

The truth about cats and dogs

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Thinking about adopting a perky little puppy as a friend for your fluffy cat, but worried that they'll fight -- well, like cats and dogs?

Think again. New research at Tel Aviv University, the first of its kind in the world, has found a new recipe for success. According to the study, if the cat is adopted before the dog and if they are introduced when still young (less than 6 months for kittens, a year for dogs), there is a high probability that your two pets will get along swimmingly. Results from the research were recently reported in the journal *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*.

"This is the first time anyone has done scientific research on pets living in the same home," says Prof. Joseph Terkel, from the Department of Zoology at Tel Aviv University. "It's especially relevant to the one-third of Americans who own a pet and are thinking about adopting a second one of the opposite species."

Talk Like a Dog

After interviewing almost 200 pet owners who own both a cat and a dog, then videotaping and analyzing the animals' behavior, TAU researchers concluded that cats and dogs can cohabitate happily if certain conditions are met. Prof. Terkel and his graduate student Neta-li Feuerstein found that two-thirds of the homes they surveyed reported a positive relationship between their cat and dog.

But it wasn't all sweetness and light (or, for that matter, bones and

catnip). There was a reported indifference between the cat and dog in 25% of the homes, while aggression and fighting were observed in 10% of the homes.

One reason for the fighting might have been crossed inter-species signals. Cats and dogs may not have been able to read each other's body cues. For instance, cats tend to lash their tails about when mad, while dogs growl and arch their backs. A cat purrs when happy, while a dog wags its tail. A cat's averted head signals aggression, while in a dog the same head position signals submission.

In homes where cat/dog détente existed, Prof. Terkel observed a surprising behavior. "We found that cats and dogs are learning how to talk each other's language. It was a surprise that cats can learn how to talk 'Dog' and vice versa."

What's especially interesting, Prof. Terkel remarks, is that both cats and dogs have appeared to evolve beyond their instincts. They can learn to read each other's body signals, suggesting that the two species may have more in common than was previously suspected.

Peacemaking Pets Can Be a Model for People

Once familiar with each others' presence and body language, cats and dogs can play together, greet each other nose-to-nose, and enjoy sleeping together on the couch. They can easily share the same water bowl and in some cases groom each other. The far-reaching implications of this Tel Aviv University research on cats and dogs may extend beyond pets -- to people who don't get along, including neighbours, colleagues at work, and even world superpowers.

"If cats and dogs can learn to get along," concludes Prof. Terkel, "surely people have a good chance."

Source: American Friends of Tel Aviv University

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