



Desensitizing a Cat-Aggressive Dog

What you need:

- One cat-aggressive pit bull
- One very mellow cat
- Lots of treats
- A Gentle Leader head collar
- A good strong, leather leash
- A lot of patience!

I always do this in my living room with no other distractions. I'll put my kitty in a far corner. (My kitty will hold a down stay, but you can give your kitty a bowl of wet food to keep them in place if you want. This will also counter-condition the cat to aggressive dogs!) I'll then bring the dog down the hallway towards the kitty. You must stay calm! When they start to freak out, I'll just walk backwards down the hall without saying a word and without any leash corrections. I'm always facing the cat. I don't turn around at all.

When you walk backwards with a dog on a head collar, their face turns toward you. There's your opportunity to reward them. I don't give commands and I don't ever reprimand. This is desensitizing, not obedience! If you do this every day, a couple times a day, you'll be amazed at the results! (Just be careful the cat doesn't get too fat from eating all that wet food!)

When you get to the point where the dog is getting used to the pattern (if I aggress, we go the other way), what you will be looking for is unsolicited looks. You want the dog to turn and look at you before the leash gets tight. That's when you know you're making progress! The whole point to this is so the dog gets the pattern. When they see a cat, you want them to look at you to get the treat, not look at the cat.

Get closer only when the dog isn't reacting as intensely. Also, don't do this for more than a few minutes at a time at first. This is intense stuff for dogs! This also does not cover outside cats! If they see a running kitty outside, they're gonna go after it! Staying calm and having patience is key.

And finally, is this a surefire way to get your dog to love cats? No way. But, can you get your dog to the point of being in the same room with that particular cat and not freak out? Yes, if you're diligent about it.

By Cinimon Clark, TurnaroundTraining