

The New Arrival!

Introducing Your New Cat to the Family

It would be great if a brief tour, a smile and a few handshakes were all your cat needed to settle right in to her new home. Unfortunately, it's a little bit trickier than that...especially if you already have cats. If you could use a little help on how to get the introductions started smoothly, read on!

If this is your first...

If you don't already have any pets, the transition will be a lot easier. But you still need to remember the first rule of making, well, *any* kind of change in a cat's life: take it slow!

When you first bring her home, your cat may very well be timid or scared; rather than immediately lose her under a bed or behind a bookshelf (or worse, straight back out the door), introduce her to her new home a little bit at a time. At first, just sit with her in a small room – preferably the one where her litter box will be located. Regardless of what room you choose, be sure that you provide her with a litter box, food, and water. The whole idea is to make her comfortable, and if she's missing those basic amenities she'll just become even more on-edge. Be calm and reassuring. If you have small children who are understandably excited about their new pet, this is *not* the time to let them meet her. Once she is comfortable with you and has calmed down, introduce her gradually to your whole home. Just take it one room at a time, and be patient: she has a lot of exploring to do.

When she is introduced to children, be absolutely certain that the interactions are closely supervised. Remember, she does not understand that they don't know any better when they pull her tail or ears, or poke her a little too hard, and she is already under a lot of stress. If she feels threatened, it's only natural for her to defend herself with her claws or teeth, so for the sake of your cat and your children, don't let the situation get out of control. Do *not* punish her if she does have to defend herself. If she seems to be getting over-stimulated and distressed, give her a break: return her to a smaller, confined, and quiet space. Remember,

*Kids? Cats?
Dogs? No
matter what,
your new cat
needs a safe
room until she
settles in!*

your children, no matter how young they are, are more capable of understanding you than she is, so teach them the humane way to treat a pet: hold their hands and help them stroke her gently, and be sure that they know to use “inside voices” or she'll be scared. If you punish her for being afraid of your children, you'll only teach her to fear both them and you, and you'll soon have a highly aggressive, frightened cat on your hands. If you help her learn that they're just as nice as you are, and give her time to become comfortable around them, you'll have a wonderful pet and memories to last a lifetime.

Fluffy, meet Socks

If you already have a cat (or cats), things can get a little trickier. Cats, like everybody else, are territorial, and if you already have a cat, then you and your home have already been claimed. Bringing a new cat into the mix can shake things up, but usually all they really need is a little time to establish a new pecking order. Be aware that this can take quite a while: frequently around a few weeks. Don't be alarmed if your cats don't seem to like each other right away, that is perfectly normal.

As described above, the first thing you want to do is create a safe, confined area just for you and your new cat. You want her to feel comfortable with her new surroundings before you try to introduce her to your resident cat, so be sure she has a litter box, food, and water, and maybe a scratching post and some toys. Stay with her and calm her down; the trip to a new home can be very stressful for a cat. Speak to her reassuringly and give her plenty of affection. While she may not like being confined to a small space, she will definitely appreciate having this area as her “safe room” when the fur starts to fly, so to speak. You

will probably want to keep it set up to accommodate her until she settles in with your resident cat.

Your new cat may call her safe room home for up to the first week she's in your house...it really depends on how well her personality meshes with your resident cat's. Regardless, the first interaction the two of them should have should be under the door of her safe room. Let them sniff each other and get used to each other's smells for as long as they need; never just toss them in together. While your new cat is still restricted to her safe room, try pulling the old switcheroo: swap the blankets, towels, or beds that the cats like to sleep on so that they can get used to the other cat's smell being there before they have to start sharing their favorite places. You may also want to let the cats take their first look at each other inside the safe room. Confine the new cat to a carrier, and let the resident cat come in for a few minutes. Some hissing is normal – just don't let it go on for too long, since your new cat is likely to feel stressed out being stuck in the carrier and unable to defend herself.

When you do introduce your feline friends, take it slow and make sure you're there to supervise. Bring them together in an open, neutral space: avoid places of particular importance, like sleeping areas, favorite spots, and around the food bowls – your resident cat is more likely to become aggressive if she feels that the things she values most are in jeopardy. Don't be surprised if there is a good deal of hissing and growling, and maybe some hiding or even fighting, because all of these are normal behaviors...but you should be absolutely prepared to step in if things get out of hand. If things get too aggressive, or either cat seems completely overwhelmed and stressed, take the new cat back to her safe room and let them calm down. Repeat this procedure frequently and keep the cats together for longer and longer periods of time, until they can live together in relative harmony. The hissing may continue for weeks, but as both cats begin to feel less threatened and more friendly the negative behavior will decrease.

Fluffy, meet Rover

First of all, if you have both dogs and cats, take care of introducing your new cat to your resident cat before you worry about introducing her to your dog. Cat-to-cat introductions tend to be more difficult than cat-to-dog introductions, so it's a good idea to get the drama out of the way first and worry about the dog later.

Hissing and growling is normal, but make sure everybody gets a break if they seem overwhelmed.

When you first introduce your new cat to your dog, make sure the dog is confined – either on a leash, or if he's crate-trained, inside his crate – so the cat can approach him on her own terms. Have a squirt bottle ready if there is any sign of aggression between the two, and separate them immediately if either animal seems to feel threatened or fearful. Just let them calm down, and try again later. Continue letting them interact like this, under very controlled conditions, until they seem comfortable with each other; even if the first meeting goes well, don't immediately let them loose to romp around the house together. This is especially important if your new cat is just a kitten; your dog may absolutely love her and just want to play all day long, but he also may not understand how fragile she is and how easily his version of play could turn fatal. Never let your dog and kitten interact unsupervised, unless you are absolutely, 100% certain that he will not harm her, or she is big enough to withstand a little rough play.

Your dog may not know his own strength, so never leave him unattended with your new kitten. What he thinks is play could be very dangerous for a fragile baby!

Keeping the Peace (post-introduction)

- 🐾 Place your cats' food bowls at opposite ends of the room to start off, and then gradually over the course of a week move them closer together, until the cats are eating side by side – once you get there, you're golden!
- 🐾 Provide plenty of hang-out spots so that the cats aren't immediately forced to share, and everybody can stay comfortable. They may decide they like snuggling up together down the road, but if they don't, everybody will still be happy.
- 🐾 Keep at least as many litter boxes as you have cats...again, they may decide to share eventually, but then again they may not. And scooping a couple of boxes is a lot better than dealing with daily "accidents," if one cat prevents the other from using the box.
- 🐾 Keep litter boxes and food dishes out of reach of the dog. At least until she's fully adjusted to life in a multi-pet home, your cat may feel threatened if a dog can sneak up on her while she's eating or using the bathroom, and you never, ever want her to associate fear with either of those places.