



# Introducing Your New Cat to Your Resident Cat

While some are more social than others, cats can be wonderful companions for each other. However, cats are territorial and need to be introduced slowly in order to give them time to get used to each other before there is a face-to-face confrontation. In almost all scenarios, an initial face-to-face interaction will end poorly, even between two cats that could become best friends over time. Slow introductions help prevent this initial bad impression, making the introduction process easier for all involved. An adult cat who has never been around other animals may need several weeks or even months to learn to share her home (and her people) with other pets in the household.

## Step 1: Confinement

Confine your new cat to one small to medium-sized room with her litter box, food, water and a bed. Feed your resident cat and the newcomer on opposite sides of the door to this room. This will help both of them to associate something enjoyable (eating!) with each other's smells. Don't put the food so close to the door that the cats are too upset by each other's presence to eat. Gradually move the dishes closer to the door until your pets can eat calmly, directly on either side of the door. Don't rush this process! Go as slow as your cats need. Next, prop open the door just enough to allow the cats to see each other, and repeat the whole process. Feel free to incorporate baby gates as needed, but be aware that many cats can easily jump the gate.

## Step 2: Swap Scents

As long as neither cat is sick, the second step is swapping scents. Switch sleeping blankets or beds between your new cat and your resident cat so they have a chance to become accustomed to each other's scent without having to be face-to-face. Rub a towel on one cat and put it underneath the food dish of the other cat. You should do this with each cat in the house.

## Step 3: Switch Living Areas

Once the new cat is using her litter box and eating regularly while confined, let her have free time in the house while confining your other cat(s) to the new cat's room. This switch provides another way for the animals to experience each other's scents without a face-to-face meeting. It also allows the newcomer to become familiar with her new surroundings without being frightened by the other cats.

#### Step 4: Avoid Negative Interactions

While supervising, introduce your cats to each other so gradually that neither animal becomes afraid or aggressive. If either cat becomes fearful or aggressive, separate them, and start over with the introduction process in a series of very small, gradual steps, as outlined above. Avoid any interactions between your cats that result in either fearful or aggressive behavior such as growling, hissing, swatting, chasing, or stalking. If these responses are allowed to become a habit, they can be difficult to change.

While your cats are in the same space, be sure to incorporate food, treats, and playtime to ensure they create positive associations when seeing each other. They don't need to interact right away, just seeing each other and sharing the same large space is enough while they form a relationship.

#### Tips

- If one of your cats has a medical problem or is injured, this could stall the introduction process. Check with your veterinarian to be sure that all of your cats are healthy.
- You should have at least one litter box per cat plus one, and you'll need to clean all of the litter boxes more frequently. Make sure that none of the cats are being "ambushed" by another while trying to use the litter box.
- Try to keep your resident pet cats' schedule as close as possible to what it was before the newcomer's appearance. Cats thrive on routine, so we don't want to create any additional stress by changing up their normal daily schedule.
- Be sure each cat has a safe hiding place from the other and plenty of escape routes.
- You can also use anxiety-reducing remedies to assist in the introduction. See handout: "Stress Relief for Your Pet."
- Clicker training your cats may reduce the time frame of the introduction. See handout: "Cat Clicker Training."
- When letting the cats interact, or they are in the same room, keep the meeting times short and sweet. Try to end on a positive note, like giving them each a treat or a little bit of wet food. If the introduction is going south, end it sooner before things escalate.

#### When to Get Help

If the introductions don't go smoothly or if you have any concerns about the process, please contact Homeward Pet Adoption Center's Animal Behavior Manager or another behavior professional. Animals can be severely injured in fights, and the longer the problem continues, the harder it can be to resolve. Punishment won't work and could make things worse. Conflicts between pets in the same family can often be resolved with professional help.