

Bringing Home a New Cat or Kitten

Whether you're bringing home your first, second or fifth cat, it's extremely important to prepare ahead of time. Before making the decision to add a new cat to your household, please consider the following:

- Is your home large enough for all cats to have adequate territory?
- Are any of your current cats (if relevant) suffering from a chronic illness where the added stress of a new cat may cause further health problems?
- Are any of your cats already suffering from behavioural issues such as inappropriate marking?

Once you've carefully considered all the above factors and are ready to add a new feline family member, the following sections will help ensure a smooth transition and integration with other family members and pets.

General Tips for Bringing a New Cat Home

- **Prepare a safe room.** A safe starter room or sanctuary for the new cat will provide the cat with the quiet and safety s/he needs while becoming familiar with the scents and sounds of your home. The starter room can be any size but must have a secure door and ceiling.
- **Cat-proof the safe room.** Check out our **Cat Safety Tips** and **Escape Prevention** sheets for more information.
- **Give kitty a place to hide.** New cats are often nervous and like to hide. Cardboard boxes or sheets draped over chairs make ideal hiding spots when you first bring kitty home. If you've adopted a **shy cat**, we recommend removing large items of furniture from the room, such as beds and dressers. It is much easier to interact with a cat hiding in a box than a cat hiding under a bed.
- **Help your new cat get to know you.** Place a t-shirt or a piece of your clothing that contains your scent in the safe room. This helps the cat to get to know you.
- **Equip the safe room with cat food, water and litter.** Place food and water on one side of the room and an open (unenclosed) litter box on the other side. Shyer cats may not eat much during the first 24 to 48 hours and may experience temporary diarrhoea from stress. If your cat has not eaten in 48 hours, try some extra tasty treats such as canned tuna or salmon. If this is not successful, you may want to consult your veterinarian for advice.
- **Give your new cat a new scratching post.** Put a new scratching post (at least one metre tall) inside the safe room. Scratching is a natural and comforting behaviour for cats. It's also important that the scratching post is **new** and has not been used by other cats. Your new cat does not want to be stressed by the smells of other cats while s/he is first adapting to his or her new surroundings.
- **Feliway saves the day.** If your new cat is an adult, you can use a store-bought product called Feliway. Feliway imitates natural cat pheromones and helps a new cat feel more comfortable. Feliway comes in a spray and diffuser form.
- **Give your cat some cat toys for entertainment.** Provide toys such as mice and balls in the safe room for when you are not around.
- **Spend time with your new cat.** In the beginning, visit frequently for short periods of time. Visiting can mean interacting directly with the new cat in the form of play or petting, or quietly reading a book or chatting on the telephone in the same space as your new companion. Keep in mind that a nervous cat may growl, hiss, twitch its tails or pull its ears back. The best response is to speak softly followed by giving the cat some time alone.



- **Transition beyond the safe room.** When you and your new cat have established a trusting relationship, the cat is ready to begin exploring the house. Be sure to begin this process when you are home to supervise. Close most of the doors so the cat begins its orientation in stages. Too many new spaces at once can be stressful and frightening. If you've adopted a shy cat, be sure not let it in the basement for many weeks. Most basements have many hiding places—some inaccessible to humans.
- **Ready to explore the roost.** Remember, integration into the rest of the house is dependent on the personality of your new cat (as well as your existing pets). Sometimes the integration process can begin in just two to four days; however, sometimes it is best to wait a couple weeks. Shy cats in particular may need a longer integration period.

How to Introduce Cats to Cats

Phase 1 - Cat Smells Cat

- **Successful introductions take time.** DO NOT and we repeat DO NOT try to introduce the new addition to your resident cat(s) immediately upon arrival. You may damage the new relationship irreparably and initiate fear, anger, aggression, spraying and litter box problems in the new cat and/or resident cat(s). Successful introductions take time.
- **Let the cats sniff out the situation.** Let “smell” be the first introduction as the cats sniff each other from under the “safe room” door. Within two to four days, begin exchanging the bedding between the new and resident cat(s) daily. This helps familiarize the cats with each other's scents.

Phase 2 - Cat Continues to Smell Cat

- **Let the sniffing continue.** If there are no marked signs of aggression from the cats, such as hissing and growling, the next step is to confine your resident cat to a room and let the new cat explore your house for a couple of hours each day for several days.

Phase 3 - Cat Sees Cat

- **Organize a carrier meeting.** Place your new cat in a carrier and put the carrier in a location of your home outside of the safe room (for example, the living room). Allow the cats to look at each other and sniff through the carrier door.
- **Any signs of aggression?** Keep the visit short and return the new cat to its safe room.
- Repeat this phase 2 to 3 times daily (if possible), until cats appear to be more comfortable with each other.

Phase 4 - Cat Meets Cat

- **Let the cats meet at their own pace.** If there are no signs of aggression between cats, leave the door to the safe room open a crack. This will allow the new cat to explore and/or your resident cat to visit. **Supervision is necessary** for the safety of both cats.
- In case of aggression, have a spray bottle filled with water or a towel handy. Always stop serious threats and/or aggression immediately, as a serious fight may damage the potential for successful integration and relationship.

- **If over a period of weeks your integration plan is not going well**, consider the installation of an inexpensive screen door from a building supply store. The screen door allows the cats to continue to get to know each other by sight and smell, while keeping both parties safe. Each cat can take turns in the screened room.
- **A Feliway diffuser** may also prove helpful when integration is difficult.

Phase 5 - Integration Complete

- **You may notice some occasional hissing, swatting and grouchy behaviour** over the next few months (and years). This is normal. Cats are hierarchical by nature and must establish and affirm the pecking order within your household. Plus, much like humans, all cats have the occasional “off” day.

Please note: The 5 phases detailed above offer only approximate timelines. Some integrations may proceed faster or slower and integration is dependent on the personalities of the cats involved. Remember, you know your cat(s) best. Use common sense and patience when integrating a new cat or cats.

How to Introduce a Shy Cat Companion – The Exception to the Rule

- If you’ve adopted a shy cat or kitten to provide companionship for your resident cat, a quicker integration may be best. Shy cats are often used to and welcome other feline companionship. They will be very lonely on their own, so we recommend that the integration take place very quickly (1-3 days) unless there are significant problems.

How to Introduce Cats to Dogs

Phase 1 – Cat Smells Dog

- Follow the steps detailed in Phase 1 of HOW TO INTRODUCE CATS TO CATS section above.

Phase 2 – Switch Spots

- If there are no other cats in your home, confine the dog to one room and let the cat begin to explore the rest of your house for one to two hours each day until the cat is familiar and comfortable with the layout of your home.

Phase 3 – Cat Meets Dog

- **Bring in the dog on a leash.** Once the cat is used to your home, let the cat roam loose in one room. Keep the dog on a leash and have dog treats ready in your pocket. If possible, have another person the cat is familiar with on the other side of the room to reassure and distract the cat from the dog.
- **Sit and meet.** Keep the dog seated and focused on you as the leader. Try offering the dog a toy. If the dog focuses on or accepts the toy, reward the dog with a treat. If the dog tries to stand and move towards the cat(s), correct the dog slightly with the leash and reward him or her with a treat. If at any point the dog is not responding to your commands or the cat’s stress level

appears elevated, remove the dog from the room. Keep repeating this process until the dog is responding to you and either ignoring or accepting the cat(s). This process helps teach the dog that cats are not prey, toys to be chased, or threats.

- **Watch.** Never leave the dog and cat(s) unsupervised until you are absolutely sure they have built up a mutual, trusting and respectful relationship.
- **Make sure kitty has space for alone time.** Even once the cat(s) and dog(s) are comfortable with each other, cats still like having the option to retreat to a space away from the dog. Place a baby gate across the doorway of a room in the house where the cat or cats like to hang out, or buy or build a tall cat tower so they can retreat when needed.

Note: The length of time required to successfully integrate cats with dogs varies depending on the previous experiences of the animals involved. For example, your dog may have had previous encounter with a cat or the cat may have had prior experience with a dog. Often, when the cats and dogs are used to being around the other species, integration can be quicker.

Tips for Kids

To help introduce your new cat to children, we've posted a little message from the cats!

Hi there! I'm your new cat and I'd like to tell you a few things:

- Your house is brand new to me, so I am a bit nervous and shy.
- It will take me a few days to feel comfortable, so please be patient.
- Please don't chase me; I will start to play when I feel more comfortable.
- I will learn about my new house by smelling everything.
- Because I'm new, I might run away from loud voices, noises and fast movements.
- Because I'm a bit nervous, I might hiss; that's how I say, "I am scared."
- I need quiet times just like you do, so I might find a hiding spot and take a nap.
- Please put my litter box in a quiet spot and let me use it alone.
- Please remember to pick up all my legs when you carry me or my tummy will hurt.
- I won't mean to, but since I have claws I might scratch you if we play too much.
- I'm not sure where to sleep yet, so I might try a lot of places before I get comfortable.
- Please pet me gently and don't pull my tail; I am small and can be hurt easily.
- Make sure you don't let me outside. I don't know where I live and I'll get lost.
- Oh, and one last thing. Please remember to close the door to outside behind you. I'm naturally very curious!