

Getting To Know You: Dogs & Cats

Firm verbal commands are a must when introducing dogs and cats.

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Q: My husband and I just rescued a 5-year-old, male Giant Schnauzer about two weeks ago. We have three cats in the house. They have seen each other in passing, but we have been keeping the cats and dog separated. At times, my husband will hold a cat while the dog is on a leash. The dog has learned that if he barks, the cat will take off. Do you have any suggestions on how we can assist their process of getting used to one another?

A: Training is not optional with this breed. If you cannot verbally direct his behavior in this scenario, addressing any other problem is an exercise in frustration.

The cats are part of your family and no one should be aggressive toward them human or dog. The "Leave it" command is vital here.

Once your basic training is in-line, set up the following situation: With the dog on lead, walk him into the same room with one of the cats but at least 10 feet away. Do not hold the cat, and ensure it has a clear escape route. Encourage the dog to remain calm by rewarding him with praise and treats. The equation you are trying to teach: cat = good things. If the dog becomes too focused on the cat, use your "Leave it" command, move away from the dog, and then reward him when he obeys.

The experience of being in the same room together should be a pleasant one for your cats and the dog. Remember: Set up the scenario for your dog's success, not failure. You can always move the animals closer in the next session. Do not rush things.

When you are away from the house, secure and separate the cats and dog. Most dogs learn to respond beautifully around other pets when trained and supported by the owner. If you continue to have a disobedient dog, seek professional help to ensure this adjustment goes well.