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Introducing a New Dog to a Resident Cat

When you bring your new dog home do not let him have full access to the house. Confine him to one or two rooms using baby gates. Let your cat investigate this newcomer at her own pace. She will most likely sneak a peek and then run off. Eventually she may become brave enough to go up to the baby gate for a closer look; when she does, praise her and give her a treat for her daringness. Keep the dog confined until the cat is comfortably moving about the house and approaching the baby gate to investigate.

Next you will set up some controlled meetings. Put the dog on lead and walk him into the room where the cat is sitting. Walk him around the room on a loose lead (a tight lead will transmit your anxiety about the situation to the dog). Do not allow the dog to act inappropriately toward the cat (barking, lunging, chasing). A mild correction (“no”) and a request to “sit” should suffice. If the correction is too severe the dog will associate getting into trouble with the cat. Reward calm behavior from the dog using praise and food treats. In addition, give an extra special treat to the cat (tuna works well) when the dog is in the room to help make a positive association in her mind about the presence of the dog.

Expect a certain amount of hissing, swatting, and growling from your cat. Do not punish her for this or she will associate the dog with the punishment. Be patient; let her get used to the idea of this big goofy dog sharing her home.

Repeat these controlled meetings until both animals remain calm and relaxed with each other. Don't let the dog have free run of the house unless you are present until you are sure they are fine together. This could take weeks to months. Don't expect too much too soon.