

## WESTIES LIVING WITH CATS

1/1/06

**Important:** Please remember and understand that Westies are bred to hunt and kill critters. In some, that instinct is so strong that it cannot be overcome. There is never a guarantee that all Westies can learn to live peacefully with the house cat. In many cases, it will take a good month of real work to make it happen. In most cases it does seem to work out. Having the dog in training classes for obedience, day-to-day living, agility, anything, will help because he will learn to look to you for direction.

In most cases, if it doesn't work out, it is the CAT who cannot adjust. Some folks bring in a dog and never see their cat again. It goes into hiding and comes out only at night to eat. Some folks accept this and keep both animals. Some folks have a "cat room" which is closed off to the dogs and the cat stays in that room. The two never see each other, however most folks want a more "normal" living arrangement with their cats and dogs living and interacting together.

If you wish to make it work, please realize that it is likely to be a challenge at first. There are always some Westies who can work it out quickly and there is never any real problem. But for most, a training period of several weeks will ensue. Before you adopt a Westie to live with your cat, please **be sure you are prepared to spend a minimum of ONE FULL MONTH actively training** the animals. If you are not willing to put in this effort, please **cancel your application** to adopt while you continue to have a resident cat.

### TRAINING AND LIVING TIPS

1. **SUPERVISION:** Never leave the cat and dog alone together unsupervised. This invites disaster. When you are not there to watch them, separate them in a secure way. This means putting the dog in a crate and putting the cat behind a solid door. (Don't crate the dog and allow the cat to torment him by walking around freely.)
2. **ESCAPE ROUTE:** Even if you are home, the cat must have an escape route from the dog. There has to be someplace safe and secure that the cat can get to in order to escape from the dog. The top of a flimsy bookcase is not enough. The top of the refrigerator may be good if there is nothing nearby for the dog to climb on. Remember that cats are a lot like squirrels. They often like to tease the dog. You can't blame the dog for reacting and once that chase starts, the dog may switch into hunter mode and forget that the cat is a friend.
3. **KITTY LITTER:** The litter box has to be in an area that the cat can get to but the dog cannot reach. Dogs like to clean litter boxes, but this is very unhealthy for them. The cat needs to have some peace and quiet to accomplish its "necessary functions", so keep that litter box behind a solid baby gate.
4. **BABY GATES:** If you use baby gates to give your cat a safe place, be sure it is a metal gate that screws into the wall; not a flimsy wooden or plastic gate that relies on pressure to hold it in place. A determined dog can make short shrift of that arrangement. The gate needs to be tall enough that the dog cannot get over it. Test it out to be sure!! Note: I have one which works just great but it has a foot pedal. When the dogs get excited, they get out. I finally realized that one jumps on the pedal while the other pushes the door! I don't think they planned it; it is accidental, but it isn't secure enough if you want to protect your cat! Even one dog can open the dog gate if he jumps on the pedal and times the push just right, intentionally or not.

5. **INTRODUCTIONS:** There are different ways that have been recommended to accomplish this, and part of this will depend on the cat and how used the cat is to dogs.

**YOUR DEMEANOR:** Be calm and not reactive. You will pass your anxiety on to the animals unless you manage to stay calm and let them explore each other.

**TREATS:** Keep treats handy when you let the animals meet. Reward the dog with praise and treats whenever they are doing well together.

**SHAKE CAN OR SQUIRT BOTTLE:** Keep these handy to use whenever the dog becomes too over-stimulated with the cat. Praise as soon as the dog responds. (See <http://www.thedogspeaks.com/artshakecan.htm> ).

**DIVERSION:** Be ready to divert the dog's attention when he starts focusing on the cat; use toys, treats, play and petting.

**TRAINING:** Get the dog into a training program so that you can control his response with commands such as "leave it".

**CALMING SIGNALS:** Tell the dog, "good dog," "nice kitty", etc. in a soft, calm voice so the dog will remain calm. If you see something starting, remind him to "be good", "leave it", or other words before the incident gets started.

**PRAISE:** Watch for good things to praise. It is so much more "our nature" to scold bad behavior than it is to reward good behavior, especially when it is passive. Watch for the time the dog walks past the cat without a reaction and praise!! If ever there was a good time for treats, it is when they are being good and not even thinking about their actions. The more praise you give to them for this behavior, the less you will have to scold and correct. "Good dog" works better than "Bad dog" and "yes" works better than "no".

**OUTLETS:** Give your dog lots of playtime with things that he is allowed to chase. Don't give him a stuffed toy that looks like a cat and allow him to harm it and then expect him to be good to the real cat. Think about each item you play with and how it may cause a related response to the cat.

**EXERCISE:** Give your dog lots of exercise so he won't need to chase the cat for fun.

6. **YOU MUST BE ALERT:** Don't get too relaxed because they seem to be doing well together, especially in the early days. Be prepared to handle a "situation" if need be.

7. **KNOW WHEN TO GIVE UP:** If you have worked at this for a while and it is just not working out, be prepared to admit failure. If you cannot make it work, you may have to keep them separated permanently. If you cannot live with this, contact Rescue and return the dog. They can then place him in a home without a cat

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