for their food. Doing so will help reinforce your dog's basic obedience and also prevent the dogs from eating the cats' food. Remember to keep uneaten cat food out of the dog's reach as the ingredients and nutritional requirements for cats and dogs are different

**Teach a 'watch me' or some other attention cue.** 'Watch me' can be useful, too, to redirect the dog's attention to YOU and not the kitty.

**Keep litter boxes in an area that is accessible to the cats but not the dogs.** This is a common problem and sets you up for two issues: 1) dogs that eat cat poop, and 2) cats that avoid the litter box because the dogs ambush them. You might use a baby gate to separate the room where the litter boxes are so the cats can jump the gate to get to them, but the dogs cannot.

**Do not allow any playing between the species.** Some people have cats and dogs that truly do play with each other, but I do not feel it is safe. It is too easy for a medium sized dog to grab and accidentally kill a cat, even during play. Behaviors that I do allow between dogs and cats are: gentle sniffing or licking, laying in the same room, or sleeping with each other.

**Teach the dog to respect kitty things.** Dogs may not eat from cat bowls, may not chew cat toys, cat towers, or cat beds. Remember, behavior that you allow, you are essentially training. If a dog picks up a cat toy or cat item, cue the dog to 'drop it' and replace it with a dog toy.

**It may be useful to separate the species at times.** For example, the dogs may sleep in certain rooms or crates at night, which gives the cats free roam during the night. When owners are at work, the dogs are crated, again, giving the cats time to 'be cats' without dogs around.

Some additional considerations:

If you are adopting a pitbull from rescue, ask the rescue organization or shelter if the dog has been tested around cats. Some organizations include cat-testing during their temperament evaluations.

Remember that prey drive in dogs is normal; however, dogs may display different degrees of prey drive, some more than others. Even if your dog is good with your cats in the home, do not assume that he/she will be good with all cats or outside cats.

Always opt for safety! Separate your dog from your cats when you are not there to supervise.

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