

Tips for Introducing Cats

Many cat-loving households have more than one cat in their family. Cats can be companions, playmates and help enrich each other's lives. However, introducing a new cat to an existing cat-home can take time and patience. Cats are often placed in positions where they're either a resident cat faced with a newcomer cat or they're a new cat coming into an existing cat's territory. Truthfully, it's probably not much fun being in either position.

Throwing two cats into one environment without proper consideration of their positions is just asking for trouble. But, with a carefully planned introduction, cats can ease into accepting one another and may just become life-long pals.

Keep Your Cats Separated At First

Set up a special isolation room for your new cat. This will provide her with a safe place to get used to her surroundings and enable you to control how and when your two cats meet each other. The special room for your new cat should have all the trappings of home – a litter box, food/water, some cozy hiding places, a scratching post, and toys. The two cats should be able to smell and hear each other. You can do this by feeding both cats near the door to the isolation room so they learn to associate the smell and sound of each other with a positive experience. Doling out treats near the door is also a good idea.

After 2-3 days, some cat experts recommend switching the cats' locations so they can get used to the scent of one another. Many behaviorists advise rubbing the cats with the same towel to mix their scents. Use a clean sock to rub on the new cat's face to capture her facial pheromones. Then, leave the sock near the existing cat and let him investigate on his own.

After a few more days, the next step is to play with each of the cats near the door, building up positive associations with the scent of the other cat. This play, again, helps each cat associate the other cat with a good time.

Slowly Let the Cats See Each Other

If all seems to be going well and your cats aren't hissing or growling under the door at each other, after a week, you can try visually introducing the cats. Installing a screen door or even a high baby gate (that neither cat can jump over) can work. It's helpful to have another human with you so there is one person and one cat on each side of the barrier.

Continue feeding, playing with, and giving the cats treats within view of the other cats, but don't force it! If one cat won't eat her food right next to the screen, try moving the food dish a few feet away. Let the cats determine how close you move the dish. If both cats are eating comfortably, try moving the dish a little closer, but don't be afraid to start off with the food dishes ten or more feet apart.

Make the Face-to-Face Introduction

The final step in the process is to let the cats be together, face-to-face, for supervised interaction. Don't worry if the cats completely ignore each other or hiss a bit and then walk away. It will take some time for your cats to learn that the other is a friend and not a foe. Keep watching the cats and let them take things at their own pace as long as no one is starting to bully or harass the other. You should be able to gauge how it's going. If you sense one cat is harassing the other, don't be afraid to seek professional assistance from a behaviorist.