



Introducing your New Cat or Kitten to Other Felines in the Home

Two words: "Go Slow"!

Introducing a new cat or kitten to your resident cat(s) sometimes goes as smooth as ice, and other times as rocky as a gravel road after a heavy rain.

Since you can't ask your cat(s) if they would like a new addition to the household, the best thing to do is go slow and be proactive by preparing for all possible scenarios. Research has shown that it only takes one fight between cats to set up a lifetime of hostility and other potential problems such as litterbox issues, antagonism and fighting, biting or scratching humans in re-directed aggression, compulsive behaviors such as over-grooming, and cats that won't come out from under beds or special hiding places. These are the very problems that also lead many cats to being surrendered to animal shelters or worse.

Even if you have been lucky enough in the past to have had an easy transition of a new cat or kitten into your cat-established household, it wouldn't be wise to assume that your newest addition is going to be just as easy. Different personality types, age, sex and socialization all play a huge part in successful multi-cat households. Each situation should be measured carefully and erring on the side of caution should be the first consideration when bringing in a new feline member.

Cat behavior:

Understanding some general cat behavior and their social structures can also offer some insight as to why some cats might not adjust easily to a new cat or kitten.

Cats can and do live in harmony with other cats, but most cats are also very comfortable living a

solitary life. Studies of long-term cat colonies have shown that free-ranging cats can and do live successfully around and amongst lots of other cats. In fact, it is not uncommon for nursing mom cats to take on another mother's kittens so one can go hunt and bring back the kill to share. So why is it so difficult to introduce our resident cats to a new addition?

The biggest difference observed between the free-ranging cats and the house cats living with us is space!

Free-ranging cats are uninhibited and are able to choose to move away, avoid other cats or leave the scene when they feel threatened, thus avoiding many direct confrontations. When leaving is not an option, most cats will first invoke other behaviors to avoid aggressive practices since it is not in their best interest to fight and risk injury and potential death from bite wounds.

Some of the common behaviors observed to avoid actual fighting are:

- Using displacement behaviors such as lip licking, eating, or grooming as though they changed their mind about confronting another cat
- Using display behaviors such as body posturing
- Scenting with urine marking
- Scent and visual marking via scratching
- Employing vocalizations

The cats living in our homes, for the most part, will also try to avoid confrontations by employing many of the same methods when introduced to another cat.

Unfortunately, urine marking, scratching furniture, posturing



and hiding are often the behaviors our house cats choose when they are forced to interact or meet with another cat too quickly or without proper introductions.

Of course these are all very normal cat behaviors and punishing any of them can cause more anxiety and stress for both the established cat(s) and the new kitty, and you may end up with neurotic cats that never get along, as well as some very annoying behavior problems.

The formula for success (most of the time)

Having realistic expectations is the first step to successful introductions of cats meeting for the first time. You should plan on the process taking any where from a week to 6 months, depending on the cats. If one of the cats has been under-socialized, hides when you have company and then takes days to come out of hiding, or freaks out when you so much as move a piece of furniture, plan on this process taking much longer. If you have a cat that fits that description, you realistically should ask yourself if bringing in another cat is such a good idea.

It's not that it won't ever work when one of the cats is an under-socialized or anxious cat, but you would need to make some special concessions if this is the case—including lots of extra time, possibly permanent segregation, or re-homing if serious behavior problems result from the addition of a new cat. If you are unable to provide these options if needed, having a single cat might be best.

What you will need:

Preparation for the new arrival is very important. Consider where you can house the new cat that will prevent the resident cat or cats from bothering her in the early stages. After you decided where you will keep your new cat or kitten, you will also want her to have her own litterbox, some type of scratching surface, a set of water and feeding bowls, a few fun toys, her own cat carrier for transporting her from room to

room, and ideally, a very tall cat tree in her new space for her to use.

It's also a good idea to invest in a product called FeliWay. It is a cat pheromone spray or plug-in that sends an olfactory message of, "Hi, I'm a friendly and happy cat." Using a plug-in near, or applying the spray on the doors and around the flooring where the new cat will be housed a few days prior to the new arrival can help prepare your resident cat(s) for the new arrival since this product is based on the cheek pheromones that cats use when they are happy, contented or relaxed. Waiting until after the new arrival may still help, but the resident cat(s) may be too anxious or stressed at that point to reap the full benefits of the product.

You can also allow your resident cat(s) go into the room where the new cat will be housed so they can explore the area after you have it all set up. If you take a little time to pet, groom or play with your resident cat(s) in that space, he should rub against things and put his own "happy" scent in that area. This will help the new cat relax a little more since she will be getting a message of a friendly cat when she first enters the room.

The first day home:

Ideally, you will already have a clean bill of health for all of the cats involved. Because cats are so sensitive to environmental changes, it's no wonder that many cats come down with upper respiratory infections and digestive problems when a new cat is introduced into the household. Make sure the resident cat(s), as well as the new addition are all up to date on vaccines, are free of fleas and are eating a healthy diet to avoid illness due to stress conditions.

Have the space where the new cat is going to be housed all prepared and ready to go before you bring her home. Have a small towel in the carrier for your new cat so you can later take that out and use her scent with the resident cat(s).

Without any fanfare, take your new cat directly to the area where she will be housed and close the other cat(s) out. Spend a few minutes with the new cat, quietly opening the carrier for her to come out. Don't force her. Just leave the carrier door open and let her come out on her own. She will come out when she is ready, and don't be alarmed if your new cat runs and hides somewhere—she might just need some time to take everything in and relax after the car ride home.

Remove the towel that has your new cat's scent from the carrier. This is an opportune time to go out of the room and give your other cat(s) attention, treats, or play on the towel—a positive association with the new cat's scent. Be sure to get lots of mileage from the scented towel and feed your resident cat(s) on top of it as well. Do the same thing for your new cat by having another towel that you rub the resident cat(s) with and then feed the new cat on that towel.

During these first few days, you are not going to allow the cats to see each other. It could take several days before all the cats start to relax, but don't discourage them from smelling around the door that separates them even if they seem stressed early on. You will praise them and give small treats to each of the cats as they explore around the area where the other cat(s) is so they all start to pair the other cat's scent with good things. This will help them be more comfortable when they finally get to see each other.

Important reminders for your new cat's first day home:

Don't overwhelm your new cat with attention or play—she needs time to adjust and settle in without the distraction of trying to be polite and interact with you or other members of the family.

As exciting as it is to have a new cat or kitten, it should be made clear to any children in the household that if they give the new cat time to

adjust to her new home slowly, she will be much more receptive to their attention when she is ready.

It's also important to remember that all lifestyle changes, (even if your new cat seems un-rattled), are still stressful and it can take several days for the stress hormones to calm down enough for your cat to truly relax. Be sure that you and your family don't add to your new cat's stress by overtaxing her the first few days or you can actually extend the recuperation time from stress hormones. This will, in turn, make it more difficult for your new cat to adjust to her new home and the other cat(s).

Trading places:

After your new cat has spent a day or two in her new space, it's time to switch her and the resident cats. The new cat will now be in the area where the resident cats have been and visa versa. This doesn't have to be for days on end; just an hour or two will be fine.

Use a carrier to move the new cat and to keep her safe as you juggle everyone around. (If your new cat is not comfortable in the carrier, try moving the resident cat(s) in the carrier while the new cat moves around on her own.

Since your new cat won't be familiar with the part of the house where you are now taking her, be sure to keep an eye on her during the first 5-10 minutes after you open the carrier door. This is in case she hides some where, as you will want to know where she went so she doesn't get into a hiding place where you won't be able to get her out, or where she might be able to dart out of a door. (Be sure to have current identification on your new cat, just in case!)

After you are sure the new cat is going to just explore around, bring some of your resident cat's favorite toys or treats and spend some time interacting with your resident cat(s) where you have been keeping the new cat. You will be creating a wonderful association that will get

stronger and more connected with the new cat's scent each time you interact with your resident cat(s) in a positive way. After your resident cat(s) have spent a couple of hours or longer in the new cat's space, you can use your carrier to switch them back to the original places. Or, if all the cats seem comfortable where they are, you can leave them for longer periods of time.

You will want to continue switching them each day for a couple of days, and then it's finally time to let them actually see each other.

The meeting:

Using a door stopper or something to prop the door open about an inch, you can allow the cats to go to the open doorway to explore and sniff. The space should be small enough that they can't actually touch each other, just see one another a little. Again, lots of good things should happen in association with this exploration, such as petting, treats, grooming, food or play.

As long as the cats are displaying curiosity, and not aggression or fear, you can continue this process each day, while opening the door just a tiny bit more each time until you have the door open about 2 inches (this will depend on how big the different cats are). This will be your gauge as to how well they are doing with one another, and whether you should slow down the process, or proceed to allowing them to actually meet. It's what you don't see or hear that will tell you if and when you should allow the cats meet.

You can allow your cats to meet if you don't see or hear:

- Dilated Eyes
- Ears back
- Hissing or spitting
- Yowling
- Coming forward and swatting at the door
- Arching back and puffing out fur
- The great disappearing cat every time the door opens even just a little

Letting them meet:

Even if you think your cats are ready, don't force the cats to meet. This should be a casual, but always supervised process. Simply leave the door open and allow the cats to see each other as though it is no big deal. A couple of sprays of Feliway into the air just before the meeting can also help calm the mood.

A climbing tree is really helpful at this juncture, just in case one of the cats feels the need to get away. Having a way to get up high helps cats feel like they have more space, and they rarely fight while perched in the air since the likelihood of injury is greatly increased.

As the cats move closer to each other, you will want to keep an eye on them, and of course, be ready to intercept them if things do not appear to be going well. A word of caution: Never grab a cat in the middle of a fight or potential fight. You are likely to be bitten, and the restraint usually escalates the disagreement. Instead, have something ready that you can put between them—a rag mop or a broom are good objects to use since they are both soft enough as to not hurt the cats, but sturdy enough if a cat latched on, you could move the cat away.

If all seems to be going well after the initial meeting you can start giving the cats more freedom and time together. It's still a good idea to feed them separately so problems over food are kept to a minimum. You will also want to keep them separated when you are not able to supervise their interactions, just in case something triggers a reaction by one of the cats and you are not there to re-direct them.

Expect that it might take months for some cats to truly relax around each other, and the older the cat the more time it may take. You can, however, speed things along by providing all the cats with lots of distractions whenever they are going to spend time around one-another.

The value of climbing trees and the vertical space they provide can't be emphasized enough since they allow the cat to feel as though he or she can claim their own territory. Placing a climbing tree in front of a window with bird feeders located outside is a big distraction and is akin to providing your cats with their own little live theater.

Other ideas that really help keep the focus away from each other are food carrier toys in which you can feed an entire meal in, and satisfies your cat's hunting instincts at the same time. These kinds of toys will exercise both their mind and body, causing them to be more tired and less likely to bother each other.

Also consider catnip toys, bubble machines that can be placed on a timer (and, they make catnip bubbles!), and kitty Kongs which are another food delivery toy for cats, to name just a few. These are all fun and interactive ways to not only stimulate your cat's mind, all the while providing exercise and distraction, they also help to make positive associations with the other cat(s) when provided in each other's presence.

If you have made it this far in your introductions you can start to relax more with the cats, and actually enjoy all the fun and company of living in a multi-cat household.