

# Introducing Your New Cat to Your Other Household Cats

## Introduction

The new cat introduction process is extremely important in determining the success of having a multi-cat household. First impressions can be lasting impressions when it comes to cats. Cats' territorial nature means that the time required for the introduction process varies greatly depending on the cats involved. Before bringing a new cat into your home, it is important to recognize that this will probably take a little bit of time and effort to make everything happen smoothly. With a little patience and commitment, your new cat could wind up being good friends with, or at the very least peacefully cohabitating with your current family cat.

Introducing cats who are strangers to each other should be done in a gradual fashion. Owners should make sure to associate enjoyable things such as food, attention, or play with the other cat(s). Patience is extremely important in this process, and it is important to know that you may be required to repeat steps in the introduction process multiple times.

Cats are naturally territorial in the wild, and will defend their home range and its associated resources, such as food, resting areas, and litter boxes from other cats. In the case of the house cat, this territorialism may manifest in your cat becoming apparently aggressive in an attempt to "defend" his place in the household, as well as his "home range". While this can pose quite a challenge, with some time and commitment, most cats can learn to cope with the new housemate and put major aggression issues aside. A settling in period is generally recommended before introductions are made, since the initial stress of moving into your home can cause fear or aggressive behavior to begin with.

Make sure to speak quietly and calmly to the cats and make no sudden moves. When the cats are tolerant of each other's presence, give lots of positive reinforcement in the form of words, toys, and food. It is best not to scold or use harsh tones with the cats while they are in each other's presence. This may cause them to associate unpleasantness with being near each other. Give special attention to the resident cat(s) to reassure them of your loyalty and love and help minimize jealousy. Give the new cat loving attention only during the resident cat's absence until such time as they become true friends.

In addition, it is recommended that you temporarily assign the new cat its own room (preferably one that is not heavily trafficked). The door to this room should be kept closed, and the room should contain a litter box, dry food and water, as well as comforting objects such as a scratching post, comfortable bed, and cat toys. It is also smart to leave the cat's carrier open on the floor so the cat can retreat there if he/she feels threatened.

## The Step by Step Process

Put other cats away before you bring the new cat home, so that you can take the cat to its room without encountering the other cat(s). Then close the door securely and go visit your other cats. They will smell the new cat on you. Give them treats to positively reinforce this experience.

A few days later, in order to further acclimate the cats with each other's scent, it is good to exchange the new cat's bedding with that of the resident cat.

The next step is to rotate rooms daily for at least 2-3 days. This allows the new cat explore the rest of the house while the resident cat spends some time in the new cat's room. This will give your resident cats a chance to smell the new cat and rub their own scent on objects.

The cats should be fed in each area with wet food twice daily, and it is also good to play with the cats in each area at least twice daily. The practice of setting up a schedule of feeding treats of wet food, as well as a playtime routine, minimizes anxiety and makes the cats feel more secure.

Keep the cats in separate areas for as long as it takes to allow them the chance to become desensitized to the smells and sounds of the cats in the other area. When they all seem particularly relaxed with this process, begin to expose them to the sight of each other.

A good way to accomplish this visual introduction is to bring the new cat(s) in a carrier to meet your cats and sniff each other through the carrier wire door. Place the carrier on the floor and allow them to meet this way several times a day for about an hour. Continue these meetings for several days or until they remain calm in each other's presence.

If and when the cats are able to stay calm in each other's presence during these meetings, it is time to let the new cat out into the rest of the house for a few minutes. The length of the visits can be increased gradually each day. Depending on the personalities of the cats involved, this process may take a few days or a few months. If it appears that any fighting maybe be close to occurring while you are supervising, put the newcomer back in his/her room and proceed more slowly.

If those supervised play times go well, you can begin to allow them to cohabitate in your home. If any aggressive behavior occurs at any time, begin the introduction process again.

It is very important to understand that this process can take as little as a few days, to sometimes much longer. It is all dependent on the cats involved.

#### If things don't go well right away...

One of the most important steps to dealing aggressive behavior between cats is to recognize the different types of aggression and understand their underlying causes. A short list and description of some commonly seen aggressive behaviors include: chasing; ambushing; hissing; swatting; and/or biting. If you see these behaviors, seek help from your veterinarian.

Most cats get along fine if the introductory process is done correctly. Please seek help from your veterinarian if you feel that things are not progressing well, or if you have other questions.

*Handout created as part of a class exercise by veterinary students:  
Beau Bedell, Brynie Kaplan Dau, Jason Rowan, Kelly Suyehara*