

Introductions Between Cats



Bringing home a new pet should be a family decision, and that includes any pets currently living with you! Cats have different personalities just like people and though many cats learn to get along just fine with their new feline friends, it's always best to introduce them slowly and carefully. Rushing things can create a lifetime of ill will between cats. The following tips will help introductions go smoothly.

- Before you bring your new cat home, set up a separate space for her with food, water, litter box, scratching post, and toys. Plan to keep your new cat completely separated from your other cats for at least 2-3 weeks.
- Make sure you have plenty of litter boxes available. A good rule of thumb in multi-cat households is to have one box for each cat, plus one extra. So if you have three cats, you should have at least four litter boxes.
- Consider using Feliway spray or diffusers for a few months during the transition period. Feliway is a pheromone that has a calming effect on many cats. It is available at many pet stores or from your veterinarian.
- When you bring your cat home, take her straight to her separate space without letting her meet your resident cat. This will give them both time to get used to the idea of living with a new cat.
- Set towels or small blankets out in each cat's preferred resting places. After several days of separation, move one of each cat's towels into the other cat's space. This will give the cats a chance to get used to each other's scent. Setting the towels under each cat's food bowl can help to create a positive association with the other cat's scent. Do this several times over the course of 1-2 weeks.
- Now you can begin to let the cats spend short periods of time in each other's space. Put your resident cat away in a separate room and let your new cat out to explore the rest of the house. Then put your new cat in a separate room while you let your resident cat explore the new cat's private space. Be sure that the cats do not have any direct interaction with each other during these exchanges.
- After 1-2 weeks of letting the cats explore each other's spaces for short periods of time every day, you can begin to feed the cats on opposite sides of a door, starting far away from the door and gradually moving their bowls closer, one foot each day, until they are eating just a few inches away from each other, on opposite sides of the door.
- The next step is to allow the cats to interact either under a closed door, or through a baby gate for short (2-3 minutes) periods of time. Watch for warning signs like hissing, ears pinned back, growling, or tails thrashing. If you see any of these signs, go back a step or two in the sequence for a week or two before trying this step again.
- If all goes well, you can allow a greeting without a barrier in place and gradually increase the amount of time your cats spend together until they are happy to share the house.