

Helping Cats and Dogs Live Together Safely

Cats and dogs don't necessarily have to fight like ... well, like cats and dogs! The following guide will help you set up a harmonious home for co-housed cats and dogs – from environmental modifications, to tips on improving interactions, to proper pairings.

Modify the Space

Rearrange and add to the animals' living space in a way that offers multiple exit strategies and high-rise escapes for the cat. If the cat has no choice but to dash out of the room when she feels unsafe, this can prompt the dog to chase her and make things worse. Dogs instinctually pursue fast, furry things moving erratically away.



A high-rise highway

- ❖ Strategically set up elevated surfaces in interconnected, key areas around the home that allow the cat to move around out of easy reach of the dog.
- ❖ Elevated areas include cat-navigable shelving, perches, cat trees, and human furniture pieces modified for easier feline travel, such as securing a dresser or bookcase to the wall with a nonslip surface fastened on top.

Hiding spots

- ❖ Give the cat feline-only accessible areas that allow her to eat, drink, rest, play, potty, and simply be a cat in peaceful solitude.
- ❖ Options include playpens, cat-only gates, and modifications made to doors that let the cat through while keeping the dog out.
- ❖ Heavy furniture, such as a couch, may be pulled out just far enough from the wall that the cat can easily duck behind it where a larger dog cannot fit.
- ❖ Encourage the cat to hang out in their cat-specific spaces or high perches by placing enticements, such as scattered cat treats or catnip throughout the day. Also consider a rotation of toys or exploration areas, such as empty cardboard boxes, in the cat's feline oasis.

Secure the Resources

Meal time

Reduce stress among pets by keeping important resources secure and separate. Feed animals in separate spaces, such as having the cat go to their cat-specific room with the door closed or atop a cat tree where the dog cannot reach, or place the dog in their playpen or crate during mealtime.

Potty time

Ensure the cat feels secure in their elimination areas. Keep all litterboxes well out of the dog's reach. Avoid enclosed litterboxes that trap the cat inside and increase vulnerability to being ambushed when they come out. Instead, offer open-top litterboxes that offer a full view of their surroundings to allow them to feel safe while they are particularly vulnerable. Scoop litterboxes frequently to avoid enticing a poop-eating dog.

Individual time

Ensure that both dogs and cats feel fulfilled and at ease in the home by offering individual attention and quality time with each pet separately. Offer both cats and dogs feel-good enrichment activities that direct the animals' energy toward productive pursuits. This can mean feeding meals from food puzzles rather than the bowl, and separate play sessions for dogs and cats that allow both to express excess physical and mental energies in positive ways.



Suitable pairings

It's vital to ensure the cat is safe as they're more likely to be injured or even killed, but also consider the dog's safety. If threatened, cats may lash out, bite, or swat at the dog in self-defense. If a cat scratches the dog's face, the dog's eyes are particularly vulnerable to injury – especially flatter-faced dogs with shortened muzzles and protruding eyes.

Close, ongoing supervision helps you intervene early. The dog can pose an unintentional threat by moving too quickly, looming over the cat, or cornering the cat. The dog may be clipped on leash, moved to a different area, or have their attention redirected and rewarded elsewhere to offer the cat needed space.

Not all cats and dogs are compatible companions, and that's okay! In some situations, it's simply too distressing and dangerous for animals to live together, and they're likely safer and less stressed living apart.