

Call the Animal Behaviorist

Sometimes a cat's behavior changes dramatically and no amount of trying can reverse it. You may be at your wits' end and even wondering whether you can keep the cat. That's when you know you need help. This was the case for Sheilagh when her cat Naya suddenly started acting aggressively toward her dog.

Sheilagh adopted Naya from PAWS in October 2019. She already had a young dog, Ollie, who was a mixed breed, large dog weighing more than 80 pounds. Naya was described as getting along with dogs, but she preferred to be an only cat. When Naya first came into the home, she and Ollie got along well and played together several times a day.



This went on for over a year, and then suddenly things changed. Naya began attacking Ollie! Sheilagh was shocked and couldn't imagine what had happened to cause such behavior. Despite his size, Ollie was a very timid dog, and he was traumatized by

Naya's aggression. When Sheilagh took Naya to the vet to rule out any health issues, the vet thought Ollie may have accidentally hurt Naya when they were playing. Although Sheilagh had recently noticed Naya limping, she thought nothing of it, since Naya was running and climbing as she had always done. It was around this time that the problem had begun.



Sheilagh called PAWS for advice. PAWS gave her some helpful information about cat behavior and referred her to Rachel Geller. Rachel is a certified Humane Education Specialist and a Cat Behavior and Retention Specialist, who provides her services pro bono to animal shelters. "If we can keep a cat that has a solvable, fixable behavior problem in its home," Rachel says, "it's better for the cat and for its owner."



Sheilagh and Rachel met four times to discuss Naya's behavior, and Rachel was able to provide many helpful suggestions, including the following:

- **How to play with Naya in a way that satisfied her prey drive.** Rachel recommended specific toys to try and also toys to remove from the house that may frustrate Naya. She suggested getting rid of the bird feeders outside as well.
- **How to distract and redirect Naya when she attacked the dog.** This included a list of things to do with both animals to make their together time a joyful experience instead of stressful. It also included detailed instructions on how to do a complete separation and re-introduction of the animals.

According to Sheilagh, she wasn't successful with separating and re-introducing Naya and Ollie because she couldn't bear to lock the cat in a room by herself. "She always wants to be around her people!"

At first, Sheilagh noticed some improvement between Naya and Ollie after following Rachel's recommendations. But then they hit a rough patch. Sheilagh says this happened when they went away for a long weekend and took the dog, leaving Naya with a sitter. When they returned, Naya attacked Ollie several times in one day, and it was particularly vicious. Sheilagh was convinced it wasn't going to work. After a day or so, however, Naya calmed down and has never attacked Ollie again. They are getting along well, but no



longer “play” together. Naya often nuzzles him when she walks by. The dog’s confidence is coming back more and more every day.

Sheilagh did not need to contact Rachel again, but continues to work on the ideas she gave her to help Naya and Ollie live happily every after.

Thanks to Sheilagh Senior for sharing her story and providing a wonderful home for her two pets.

For more information about Rachel Geller click her to go to her website: [Dr. Rachel Cat Behavior](#).