How to Introduce Cerberus to a Cat

Cerberus is best suited in a cat-free home. However, Cerberus may be able to coexist with a cat through proper training and gradual and monitored introductions. This guide does not guarantee that Cerberus will be able to coexist with a resident cat.

1. Begin with Separation and Scent Sharing (Days 1–4)
   - Keep Cerberus and the cat in separate rooms with closed doors.
   - Swap bedding or use scented towels to exchange smells daily.
   - Place each animal's food bowl near opposite sides of a closed door to create positive scent associations.

   > **Note:**
   > Be patient with this stage. Cats often hide or avoid contact when they smell a new dog, and it may take time before they feel comfortable leaving their safe space.

2. Facilitate Visual Introduction Through a Barrier
   - After several days, allow visual but not physical access by using a baby or pet gate.
   - Keep Cerberus on a leash and at a distance; let the cat roam freely on the other side of the barrier.

   > **Note:**
   > Reward calm behavior in both animals. Strong barriers are essential, as gates or crates may not be enough to contain Cerberus if he becomes reactive.

3. Hold Leashed, Supervised Meetings
   - When both pets remain calm, bring them into the same space under controlled conditions.
   - Keep Cerberus leashed and the cat free to exit at any time; reward calm behavior with treats and praise.

   > **Note:**
   > Keep sessions short (just a few minutes) and gradually increase the duration as comfort grows. Controlled conditions include low noise, low traffic, and a predictable space.

> **Note:**
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> Cerberus may display strong reactions, such as intense staring, stiff posture, barking, and lunging. He does not currently respond well to treat-based redirection during these episodes, so handlers must be ready to remove him calmly if he escalates.

4. Allow Curiosity from a Distance

If Cerberus fixates on the cat, mark and reward any moment he shifts his focus away. This helps teach him that calm disengagement is rewarded.

> **Note:**
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> Dogs can detect cats by scent before they see them. Watch closely for early signs of tension (stiffness, deep sniffing, fixated posture) and redirect before it escalates.

5. Allow Unsupervised Access Only When Truly Ready
   - Unsupervised time should only begin when both the cat and Cerberus can eat, rest, and move calmly around each other without tension.
   - Continue to provide escape routes and high resting areas for the cat.

> **Note:**
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> Expect this to take weeks or months. Moving too quickly increases the risk of conflict and can set back progress.

6. Maintain Ongoing Support and Environment Management
   - Always separate Cerberus and the cat when no one is home.
   - Provide multiple litter boxes and water stations so the cat can avoid Cerberus when needed.
   - Continue reinforcing calm commands like "leave it" and seek professional support if progress stalls or aggression escalates.

Redirecting Fixation

If Cerberus locks eyes, tenses, or freezes at the cat, do not scold or yank him away. Instead:

- Watch for small signs of relaxation or disengagement: blinking, sniffing, head turns, or looking at you.
- Mark and reward any moment of calm focus or self-regulation with treats, calm praise, or gentle play.
- Keep sessions short and neutral, and end them on a positive note.

> ✎ **Note:**
> If fixation escalates (barking, lunging, growling), pause the session and increase physical distance. A decompression walk before the next introduction can also help.

The goal is to build tolerance, not force obedience. Teach Cerberus that looking calmly at the cat and then disengaging leads to a reward. This builds focus without increasing stress.

Outcome

This process is likely to be slow and challenging, but with consistency and safety measures, Cerberus may gradually learn to coexist with a cat. Professional trainer support is highly recommended for homes with resident cats.