



Greyhounds and cats

Greyhounds have been bred for thousands of years for their chase instinct and are fast enough to catch small animals such as cats, or birds such as chickens, if a chase situation does arise. With careful, positive, and appropriate training some greyhounds can be trained to live with the right cat. However, this is not the case for the majority of greyhounds and so cat/other small animal trainable greyhounds are in the minority.

Each greyhound is an individual and we work to assess them on that basis, working to match their needs and characters to the home and lifestyle being offered by potential adopters.

IRGT will work to safely and responsibly expose those individual greyhounds we believe may be cat trainable to cats in a variety of situations whilst they are in our care. If you are adopting a greyhound from us and you have a cat at home, we advise the following careful steps to help your greyhound and your cat settle gradually and happily together once we believe we have found the suitable greyhound for you:

Initially, introductions need to be carefully managed and controlled. It's much easier to ensure a good start than try and repair a damaged relationship from a poor start. A greyhound joining a home with an existing cat should have a space of their own away from the cat initially. Avoid shutting them in one room or giving them too small a space so as to avoid potential issues with frustration. Likewise, do not force your cat to remain indoors.

Pheromone diffusers can potentially help keep both a cat and a greyhound calm during this process and are available to buy – please note, however, that cats and dogs need different products. Do liaise with your vet or local pet store for further details.

Scent swapping

Scent swapping gives opportunity for each animal to gradually acclimatise to each other's scent without being overwhelmed by the presence of the unfamiliar animal. To begin the process, take two clean cloths – one for your cat and one for your greyhound. Rub the cloth along your cat's scent glands in their cheeks. For the greyhound, rub the other cloth along their flanks and in their armpits. Place each cloth with the other animal, so put the cloth wiped over the cat's cheeks in the space with the greyhound and vice versa, allowing them to sniff the cloth. Gauge their reactions as this will give an indication of how an introduction might go.

Don't be tempted to rush this process, undertaking it daily for a number of days, keeping the scents topped up by repeating the rubbing process once per day until each animal is responding calmly to the smell of the other on the cloth in their space.

Introduction behind a barrier (such as a glass door or baby gate)

Ensure two people are present, one for the cat and one for the greyhound. The greyhound should be on a lead and wearing a muzzle for safety as added precautions. Ensure the cat has an escape route if they wish to run away such as an open window, or somewhere to climb or hide. Never force the cat to remain in the situation in a closed room or in a cat carrier etc as this is likely to make it a negative experience for them.

The cat with one person would be on one side of the glass door or baby gate, and the greyhound and the other person, holding the lead, should be on the other so that both animals can see each other, but not get to each other. These interactions should be short and built up over time as the animals get used to seeing each other. Calm, relaxed, quiet reactions to each other are what is needed.

To avoid the greyhound fixating on the cat, the greyhound helper can distract and engage with them as needed. Try to end each session on a positive note, even if it is only 1 or 2 minutes long. As the reactions of the cat and the greyhound go well as the process is repeated over several days, so the length of these sessions can be increased by a little each time.

Introduction with no barrier

Again, two people are needed, one for the cat and one for the greyhound. This time, remove the barrier (baby gate or open the glass door) and keep the greyhound on the lead and wearing a muzzle as a precaution. Keep the situation calm and relaxed and look for signs of stress from either the cat or the greyhound.

Signs of stress in a cat include: backing away, ears down, hissing or swiping, wide pupils.

Signs of predatory behaviour in greyhounds include: vocalisation, lunging, snapping, fixating on the cat, especially any movement from the cat.

Again, keep these interactions very short initially and build them up over time giving both the cat and the greyhound treats and gentle praise. Repeat the process over several days, increasing the duration if all is progressing well, removing the muzzle when you are confident it is appropriate to do so, and eventually allowing the greyhound off the lead with the cat if both continue to exhibit calm and relaxed behaviour during sessions.

Signs of relaxed behaviour in a cat: ears forward, relaxed body posture

Signs of relaxed behaviour in a greyhound: slow moving, relaxed body posture, not fixating/staring, ears in a neutral position (i.e. not pulled back or alert).

About the IRGT

Founded in 1997 by Rásaíocht Con Éireann/Greyhound Racing Ireland, the Irish Retired Greyhound Trust is funded by contributions from the sport of greyhound racing and through private donations, and promotes retired racing greyhounds as pets, supports their transition and preparation for life as a family companion, and works to find homes for them both within Ireland and overseas through collaboration with responsible partner rehoming organisations.

To find out more about our work and how you can support us, please visit: www.irgt.ie

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