



Introducing Pets to a Facemask



Dogs

The process should involve initially gently exposing your dog(s) to face masks at home. Start by just holding a mask in your hand and allowing your dog to approach, sniff and investigate it if they choose to.

Use a calm happy voice when talking to the dog when the mask is present and offer them some treats at the same time. The aim is to build positive associations with the mask.

Once your dog is relaxed around the mask, slowly bring the mask up to your face while the dog is watching and can clearly see that you are still behind the mask.

Immediately remove the mask and offer a food reward. This should be repeated on a regular basis and by other members of the household.

Gradually start to extend the length of time that you are wearing the mask.



When the dog is used to seeing everyone in a mask, and is showing no signs of fear or avoidance, family members can start entering the room or house while already wearing the mask. This process should help dogs to cope with the sight of unfamiliar people wearing masks.

The same process could be carried out to habituate dogs to the sight of visors.

Even if habituated to the sight of humans wearing masks, some dogs will find it difficult not being able to see the facial expressions of humans who are wearing masks.

It is therefore even more important than usual to monitor your dog and ensure that they are comfortable in social situations

Fellowship of Animal Behaviour Clinicians



Cats

Cats are less likely to need to come into contact with people wearing masks than dogs, but this may happen if for example they need a visit to the Vets.

Cats should also be habituated to the sight and smell of masks at home.

Masks should be gently presented to cats when they are relaxed and comfortable, allowing them to sniff and investigate if they choose to, while the owner talks quietly to them.



If your cat enjoys attention, then gentle stroking may help form good associations as might a few favoured treats.

If your cat seems worried, the mask should be taken away and later left on the floor or a chair so that the cat can check it out when they feel ready to.

In the next stage the owner can sit close to the cat when it is relaxed, talk in a quiet calm voice and slowly lift the mask to their face while the cat is watching ensuring that they can still see you behind the mask. This can be repeated by other members of the family.

Gradually build up the time that you wear the mask.

If your pet is struggling to cope with any aspect of the Covid-19 Pandemic or you have any concerns regarding their behaviour, please contact a qualified behaviourist. A list of these can be found on the Animal Behaviour and Training Council (ABTC) Website <https://www.abtc.org.uk/>