



Introducing a Cat to a New Home

Household with Resident Cat(s)

When a new cat is being introduced into a home where there is already a resident cat (or cats) it is especially important to give the new cat a safe haven. Provide the cat with his own room in which to adjust, before introducing him/her to the resident cat. This allows the newcomer and the resident cat a chance to get used to one another's scents before their first face to face interaction.

The best way to let cats meet for the first time is to put the new cat back into the carrier and put the carrier on the floor in the resident cat's territory. Observe their interactions for about 1/2 hour then return the new cat back to its room. If there was a lot of hissing, growling or even swatting then return the cat to his/her room, keep the door shut and repeat the process a few times each day until the aggression subsides.

Cats hate change, so whenever there is something new in their lives, the slower the introduction, the better. If the carrier visits have been calm, then once the new cat is back in his/her room let the new cat out of the carrier, but now leave the door ajar, letting them meet each other face to face. Let the cats interact for about 1 hour, then return the new cat to room, even if they are interacting calmly. This time apart allows them to process the information they gained while they were together. It also allows them both to regain their sense of territory and confidence, which encourages a favorable interaction at their next meeting. Continue this process daily, lengthening the amount of time they are together a little each time.

The key to introducing cats to each other is patience. What we most often perceive as fighting is in actuality their way of working out their territory. This is an essential part of how cats learn to live together in multi-cat household and they must go through it. Our intervention prolongs this process. So for the most part, let them do what they will and stay out of it. Your anxiety about their interactions can feed their agitation, so try to be calm and encouraging, letting them know that they are acting appropriately.

The only times our intervention may be necessary is if their exchanges with each other draw blood or if one is continually chasing/dominating the other one. This often causes depression in the cat who is being chased. Slight depression, lasting a few days to a week is normal. Prolonged depression is not. The best way to intervene is to squirt them with a spray bottle

containing water. Or, better yet, just squirt the one who is instigating the aggression. A spray bottle works well because it startles them silently and they don't necessarily associate the punishment as having come from you. If a spray bottle isn't handy, a loud noise, such as clapping your hands also works well. You never want to get in the middle of a cat fight. Cats in the heat of battle can redirect their aggression towards you and cat bites to humans can become serious. The average amount of time it takes for cats to establish the rules of territory with each other is 2 weeks to 2 months although it can take longer.

Household with a Resident Dog

When introducing your dog to a new cat it is vital that your dog knows basic obedience. You will need to have your dog under control when interacting with the new cat so it can learn which behaviours are appropriate and which ones are not. It is generally easier to introduce a kitten to a dog but it isn't necessary for a harmonious relationship. If you do bring home a kitten, follow the guidelines given below, but do not leave them together unsupervised until the kitten is at least 4 months old and able to defend itself if the need arises.

Introducing a new cat to a resident dog is similar to introducing cats to one another (as described above). Without letting them actually meet, you will want to start by giving the new cat a safe haven. Set it up in its own room, and allow it to become comfortable. Once it is comfortable in this room, let it explore the rest of the house for short periods each day while the dog is not there.

Cats' personalities are directly related to how they perceive and experience their territory. A cat who is comfortable and self-assured in her territory will be more confident and relaxed when confronted with new, potentially stressful situations. When the cat appears fairly relaxed in most areas of the house, let them meet. The best way to do this is to introduce them while the cat is up on a high surface unreachable by the dog (such as a counter or on cat furniture). Then bring the dog into the room on a leash. Observe their interactions. **A dog that is showing overt aggression, such as lunging, snarling, growling, baring teeth etc., will probably never accept a cat. The cat is better off being returned.**

If all is reasonably calm so far, walk the dog around the room on a leash. Let the dog go wherever it wants but don't let go of the leash in case the dog decides to chase the cat. On-leash interactions give the cat the opportunity to approach the dog if it chooses, or to find its own routes of escape. During the first few meetings, the cat and dog will probably not interact face to face.

Do not ever let the dog intimidate the cat by barking or chasing. Give it a correction each time it acts inappropriately to let it know that these behaviors are unacceptable. On the other hand, if the cat bops the dog on the nose as a warning, that is a good sign and should not be discouraged. When they set boundaries between themselves, they are beginning to establish a working relationship. Let them interact with the dog on the leash for about 1/2 hour, then return the cat back to its safe haven. Increase the amount of time they are together each visit.

It is important to be patient and encouraging in their interactions. If you are relaxed, they too will be more at ease. Don't try to rush the introduction or force them to interact more than either of them are willing. You should use your best judgment as to when they can begin supervised sessions with the dog off the leash.