



Greyhounds and Cats

I would love to have a £1 for every time someone has said to me that ***“I can’t have a Greyhound because I have a cat”*** Believe me; I would have had a lot of money by now to rescue more greyhounds!

Greyhounds can and do live with cats. OK, greyhounds are sight hounds and are trained to chase small, fluffy things on a rail. But think of it like this: If you rescued another breed of dog at the age of 4, 5, and 6 or even 7 years old that had spent its entire life in kennels with only the same breed of dog and humans for company, how do you think they would react to seeing a cat for the first time? Exactly! Any dog who has never been socialised with cats will suffer from the same problems. The only difference between a greyhound and any other breed is that greyhounds are extremely fast and could catch a cat if it wanted to.

I will stand by my statement that I believe that 90% of greyhounds will learn to live with **“their own”** cats but quite likely may not accept anyone else's. This includes your neighbour's cat that pops in to use your flower bed on regular occasions! **I am convinced that greyhounds perceive the cats in their house as part of their pack and they will accept them given time.**

Having said all this, cat introductions should not be entered into lightly. Put a great deal of thought into it - and I really mean this. The majority of greyhounds do have the potential to live with cats but it takes commitment, time, patience, persistence and confidence from you. Just because the greyhound lunges for the cat during the first couple of days, do not be put off. You must be extremely vigilant 24 hours a day, 7 days a week until you are 100% confident that the greyhound has lost interest in your cat(s).

1. Just before you come to collect your greyhound from the kennels, ensure that your cat is indoors and cannot get out. The cat should be kept inside for an absolute minimum of 10 days. The purpose of this is twofold. (i) If your cat really does "freak out" about sharing its house with a greyhound, it cannot go absent without leave. You do run the risk of never seeing your cat again if it is extremely unhappy about the change in circumstance at home. (ii) Greyhounds who are exposed to cats on a regular basis, generally detrain quicker. If the cat is a permanent fixture in the house, the greyhound will be exposed to the cat much more.

The use of litter trays should be employed and feed your cat somewhere high up, for instance the kitchen work surface. The cat should be given the option of having a dog free area somewhere in the house but do not shut the dog out of this area. I prefer the use of dog gates/children's stair gates. This means that your cat can freely come and go as it pleases but the dog cannot follow. However, the dog will be able to see the cat at all times. Continually separating cat and greyhound will make the dog a lot more interested in the cat because of the novelty factor of seeing it.

3. Do not try to hold the cat in your arms. You will get severely scratched and bitten by the cat and it also heightens the greyhound's interest. On introduction to the cat, make sure you have a firm grip on the lead. The greyhound will pull and lunge towards the cat. Gently pull the dog back and say "NO" very forcibly. The tone of the "NO" is very important - you have to mean it. Try to distract the greyhound by calling its name and by having some very nice dog treats available. Cheese works well. Every time your dog lunges for the cat, do the same again. If you can distract the dog, reward the dog well and give lots of cuddles. Keep the dog on lead and muzzled at all times when the dog and cat are together but let the cat come and go as it pleases. (The muzzle must be removed to allow the dog to eat, or if the dog shows any signs of vomiting. Make sure you have a firm grip on the dogs lead at these times and try to keep the cat away

from the dog whilst it is unmuzzled. Other than that, it is possible for a greyhound to drink and do all other things whilst wearing a muzzle.) Hopefully, you will have a cat with "attitude" and it will have given the greyhound one or two whacks. I positively encourage cats to do this and if the cat makes the greyhound yelp, then fine. This may sound cruel but generally, greyhounds are extreme wimps. If they find something that hurts them, they do think twice about returning to that item again. Cats are always boss over a dog, greyhounds included if given the chance.

Do not be discouraged if you see no improvement over a couple of days. It may be that it can take up to 2-3 weeks with lead and muzzled and then all of sudden, it seems to "click" that chasing the cats was not allowed. When I say "kept on lead", that is precisely what I mean.

4. Once you feel your dog making an improvement with the cat, change things. An improvement can be quantified as the greyhound is no longer "fixed" on the cat or if the cat hisses at the dog, the dog looks away and puts its head down. When you are at home, take the lead off the dog but still keep it muzzled. Should the greyhound have the urge to chase the cat, you are there to supervise and say "NO" if necessary and of course, reward the good behaviour. The cat can use its "bolt hole" of going through the stair gate and it knows the greyhound cannot follow. Keep up this routine until the greyhound has really lost interest in the cat.

5. Once you feel confident that the greyhound has lost interest, you can then take the muzzle off while you are at home to supervise. Again, correct any undesirable behaviour with the word "NO" and reward the greyhound for good behaviour.

6. The final stage is for you to leave an unmuzzled greyhound together with the cat unsupervised. Providing the greyhound has lost all interest in the cat, this should not be a problem. However, the first time you leave them together pretend you are going out but be just outside so if anything does happen, you are there to intervene. Gradually, leave them for longer periods of time and before long, you will be able to go out safe in the knowledge that cat and dog are happy together.

A few points to remember:-

- Cat introductions should not be entered into lightly but it can and has been done on many occasions.
- Do not worry about the use of muzzles. Greyhounds are very used to wearing muzzles; they do not distress them at all. A muzzle is essential for the safety of the cat in the early days and it gives you a "comfort zone" should you accidentally drop the lead.
- Never leave the cat and dog alone together unsupervised. Separate them when you go out, until you are 100% confident that no trouble will occur.
- Have confidence in yourself. Greyhounds are very aware of your moods and feelings. If you give out "negative vibes", the dog will sense this.
- Greyhounds are fighting against hundreds of years of breeding and their race training which has all heightened the "chase instinct", but ultimately they only want to please you. If pleasing you is ignoring the cats, they will understand eventually and you will have successfully detrained a greyhound with your cat(s).
- Be aware that in the early days you will feel stressed, exhausted and have a very difficult time relaxing.

Remember, we are always at the end of the phone to offer support and encouragement in the detraining process