

Introducing a Cat/Kitten into the Household

Introducing a new cat into a household, especially when there are existing cats, can seem like an overwhelming task. Patience is key--the transition can take several weeks but planning ahead can reduce the stress, allow for an easier transition, and build a positive relationship between your feline companions.

Before bringing a new cat or kitten into the household, it is imperative that he/she has been tested for the Feline Leukemia Virus (FELV) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV). These tests are performed by taking a small blood sample from your cat/kitten. The test is generally performed in the clinic either while you wait or that same day. Many of the rescue organizations and shelters run these tests prior to adoption but not all. Be sure to bring your paperwork with you on their first visit to the veterinarian, they will be able to determine what your cat/kitten will need.

If you already have a cat(s) at home, it is also important that before bringing in the new cat/kitten into your house, that the current cat(s) be tested for FELV & FIV if not tested before or if they go outside and have not been vaccinated for the viruses. If you do not know the status of your current cat and a new kitty is brought in, they could potentially be exposed to the virus.

The first few days you should isolate your new cat in a separate room with its own food, water, litter box, bedding and toys. Bring familiar items from the adoption location in order to make it smell comforting and "homey" for them. Keep the carrier open in the room as well so the cat has a place to hide and also becomes familiar with it for future veterinary visits. This is important as we know that many cat owners become stressed because it is often difficult to get cats into carriers if they are not habituated to it. If there are other cats in the home, this allows both cats to first get used to the scent and sounds of the other cat without risk of confrontation. Be sure to spend a lot of time with each cat or group of cats individually.

Once all cats in the home seem relaxed, gradually start to move the food dishes closer to the door that separates them. If any stress is noted, go back to the step where they were comfortable and work more slowly. You can also use a toy for them to play with under the door when they are calm and hopefully curious. If cats are calm, take a cloth/blanket to wipe one cat and then put that cloth in the room with the other cats. Do the same for new and existing cats, so that the other can smell the cat in their area. If this is comfortable to all cats, you can also mix the scents on one cloth, wiping first one cat, then the other. Reward all calm behaviors with treats and praise in a soft voice.

When the cats are comfortable with the above, it is time to try a brief and safe interaction. This can be done by opening the crack of the door an inch so that both cats are safe, but can start to see each other. If one cat hisses or tries to attack, close the door and back up the process, and restart more gradually. Sometimes it can be helpful to distract the cats with food. An eye and hook latch or doorstops on each side of the door work well.

When all is going well, place the new cat inside a carrier and allow the other cat(s) to explore by seeing and smelling the new cat more closely in a safe environment. Continue to reward calm behaviors with treats and praise in a soft voice. If the cats are harness and leash trained, this is another option.

If the cats seem comfortable in this environment the next step is to try placing them in the same room with direct supervision. Start introductions for brief periods making it more likely that the experiences will be positive. Remember to be patient and go back a few steps if necessary and gradually re-introduce. If you have any concerns, contact your veterinarian. If your cats have been successfully acclimated, remember that each cat still needs their own resources, often in different locations, such as food, water, bedding and litter boxes.

It can still be overwhelming to acclimate a cat into a home without other cats. As your companion becomes more comfortable, he or she will be more likely to explore and test the boundaries. You should always check for potential hazards such as poisonous plants, full-length curtains, fireplaces, breakable objects, etc. The more prepared you are, the smoother the transition can be.

We also recommend using Feliway in the house. Feliway is a synthetic copy of the feline facial pheromone used by cats to mark their territory as safe and secure. Using Feliway during this first introduction is advised to help the cats feel safe and secure. Plug in a Feliway Diffuser a few days before introducing the new cat and use it for at least one month to help both the new and resident cat(s) adjust.

Plug the Feliway Diffuser in the room your cats spend most of their time. If cats are separated or do not share the same living areas, you may need a Diffuser in each area. One diffuser covers up to 700 sq. ft.

For more information you can go to: <http://www.feliway.com/us/>

