

INTRODUCING YOUR NEW CAT TO FAMILY CATS

So, you have decided to add another cat to your family! Perhaps you want to give your current cat a companion, or want to rescue a cat in need. Before you adopt another cat, you should consider the personality and experience of the cat or cats you already have. Is your cat friendly with other cats? Is she easy going and self-confident? Does your cat seem to adapt well to changes or does she show fearful or aggressive tendencies? How about the cat you are considering to adopt? What do you know about her behavior?

Whether you adopt a kitten or an adult cat, the same steps should be followed to introduce your new cat to your other cat. Kittens in general however, are more likely to be friendly, playful and curious toward other cats than are most adults. These same steps can be taken to re-introduce cats to one another if they've been kept apart due to fighting problems.

How to Introduce Your Cats to Each Other

Introducing cats to one another should be a positive experience for both. Your goals are for both cats to be relaxed and friendly rather than threatening or aggressive.

First impressions are very important to cats. Initial introductions that are stressful and unpleasant, and cause the cats to become fearful or aggressive, may cause long term conflicts.

Introductions and re-introductions must be micro-managed. They must proceed slowly. At first, house the cats separately. The new cat (or one of the fighting cats) can be kept in one room of the house with her own food, water, toys and litter box while the other cat has the rest of the house.

Alternate which cat is confined and which has the house, which will allow the new cat to explore her new residence. Under these conditions, the cats can hear and smell each other but can not see each other. Preventing visual contact at first is quite important.

Because odors are quite important to cats, you'll want to expose the cats to one another's smells in association with pleasantness. Rub several cloths or towels on each cat and place them under the other cat's food dish, on the favorite window perch or other resting place. Not only will this pair the other cat's scent with "good things," it will also give you a rough idea of how well the cats are accepting one another.

If any of the cats actively avoids the smell of the other by not lying on the scented towels, or avoiding the food dish, you know they aren't yet ready to lay eyes on one another. Continue keeping the cats separated until neither is avoiding the odor of the other.

While the cats are housed separately, feed them on either side of a closed door, as another way of associating "good things" with each other. Start with the food bowls sufficiently far back from the door so all the cats will eat. Some cats won't approach the bowl if it is too close to the door and the cat is quite fearful of the cat on the other side.

The same steps
should be followed
to introduce kittens
or adult cats.

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Your goal is for both cats to have pleasant experiences.

Don't assume a bad relationship will get better on its own.

Once the cats are relaxed and eating with only a closed door between them, you can open the door slightly to let them see each other briefly. Continue to feed them with the door propped open. If at any time the cats become fearful or aggressive (growl or hiss), stop the session and try later, for either a shorter period of time or with the door open less.

Once the cats can look at each other and be relaxed, it's time to allow a bit of physical contact. Put stacked baby gates across the doorway where you've been working and allow the cats to approach one another. Supervise, so that neither cat attempts to jump the barrier at first.

Another option is to put each cat in her own see-through carrier, place the carriers close together and then alternate allowing one cat out of her carrier. Or, if the cats are trained to a harness and leash, you can attach leashes to furniture, such that the cats can sniff one another.

Keep these initial "up close and personal" introductions fairly brief and continue to pair with "good things" such as food, petting or toys. As before, if either cat is fearful, aggressive, or too excited, calmly end the session and allow a bit less contact the next time.

Once these experiences are going well, allow the cats loose together while you closely supervise them. Keep dangling toys handy to distract the cats into play if things become tense. Use a squirt of water to interrupt mild problems such as rough play or chasing. Learn more about how to use this type of punishment correctly by reading the article on the topic.

Cats vary as to how quickly they move through the introduction phase. Some cats may make friends quickly, while others may take days, weeks, or even months to get used to each other.

What kind of relationships cats form will vary as well. Some may never be best buddies, but merely tolerate each other. Factors that influence these relationships include the cats' ages, early learning, later experiences, and general personalities. In free roaming cat colonies females may get along better than male-male pairs, but in studies of domestic house cats, gender seemed much less important than other factors.

If You Have Problems

If your cats just can't seem to get along no matter how slowly and carefully you try to introduce them, go back to housing them separately. Don't assume that the relationship will somehow improve over time without some sort of intervention. The more your cats fight or get in spats, the more likely they will dislike each other permanently. You do not want any of your pets to be under constant stress from harassment. This is not a good quality of life.

If you are having difficulty encouraging your pets to get along, contact a certified applied or veterinary behaviorist or other behavior consultant to help you. If you want to learn more about finding a behavior consultant read the article entitled "Guidelines for Choosing a Dog Trainer or Behavior Consultant." In rare cases, the animals may never get along and finding one of them another home may be the best thing to do.

What NOT To Do

Do not force the cats to interact. Do not leave the cats alone unsupervised. Once the cats are comfortable with each other while you are supervising them you can gradually work up to longer times that you leave them

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alone together. You can do this by briefly standing outside the door, getting the mail or running an errand. Do not use physical punishment with the cats. This could be dangerous to you or the cats and the cats will associate negative things with being around each other (See the article on punishment). Never try to break up a fight or wrestling match, instead squirt the cats with water, a citronella oil spray, throw a pillow at them or make a loud noise to break them up before separating them.

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