

Fighting Like Cats and Dogs

Yorkshire Terrier hates all things feline.

By September Morn

Q. Our 4-year-old Yorkshire Terrier, Zoe, is a precious dog and we love her dearly, but she hates cats. Our daughter — who takes care of Zoe when we travel — has a kitten and had an older cat who died recently. Zoe fought all the time with the older cat. Although he cut her several times with his claws, Zoe went back for more. I think Zoe would kill the kitten if she could get a hold of it.

Nothing we've tried works. We are desperate, as our daughter is the only one we have to watch her when we're away. Any help would be appreciated.

Also (and this is our fault) Zoe will not eat dog food — only boiled chicken. We've been told if we don't feed her anything but dog food she will eat it when she gets hungry enough. I tried that last week for three days and she ate nothing. I finally gave in and gave her chicken. Any ideas?

A. If you really think Zoe might harm your daughter's kitten, you need to arrange some way to keep the pets separated so neither gets hurt. It's not reasonable to put the kitten in danger, so Zoe may need to stay confined with baby gates or a folding pen in one area of your daughter's home so the kitten can move safely through the house. It is, after all, the kitten's home and, if Zoe is aggressive, the kitten must be protected from her.

As for feeding Zoe nothing but boiled chicken: Though your motivation for doing this is your love for her, you're actually putting her health at risk. It's not necessary to feed your dog commercial dog food if you don't want to — many people feed their dogs a home-prepared diet. The problem is that a one-item diet like the one you're feeding Zoe provides very poor nutrition for a dog. A pure-meat diet might seem like the natural way to feed a dog, but that's not true. Pure muscle meat provides protein and some fat, but it doesn't provide all the nutrients a dog needs for maintaining good health. There are balanced, human-grade foods, formulated for dogs, available in the frozen food case at many pet stores. You might try feeding Zoe one of those. Or if you choose to feed her home-cooked meals, study up on the nutritional requirements of dogs and make sure you balance her diet to provide all the nutrients she needs.

Incidentally, there is some evidence from nutritional studies that dogs fed overly-high levels of protein can tend to become more aggressive. From this we might even suspect that Zoe's diet could be contributing to her high level of aggression with cats.

So, fix Zoe's diet, buy your daughter some baby gates, and have a nice trip!