

## Introducing Your New Cat to Your Existing Cat(s)

A step-by-step guide to help adopters integrate a new cat to their furry family members.



Thank you for choosing to adopt! We understand that introducing a new cat to your home and your other pets can be intimidating but don't worry! We're here to help!

Remember that cat relationships, like human relationships, may take time to develop. While some cats may "hit it off" and become fast friends immediately, others will need more time and patience to develop their relationship. Remember that cats are individuals

and each relationship will be unique. Some cats will become playmates with other cats, some will enjoy the companionship of other cats, and others may prefer to their personal space from other cats.

Though we know adopters may feel eager to introduce their new pet to the whole family, we recommend providing your new cat with time to adjust to their new environment and decompress from shelter life before introducing them to your other cats. (Adjustment and decompression times will vary for each cat and recommendations may vary from 3 days - 2 weeks.) Remember that new cats may also pose a health risk to your resident cats and adopters should follow any instructions given regarding how long cats should remain separated.

### Things to Remember Before Introducing

- **Familiarize yourself with signs of stress in cats beforehand.** BARC offers resources for cat body language cues and there are also many resources available online as well.
- **Keep it positive.** Interrupt any undesired behaviors quickly and calmly. Keep voices happy and maintain a light-hearted setting. Offer gentle re-directions of your cat's attention rather than yanking them apart or reprimanding cats. (Ex: offer soft claps/pats or an audible distraction)
- **Keep it optional.** Don't force interactions between the cats. Either or both cats may ignore one another at first and that's ok! Allow them to remain inside their "comfort zone". They will interact when they are ready.
- **Be patient.** Remember that bringing a new cat home will require adjustments for everyone, especially your current pets. Taking your time and offering plenty of breaks will help ensure a more successful outcome for all!
- **Never reprimand either pet for communicating.** There may be some hissing or swatting which may sound scary however this is simply how cats communicate and as long as no one is pinned down or harassed, do not interfere. If you do find yourself in a situation where you may need to intervene remember to keep thing positive and never punish either cat. Reprimanding them will teach them not to communicate with each other (potentially causing an escalation to an actual fight in the future) and to associate the new pet with negative experiences. Instead, calmly remove them from the situation and allow a break time. Always praise positive interactions and communications!
- **Make sure there are plenty of hiding spots for your cats.** Some like to sit up high, on shelves and on kitty condo perches. Frightened cats, on the other hand, tend to hide under and behind things, so make sure you provide spots at floor level as well. Place food, water and litter boxes out in the open so your cats don't feel trapped when they access these resources. Make sure you have a litter box for each cat, plus at least one extra.

## The Introduction Process

Cats are known to be territorial creatures however it is totally possible to have a happy multi-cat home! How two cats are introduced is a very important factor that may determine how your cats interact with each other in the long run.

By planning and taking things slowly, your chances of success when introducing cats are much greater. If you rush into things and attempt to “force” a relationship, you might inadvertently sabotage a relationship that could have otherwise worked out.

- **Step one: Separate First!** It is best to separate your resident cat from your new cat when you first bring them home so that you can have more control in their initial meeting. The two cats should be able to smell and hear—but not see or touch—each other. Each cat should have her own food and water bowl, litter box, scratching post, bed, etc. Feed the cats near the door that separates them, so they learn that coming together (even though they can't see each other) results in a pleasant experience. In addition to regular cat food, feed the cats extra-special treats near the door as well, like tiny pieces of tuna, salmon, cheese, chicken or liver.
- **Step two: Scent Swapping!** After three to four days, switch the cats' locations so they can investigate each other's smell. This may sound odd to us humans, but cats can learn a lot about each other solely through smell! The resident cat should now be confined in the room, while the new cat is allowed to roam the house. Some behaviorists suggest rubbing the cats separately with the same towel to intermix their scents. First, gently rub one cat with the towel and then rub the other cat. After the towel carries both cats' scents, bring the towel back to the first cat and rub her with it again.
  - Tip: Encourage play between your resident cat and the new cat even if it is through a closed door. Encourage them to paw at toys under the door. Eventually the cats may play “paws” under the door with each other.
- **Step three: Let them make visual contact!** If everything seems to be going well, and everyone is acting, eating, and using the litter box normally, you're doing great! The next step is to open the separating door but keep a gate of some sort across it so they can see, smell, and have contact with each other. The gate should prevent complete access. (A baby gate is perfect, but usually not high enough for cats, so you may need to stack two on top of each other.) Continue feeding both cats on their respective sides of the door and continue switching them back and forth.
- **Step four: Allow them to meet.** At this stage you are ready to permit the cats to spend time together without a barrier between them. Supervise these initial face-to-face interactions carefully. Keep meeting brief initially and as the cats become more familiar with each other, allow them longer and longer periods of time together.

