

# NEW CAT

## INTRODUCING YOUR NEW CAT TO YOUR RESIDENT

Cats can have great friendships with each other. When introducing another cat into your home you must manage the introduction carefully to ensure both cats adapt well. For example, if one cat gets hissed at or swatted, he may always be scared of the other cat. Below are some steps to help ease the transition and tips to help create a stress-free multi-cat environment.

### UNDERSTANDING CAT BEHAVIOUR

Domestic cats have evolved from territorial and largely solitary wild ancestors. Their need to defend territory comes from the need to catch sufficient prey to survive. Though modern domestic cats are more social and can live in groups, it is important to consider their history to understand their natural territorial nature. Relationship problems between cats are often a reason for cats being relinquished or returned to the SPCA after an adoption. The **gradual** introduction process is very important in establishing a relationship between cats.

Cats communicate visually but also by scent. They use rubbing to leave scent and for building a social bond with their human or cat friends.

#### Before you bring your new cat home

- Set aside one room for your new cat away from the resident cat's favourite place.
- Have at least one comfortable sleeping area, a hiding area such as a box or a "tent bed," food and water bowls and a litter box. Keep in mind that cats don't like to eat near where they eliminate, so keep food and water bowls away from their litter box.

#### Bringing your new cat home

**Remember**, in addition to meeting your pets already in the home, **you must also help your new cat bond with your human family members**. All these changes - a new home, new people and other animals - can be stressful. Think about how overwhelming all of this change would be if it were you being suddenly placed into a new environment. The following few steps should help make the transition easier:

- Just transporting your cat can be stressful. Cats feel safe when surrounded by their own scent. To make her trip as stress-free as possible, place the towel or bedding she has been sleeping on in the carrier box so she has a familiar scent during the trip home.
- Once home, take the cat to her room right away. Do not come into contact with the resident cat.
- Keep the cat inside the carrier box until you are in her room with the door shut.
- Place her box or other hiding area in a corner of the room (away from the litter box) and place the carrier box beside it. Open the door.
- Do not force the cat to come out. She may be frightened and stressed by the new environment.
- Leave the cat alone in the room. Allow her to settle down and come out on her own. If using the Hide, Perch & Go box from the shelter you will want to reassemble the box (once she has left

voluntarily) back to a hide-and-perch area for your cat to use in the transition period. The box will be saturated with her familiar scent and help reduce stress.

## **Scent swapping**

Cats communicate with each other by scent, so you should start by introducing the cats to each other by “swapping” scents. This process will take a few days so be patient and not rush a physical meeting with your resident cat.

- Later the first day, place your new cat’s towel on or near your resident cat’s favourite place or food bowl and encourage him to approach.
- If your cat starts to hiss, spit or avoid the towel place it on the floor away from his bed or food bowl. Each day move the towel closer to the cat’s food bowl. Do the same thing with your resident cat’s bedding giving it to the new cat for her to smell.
- Next, swap food bowls between the cats. They will start to associate the positive act of eating with the scent of the other cat.
- Swap direct scent between cats by petting one cat with a cloth around the cheeks and pet the other cat with it in the same way. It is important to rub the cheeks because this is where cats have glands that secrete a “friendly” hormone. Once they are completely tolerant of each other’s scent proceed to visual contact.

The time it takes to accept each other’s scent can vary from a few hours (usually when one is a kitten or both are very social cats) to a few weeks if either or both cats are less social.

## **Visual contact**

- Ideally, the solid door that separates the cat would be temporarily replaced with a screen door or a baby gate with the access above the gate blocked. However, if this is not possible, open the door of your new cat’s room just enough so the cats are able to see each other, sniff each other and touch noses. The opening should not be wide enough for either cat to go through. Secure it with a hook or a small nail and a rope.
- Encourage the cats to spend time close to each other with treats on either side of the door or by playing with a feather wand (thus avoiding putting your hand between the cats). Do not use catnip. Some cats get aggressive or overly excited.
- If the cats are showing aggression towards each other (more severe than a hiss or a quick swat) you may need to make the opening smaller. Over the next few days, feed the cats closer and closer to the door.
- Only once the cats are comfortable with each other (they may sniff noses, play through the door or rub against the door) you can have a proper introduction. There should be no growling, spitting or hissing.

## **First time encounter without a barrier**

### *Give your cats space and time*

It is now time to open the door and let them explore each other’s territory. Just for safety, keep a set of keys or other jingly item handy to throw on the floor to distract them should they get into a little spat. Do not scare them just interrupt them. Your cats will probably be fine. Don’t be concerned if the cats ignore each other. Do not pick them up and attempt to force them to interact. Remember, cats resolve personality conflicts by increasing space

between each other. Give them the freedom to do that. Each cat should have two choices to escape contact with the other cat, either by jumping up or moving out of the area.

### **Longer term**

#### *Respect your cats as individuals*

When you have two cats, they may be very close, grooming each other and playing or they may live together but not pay much attention to each other. Cats enjoy watching other cats. So, even if they don't seem to interact they are making each other's life more interesting.

Unless your cats freely choose to use the same litter box and eat out of the same bowl, be sure to provide each cat with separate litter boxes, beds, hiding and perching areas and food, and food and water bowls.

### **CAUTION**

#### **Signs of aggression**

Bullying between cats can sometimes be very subtle. A cat may bully another by denying him access to resources.

For example, if you have a cat door to an outdoor enclosure, one cat may stand next to it and hit and swat the other cat when entering or leaving. One may sit near the food bowl and hiss or swat at the other cat when he approaches. Or one cat may simply stare at the other. You will know if the other cat feels intimidated because he will begin to avoid the areas protected by the other and will flatten his body and move slowly from place to place to avoid arousing the bully cat.

If the aggression is a regular occurrence, be sure the bullied cat has his own space where the other cannot go and where he can access a litter box, food, water and bedding without being bullied. If the aggression is not severe or is sporadic, consider arranging your furniture so that there are obstacles for the harassed cat to walk behind or to go up and over to gain access to other parts of the home. Having multiple pathways provides both cats with escape routes and hiding areas to minimize contact bottlenecks and allow your cats to develop their own patterns to avoid direct contact with one another. Many cats do fine together even if they don't get along as "best buddies."

Observe your cats closely if you see bullying behaviour. It may seem minor, but bullying can cause chronic stress not only for the being harassed, but also for the bully cat, as feels he has to guard his territory all the time. This may lead to stress-related disease or behaviour problems such as spraying, over-grooming or eliminating outside the litter box.

Lastly, never punish either cat if they show aggression. If you see signs of aggression go back a few steps. Scent swap for a few days and start visual contact slowly again.

To help calm cats you can purchase a cat appeasing pheromone called Feliway in the form of a plug-in diffuser or as a spray. The spray can be applied to cat beds, perching areas and furniture. Feliway is available online, at select pet supply stores or through your veterinarian.

Adapted from cat behaviour research by Dr. Rachel Casey, Anthrozoology Institute, UK  
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