



Historically, cats are considered to be a solitary species that have no need for companionship and prefer to be alone. In fact, research shows that, within a colony, they may form close relationships to other cats, usually due to the benefits of sharing resources, e.g. food.



However, cat behaviour is also extremely complex and some cats do not cope well with change in their environment. Many cats are happier living without other cats as, although they can be social, they prefer to choose their own companions. However, if there is no competition for food or safe sleeping places, most cats accept each other. How you introduce a new cat or kitten into your home, and to a resident cat or cats can make a difference. Once a relationship becomes violent or fearful and the cat feels threatened, it is difficult to change behaviour patterns. Taking things slowly with careful introduction is vital to prevent excessive reactions.



CAT BEHAVIOUR

- Territory is very important to cats, which can make introduction of new cats into the home difficult. Most adult cats will only be friendly to cats that they have grown up with and may not accept new cats into the home.
- Cats cannot be forced to like one another- if there is competition for resources, e.g. food, litter tray, sleeping space, cats will be less likely to tolerate each other. A cat may suffer if he/she cannot avoid other cats he/she doesn't like.
- The perception of threat from inside the home may trigger behaviour problems in cats. Common problems in multi-cat households include the onset of marking behaviour (or 'spraying') and aggression between resident cats.



PREPARING FOR THE INTRODUCTION

- Choose a quiet time when the household is calm – avoid festivities, parties, visiting relatives or friends, and find time to concentrate on calm reassurance for both cats.
- You can integrate the new cat into your home better by ensuring that the new pet smells of "home" before being introduced to the resident cat as scent is an important communication method for them. Gather scents from the new cat's head by gently stroking with a soft cloth and dabbing this around your home and furniture to mix and spread the scents. You may also wish to swap the bedding of your animals to enable them to smell each other prior to meeting.





- Letting the new cat get used to the new smells of the house, and another cat, before the initial meeting can help in the introduction. For this reason, it is useful to delay the cats from meeting for a few days or even a week. During this time, keep them in separate areas of the house, but allow each cat to investigate the other's room and bed without actually meeting.



USING A PEN OR CARRIER FOR INTRODUCTIONS

- Problems can arise if initial meetings are allowed to deteriorate into a fight or chase. The best way to avoid this is to use a kittening pen or cat carrier for initial introductions. Kitten pens are metal mesh pens with a door, which can be left open or shut securely and look similar to a dog crate. The cat inside can see what is going on but feels safe inside the "den".
- Make sure that this area is large enough for your cat to stand up (including fully on hind legs), turn around and stretch out fully. Only use this method if your cat is happy to be inside the carrier or he/she may become more stressed and actually associate the unpleasant experience with the other cat.
- Put a blanket over the top initially for more security – but allow for viewing out of one side at least.
- The pen allows the cats to see each other, sniff through the bars and interact without any attack or intimidation. The bars allow them to be close together but provide protection at the same time.
- Place the new cat or kitten in the pen/carrier and let the resident cat come into the room. If using a cat carrier, place it above ground level so the cats are not forced into direct eye contact with each other (which can cause aggression). Let the resident cat come into the room and give the cat attention and calm reassurance.
- If the resident cat decides to run away without investigating the new cat, do not force a meeting but accept that things may take a little longer.



FACE TO FACE MEETINGS

- When the time is right to let your cats meet without the pen/ carrier, choose a room where either cat can escape behind furniture, jump up high, or hide if necessary.
- Gauge how the cats are getting on– they may find their own spots and curl up for a sleep or you may need to keep the new one separate again for a little longer and not force any interactions.
- Once you are sure they are not going to fight or chase, then start to use the whole house – the cats will probably find places to sleep and routines which allow them to live peacefully in the same house while gradually becoming used to and accepting one





another. Make sure that there is enough space and provide enough litter trays, toys and plenty of places to sleep and hide so they can avoid each other if they want to.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The RSPCA does not advise to introduce unfamiliar adult cats. While they may tolerate one another, there may still be underlying levels of stress which can have negative impacts on their welfare so it is very important to think carefully before getting a second cat. You will need to set up a completely separate territory for each cat, providing them with separate feed stations, litter trays and places to rest. This should not overlap with the resident cats territory and so you should be sure that you have the space to do this.

If you do decide to introduce another cat into your home, seek further advice on the best way to introduce them. Your vet may be able to refer you to a clinical animal behaviourist that should have a combination of appropriate qualifications, up to date knowledge, skills and experience and treat behaviour in a way which doesn't put the welfare of the cats at risk.

The RSPCA would like to thank Julie Bedford (BSc (Hons), PGCE, PG.Dip (CABC), CCAB) for her involvement in producing information on introducing cats.



OTHER POSSIBLE LINKS:

- Cat welfare needs [webpage](#)
- Find a [vet](#)
- Find a [clinical animal behaviourist](#)

Links to the web pages of other organisations are provided for additional information only and do not imply any endorsement by the RSPCA of those organisations or of any content on the website.



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