

Introducing Your New Cat to Your Resident Cat

While some are more social than others, cats are wonderful companions to each other. An 8-year-old cat who has never been around other animals may need several weeks or even months to learn to share her territory (and her people) with other pets in the household. However, a very young or very social cat may need only a few days. Cats are territorial and need to be introduced slowly in order to give them time to get used to each other before there is a face-to-face confrontation. Slow introductions help prevent fearful and aggressive problems from developing. Note: Clicker training your cats may reduce the time frame of the introduction. See handout: "Cat Clicker Training."

Confinement

Confine your new cat to one medium-sized room with her litter box, food, water and a bed. Feed your resident cat and the newcomer on opposite sides of the door to this room. This will help both of them to associate something enjoyable (eating!) with each other's smells. Don't put the food so close to the door that the cats are too upset by each other's presence to eat. Gradually move the dishes closer to the door until your pets can eat calmly, directly on either side of the door. Next, prop open the door just enough to allow the cats to see each other, and repeat the whole process.

Swap Scents

As long as neither cat is sick, the second step is swapping scents. Switch sleeping blankets or beds between your new cat and your resident cat so they have a chance to become accustomed to each other's scent. Rub a towel on one cat and put it underneath the food dish of the other cat. You should do this with each cat in the house.

Switch Living Areas

Once the new cat is using her litter box and eating regularly while confined, let her have free time in the house while confining your other cat(s) to the new cat's room. This switch provides another way for the animals to experience each other's scents without a face-to-face meeting. It also allows the newcomer to become familiar with her new surroundings, without being frightened by the other cats.

Avoid Fearful and Aggressive Meetings

Avoid any interactions between your cats that result in either fearful or aggressive behavior such as growling, hissing, swatting, chasing, stalking. If these responses are allowed to become a habit, they can be difficult to change. It's better to introduce your cats to each other so gradually that neither animal becomes afraid or aggressive. If either cat becomes fearful or aggressive, separate them, and start over with the introduction process in a series of very small, gradual steps, as outlined above.

Tips

If one of your cats has a medical problem or is injured, this could stall the introduction process. Check with your veterinarian to be sure that all of your cats are healthy, especially if you have adopted this cat from a shelter.

You should have at least one litter box per cat plus one, and you'll need to clean all of the litter boxes more frequently. Make sure that none of the cats is being "ambushed" by another while trying to use the litter box.

Try to keep your resident pet cats' schedule as close as possible to what it was before the newcomer's appearance.

Your goal is to avoid any outright fights, but if small spats do occur between your cats, you shouldn't attempt to separate the cats by picking up one cat or getting between them with your hands or body parts. Instead, make a loud noise, throw a pillow, or use a squirt bottle with water and vinegar (3:1 ratios) to separate the cats. Give them a chance to calm down and go back several steps in the introduction process.

Be sure each cat has a safe hiding place from the other.

You can also use anxiety reducing remedies to assist in the introduction. See handout: "Stress Relief for Your Pet."

When to Get Help

If the introductions don't go smoothly, seek professional help right away. See handout: "When the Helpline Can't Help." Animals can be severely injured in fights, and the longer the problem continues, the harder it can be to resolve. Punishment won't work and could make things worse. Conflicts between pets in the same family can often be resolved with professional help.