Dog and Cat Introductions

- Safety first. Make sure to have the dog under your control, either on a leash or with a secure barrier (like a baby gate) in place. Ideally, you should have two people present for the introduction – one for each animal – in case they need to be quickly separated. Make sure the cat has access to an escape route, such as higher ground outside the dog's reach or a hiding spot the dog cannot enter.
- Pay attention to body language. Watch the cat for signs of irritation such as pinned ears, stiff posture, swishing tail, hissing, or growling. Most dogs will instinctively want to chase a fleeing cat, so do not approach if the cat appears panicked or cornered. Watch the dog for stiff posture, a hard stare, barking, whining, or lunging. If the dog is too fixated on the cat to listen to you, increase the distance between them. If the dog greets the cat calmy and politely (or ignores the cat completely), be sure to reward them with lots of praise and treats!
- **Work on desensitization.** If the dog is too interested in the cat to remain calm during a face-to-face introduction, you can gradually decrease their reaction by putting the cat in a separate space with a barrier (like a secure baby gate) in place. Allow the dog to view the cat through the gate, then redirect the dog's attention onto you with toys, treats, or cues. Make sure to reward the dog with praise and treats for refocusing their attention! Continue these short, structured viewings. If the dog is too excited to focus on rewards and distractions, close the door completely and work on scent acclimation first. Feed both animals on either side of the door to help them associate each other's smell with something good (food). Swap out blankets, bedding, or brushes between the pets so they can become acclimated to the new scent without the pressure of visual overstimulation. Once the dog is no longer fixated on that smell on the other side of the door, you can re-attempt visual introductions.
- **Praise and reward!** Continue to reinforce the dog's good behavior by praising and rewarding them whenever they have a good interaction with the cat (ignoring the cat completely counts!). Some dogs may respond more positively with a specific cue (such as "leave it") or mark (like "yes!" or the sound of a clicker). Take note of what

the dog responds to most positively and be prepared to adjust your methods accordingly.

- **Monitor interactions closely and keep separate unless supervised.** You want to keep all interactions positive and controlled. Make sure the cat has access to a variety of “safe zones” the dog cannot reach. Most dogs are larger and stronger than most cats and can cause serious harm without meaning to, so be ready to separate the two animals if you notice signs of agitation or over-excitement. And always be ready to dole out lots of praise and treats for positive interactions!
- Be patient. Every dog and cat is different, and how quickly they adjust to one another depends on their individual personalities, comfort levels, the rewards you use, and how frequently you practice. Some dogs take to living with cats right away; others may take days, weeks, or months of training; and some dogs may never be able to safely live with cats at all. The comfort and safety of both animals should always be your top priority.