

Greyhounds: Living with Cats & Small Animals

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Greyhounds and cats

Many dogs have a chase instinct and may want to chase cats or other small animals. Due to a greyhound's speed, they are capable of actually catching them. During their upbringing, most greyhounds will have been trained to chase a fast moving, furry lure, which means their instinct to chase a cat may still be present. With careful positive training many greyhounds can live quite happily with cats and other small domestic pets.

When choosing your greyhound, RGT volunteers will have been made aware that you have other pets at home and will have endeavoured to provide you with a greyhound which has been assessed as being 'cat trainable' i.e. shown little/no interest in a cat or small dog when meeting them at the kennel. However, it is not a guarantee that when a fast moving small animal appears in front of a newly homed greyhound, that it will not revert to its instinct to chase.

Positive training

Positive training works by rewarding our dogs for the behaviours we want and ignoring or preventing the behaviours we don't want. By rewarding our dogs as soon as they perform the required behaviour, such as 'leave it', we are letting them know they have performed the correct action and giving them a reason to repeat the behaviour next time we ask for it.

Greyhounds are a sensitive breed and do not respond well to punishment. Using aversive training techniques such as shouting, physical punishment, or using rattle cans, will not teach your dog what you want him to do. It is more likely to make your dog fearful and cause other behaviour problems.

Using rewards in training

When you start teaching your dog to do something, you need to reward him as soon as he has performed the required action. The type of rewards you use need to be something that your dog really wants and values.

Most greyhounds respond well to food rewards such as small pieces of cheese, hot dog, sausage and chicken. You will find that your greyhound will favour certain

food treats over other treats – these treats are the ‘high value’ treats that you will need to use in cat training and when you’re asking your dog to perform a behaviour he finds difficult.

Training tip:

The more difficult a behaviour is to train, the more you will need to use higher value rewards, such as dried liver, cooked chicken and bits of sausage. Dried biscuit type treats or pieces of vegetables are unlikely to be motivating enough.

Introducing a greyhound to a home with a cat or other smaller animals in residence

When training your greyhound to live with a cat you need to consider both the safety of your dog and cat. This will help ensure that your training is successful and as stress free as possible for both your dog and cat.

Before bringing your greyhound home the first step is to provide your cat with a safe area that the dog has no access to. This may mean using stair gates to separate them, or providing a separate room for your cat. In this safe area you will need to provide your cat with a litter tray, their bed, food and water.

You will also need to make sure that your cat has plenty of high areas to escape to,

as these provide your cat with extra safe spaces away from the dog. You may also wish to restrict your cat’s access to going outside in this introductory period to prevent your cat from leaving home and not returning.



It is also advisable to muzzle and keep your greyhound on a lead for the first training sessions with your cat. Most greyhounds are used to wearing a plastic box muzzle and it provides protection for both your dog and the cat.

You will need to keep the dog and cat separate for a number of days or even weeks, before you can introduce them fully to each other. First meetings need to be calm to give both your cat and dog a chance to get used to each other's scent before they meet and training begins.

Before you start your training

You will need:

- **A flat, comfortable lead** (*leather or soft webbing*)
- **A leather greyhound collar** (*'fish tail' shape collar for greyhounds*) **or greyhound martingale collar**
- **A muzzle** (the plastic box type for greyhounds)
- **Small, high value treats** (the size of a large pea)
- **A quiet area, without any distractions, to train in**



Leave it!

For successful cat training, a strong and reliable 'leave it' command is essential as it forms the basis of training your greyhound to live with cats. In practice, it means ignore the object, leave it alone and pay attention to me.

By training a reliable 'leave it', your dog will soon learn that ignoring an object

leads to good things happening, whereas if he pays attention to the object the good things stop. Only once your dog has a good understanding of 'leave it', can you then start to work using the command with the cat present.

Training 'leave it'

1. Show your dog you have a tasty food reward in your hand. Hold the food firmly between your thumb and forefinger, so only a little bit is poking out and say 'leave it'. Your dog is likely to try to get to the food by licking, nibbling or pawing at your hand. Ignore this and keep your hand still.
2. The moment that your dog takes his nose away from your hand, even if it is for a millisecond, feed him a food reward from your other hand.
3. Practise and repeat until your dog automatically takes his head away and doesn't look at the food in your hand.
4. Once you are sure your dog knows the 'leave it' command, you can start applying it to other objects you want your dog to ignore, remembering to praise your dog and reward him every time he leaves a new object.

Training tip:

Remember to only say 'leave it' once each time you practise and wait for your dog to move his head away before rewarding.

Managing introductions

First impressions count and if carefully managed, there is no reason why your cat and greyhound can't get along and become the best of friends.

If you have trained a reliable 'leave it' and followed the safety steps, it is time to introduce your dog and cat to each other. Introductions should be taken slowly and with sufficient distance between your dog and cat to ensure that both remain calm.

Your dog will need to be on his lead and muzzled, so that he cannot chase the cat. You will also need to make sure that the cat has an 'escape route', such as a baby gate on the door or some high areas that allow the cat to get away but still remain in sight of the dog; some cats may feel more secure and relaxed in a cat basket.

Follow the steps outlined in training 'leave it'; however, rather than having food in between your

finger and thumb, use the 'leave it' command as soon as your dog looks at the cat. The moment your dog looks away from the cat and pays attention to you, praise him and reward him with a food treat.

Ensure that you keep enough distance between your cat and dog in the early stages of training to prevent any lunging.

Once your dog is calmly ignoring the cat, you can begin to start reducing the distance between them.

Keep practising the 'leave it' and continue to praise and reward your dog for looking away or ignoring the cat and paying attention to you.

When your dog is reliably ignoring the cat at a close distance, you can remove the lead and muzzle and continue the training. Remember to supervise all meetings and continue to reward both your dog and cat for calm behaviour.

Training tip:

Don't be tempted to rush the introduction stage and remember to always reward both your cat and dog for calm, relaxed behaviour when they are together.

Training in different areas

Once your dog is reliably ignoring the cat within your home, it is time to train him to ignore the cat in the garden and other environments. Although your dog may understand to ignore the cat inside, this does not necessarily transfer to meetings outdoors.

As this is a different environment you will need to go back to managing the introductions with your dog being muzzled and on a lead and following the advice on training 'leave it'.

Training tip:

Do not allow your dog to chase a cat at any time – managing your dog's chase instinct is very important. Once a dog has learned how rewarding it is to chase a cat, it will make successful cat training much harder.

If you have a confident dog and a fearful cat

Do not allow your dog to chase the cat under any circumstances, as this will only increase your cat's fear of the dog. Ensure introductions are carefully managed by placing your cat in secure cat crate/ cat carrier and allowing the cat to see the dog in the room. Your dog will need to be on his lead and kept a good distance away.

Ensure your dog is reliably responding to 'leave it' and reward both the dog and cat for calm behaviour. Over time (this could be days or weeks) gradually decrease the distance between the dog and cat, ensuring both remain calm.

When your cat is more relaxed around the dog, you can remove the cat crate and continue the training, with the cat being free to move around. Remember to ensure that you provide an 'escape route' for the cat if he becomes afraid.

Training tip:

In the early stages of training, never leave your cat and dog together unsupervised, even if the dog is muzzled and the cat is in a crate. Work on building their confidence and rewarding calm behaviour.

If you have a fearful dog and a confident cat

Do not allow the cat to be alone with your dog unsupervised or to take a swipe at your dog. This will only increase your dog's fear of the cat and may lead to your dog reacting to your cat in an unfavourable manner.

You will need to manage introductions carefully by muzzling and keeping your dog on the lead when you introduce him to the cat. Follow the guidance in the confident dog – fearful cat section.

When your dog is comfortable with the cat being in the same room and in the cat carrier, you can continue training the 'leave it' with the cat out of the crate.

Many greyhounds live happily with cats and other small animals. This leaflet gives valuable hints and training tips to help your pets live together in harmony.



For further information or guidance please contact:

- **Retired Greyhound Trust Welfare Helpline**
020 8335 3016
(open M-F 10-11am)
- **Local Retired Greyhound Trust Branches**
www.retiredgreyhounds.co.uk/branches
- **Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors**
www.apbc.org.uk
- **The Association of Pet Dog Trainers**
www.apdt.co.uk



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Although within that context every effort has been made by the Retired Greyhound Trust to ensure that the detail set out in this booklet is accurate, the Trust does not accept any liability for the contents of this leaflet or for the consequences of any action taken on the basis of the information provided. Any person taking on the responsibilities of ownership of a greyhound is strongly advised to seek formal advice on their behaviour and behavioural tendencies.