

Cats and Dogs

Cats and dogs have different views on life. Can the two species live together peacefully?

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The socialization and developmental stages of cats and dogs also vary. Recognizing this will help you have a happy household. If possible, try to time your cat-dog introductions during their respective peak times of sociability. Cats go through their sensitivity period between 2 and 7 weeks of age, and dogs, between 3 and 12 weeks, says Nicholas Dodman, DVM, a veterinarian and animal behaviorist at Tufts University Veterinary Medical School in North Grafton, Mass.

"A lot depends on the animal's early experiences. If the animals are introduced in a friendly way during this period, your chances of success are very high," Dodman says. "I actually have a video of a cat that bonded with a mouse during this period and the two remained best friends throughout their adulthood. There's the famous case of Coco, the gorilla who bonded with a cat. When the cat had her litter, Coco was the only other creature that was allowed to groom the kittens. This period really allows for biblical expression, 'The lamb will lie down with the beast,' to come true."

Genetics Plays Key RoleCat owners know each cat possesses a distinct personality. It does not come about by happenstance nor is it solely shaped by the cat's early socialization experiences. A good percentage of a cat's personality is genetic, say animal experts. Certainly a cat's personality will be shaped to some degree by its environment, but a good portion of its personality is predetermined, Dodman says.

"An alert-personality cat tends to be in a vigilant state quite often, staying very wary of its environment. An equable-personality cat has an even personality and can be quite even tempered. A sociable cat has an outgoing personality while an unsociable cat shies away from interaction," Dodman says. "The tricky part you may not know your cat's genetic personality type."

Nature clearly has its role in the formation of a cat's personality, but your cat is not just a sum of its genetic parts. Any early experiences dogs and cats have with the other species can be effective predictors about how they will get along as housemates.

Animals adopted as adults may pose special problems because their early experiences are unknown. Shelter animals may actually do quite well because of their time spent around other species, but you won't know until it is time to introduce them to a new animal in your home. Adult animals may have to unlearn early negative socialization the prospect may make them more than just a little reluctant to be friends with a different type of animal. Clearly, the work has the potential for being much more challenging for you and the animals.