



INTRODUCING CATS TO A NEW CAT

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR NEW CAT!

Cats are social creatures who often enjoy living with other cats. However, cats can also be territorial and slow to adapt to change. It can take many weeks for some cats to become comfortable with one another after first being introduced. Cats are individuals. Some will warm up to another cat very quickly, while others may take a lot of time, and some may always prefer to live alone.

HOW TO PREPARE

Before introducing your cats, set up pheromone calming products such as the Feliway MultiCat Dispenser in the areas where the cats will be staying. These can be found at www.feliway.com.

Let the new cat hang out in a single room with easy access to food, water, and his litter box for at least a week. This will allow him to acclimate to the sounds, scents, and routines of his new environment.

Learn about cat body language by visiting www.tuftandpaw.com/blogs/cat-guides/the-definitiveguide-to-cat-behavior-and-body-language.

Make sure that both cats are getting lots of playtime, exercise, and mental stimulation during this process. You want to keep things fun and ensure that no one feels neglected during this transition.

INTRODUCTIONS

Swap bedding and toys that have each cat's scent on them daily. Place blankets and towels with one cat's scent under the food dishes of the other cat, so both cats can begin to associate the smell of the other with positive things.

Separate the cats by a closed door. They will be able to smell and hear each other, but they should not see each other yet. It is okay if they bat their paws under the door, especially if it is playful.

When you can tell that the cats are aware of each other, and you see no signs of stress behaviors such as growling or hissing, a whipping or thumping tail, stiff body posture, or fur standing on end, then it is time to open the door! Separate the cats with a tall gate. Stacking baby gates in the doorway can be a good way to do this as many cats will jump a pet gate.

Now the cats can see, hear, and smell each other, but they are still safely separated. Start slowly by opening the door for an hour or so per day, and increase the amount of time the door is left open as the cats become more acquainted with one another. Continue swapping scents and giving each cat attention daily. Play and give treats to each cat with the other nearby so that both cats continue to associate each other with good things. Continue the separation by door and baby gate until the cats show no stress around each other.

You may need to back up a step if either cat shows signs of escalating stress or aggression. This includes intense yowling, attempts to swat or bite (through the baby gate), or any litter box issues. If either cat stops eating, drinking, or using his litter box, go back to separating the cats with a closed door and speak with your vet about stress relief measures.

Take the gates down when both cats can interact through the baby gate with no negative reactions or signs of stress. Monitor behavior as the cats begin to interact face-to-face with no barriers between them. Do not force either cat to leave "his space"; let the cats explore on their own time. Keep things positive with lots of treats and praise. Some hissing and growling behavior is normal as they negotiate personal space and boundaries. What is important to note is whether the cats can respect each other's

boundaries and walk away from these situations, rather than reacting with escalating hostile body language or continuing to approach a cat who is communicating that he is uncomfortable. If this does happen, distract the cats by breaking visual contact (holding a blanket up between them is a great way to do this) so that the defensive cat may retreat easily. Talk calmly and happily to the cats and shoo them into their separate rooms for a break. Reprimands will only cause stress and bad associations.

Give an energetic cat a good playtime before removing the gate so he will be calmer and not take his energy out inappropriately on his new housemate. You can play with and train tricks with each cat to help them stay distracted and have fun in the presence of the other cat.

Give the cats lots of safe hiding and climbing spaces. Be sure that these safe spaces have multiple exit routes so that neither cat can be cornered. A cat will feel more secure about the other cat if he can get away from him when he wants, and this lessens the chance of fights.

Slowly increase the amount of time the cats are allowed to spend with each other, offering lots of breaks. Return the cats to their respective “safe spaces” after every meeting until they show no stress when they are near each other. Ideally, you will start to see social behaviors, such as rubbing, head butting, sleeping together, or playing together, but don’t be discouraged if that doesn’t happen! Simple peaceful coexistence is also fine.

Expect introductions to take time. It is not unusual for a cat to take many weeks to adjust to a new sibling. He must learn that the new cat is not a threat. Then they can become friends and roommates.

BREAKING UP A FIGHT

Should there be a fight, never stick your hands into the commotion, or you may be bitten or scratched by accident. Place a large object, such as a trash can lid or a blanket, between the cats. If this does not work to separate them, dump water on them or bang metal bowls or pots together noisily. Immediately separate the cats, and do not start introductions again for at least 48 hours. Give the cats lots of time to cool down before trying again.

Many scuffles are caused when people move too fast during an introduction, and these cats can still be friends. However, if there is a serious fight, especially with injuries, it may need to be accepted that some cats will simply not get along. Please email our behavior helpline for further advice about how to proceed.

LIVING TOGETHER

Make sure each cat has multiple sleeping spaces, climbing spaces, scratch

RESOURCES:

If you need additional advice about your cat’s behavior, please email our free behavior helpline at behavior@mcgov.onmicrosoft.com.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES AND ADOPTION CENTER
7315 Muncaster Mill Rd, Derwood, MD | Montgomerycountymd.gov/animalservices | (240) 773-5900