



Introducing CATS

Before you take on a new cat...

Before taking on another cat it's important to think carefully about whether it's the right decision and how your existing cat or cats will feel about a new arrival. When left to their own devices cats do sometimes form social groups if there are lots of resources like food and space available. These social groups are often made up of related females. However, just like their wild solitary ancestors, many cats today are happiest living on their own.

Unless cats consider themselves to be in the same social group they are unlikely to be friendly with each other, will do their best to avoid each other and might even fight or show aggression. They are also likely to find it stressful having to share important resources like food, beds and places to toilet. Cats that live with another cat they aren't friendly with can, as a result, experience stress, anxiety or frustration.

Introductions are important

If you are planning on taking on another cat then preparation is key and careful introductions are really important. The way cats are introduced to each other can make a difference to how happily they will live together. Don't be tempted to rush the introductions, they should be gradual; the whole process may take a week to several months. Follow the 5 step guide on the next page.

First step: set up a 'cat-safe' room

Before you start the step-by-step process of introducing your new cat to your existing cat(s) and even before you bring your new cat home you will need to set up a 'cat-safe' room for your new arrival.

Access to the whole house can be a bit overwhelming for your new cat when you first bring them home. If you



just let them loose in the house you'll likely find that they hide away in fireplaces, behind sofas and any other small gaps they can find! It's best to set them up their own cat-safe room so they can gradually acclimatise to their new surroundings and it's also essential for managing introductions between your cats.

Items for the cat-safe room

- Litter tray
- Water
- Food
- Hiding place
- Somewhere to get up high
- Comfortable bed
- Familiar smelling item (from where they previously lived eg, rescue centre)
- Scratching post

Make sure the room is safe and hazard free

Some cat owners have found the pheromone product 'Feliway' useful for helping their cats feel more settled. Try plugging in a Feliway diffuser in the cat safe room at least 24 hours before they arrive.

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Setting up the cat-safe room

Once you have everything you need for the cat-safe room you just need to set it up in a way that will make it most comfortable for your cat. Naturally cats don't like to eat, drink, toilet and sleep in the same area so make the best of the space you have to keep these bowls, beds and litter trays apart. For example, place their water bowl in one corner and their food in another. Ideally the cat-safe room will have a window (which can be kept securely shut) to provide your new cat with a view. Use a cat-tree, chair or other piece of sturdy furniture so that they have easy access to look out. Their hiding place is best located in as private a spot as possible and away from the door.

5 steps to integrating a new cat into a multi-cat household

Once your cat-safe room is ready you can begin the 5 step process of integrating your new cat with your already resident cat(s). Always go at your cats pace and only move onto the next step if there are no signs of fighting or aggression e.g. hissing, spitting, showing teeth, swiping.

Step 1

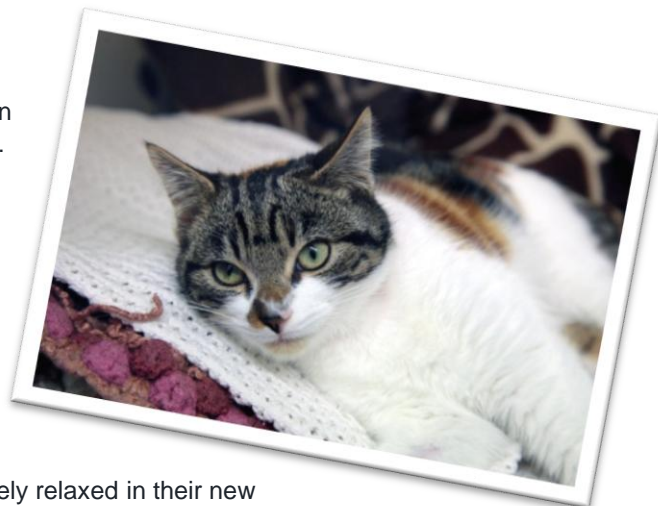
SET UP THE ENVIRONMENT FOR THE NEW CAT AND CREATE POSITIVE ASSOCIATIONS WITH THIS SPACE FOR ALL CATS

- Keep the new cat in a separate room (the cat-safe room you have already prepared) with all of its important resources: litter tray, water and food, resting/sleeping place, toys and a scratching post. There should be no direct contact with your resident cat(s).
- Hang a toy on both sides of the door of this cat-safe room or put a food bowl in front of it (on both sides) with frequent offers of delicious food. Continue to feed your cats as normal in their usual food bowl but in addition place some special food (eg, treats, wet food of a new flavour) in these extra bowls.

Step 2

EXCHANGE SCENTS

- Swap bedding with the scent of your new cat with other bedding with the scent of your resident cat(s). The bedding can be placed in each other's' core areas, for instance beneath food or water bowls. There should be ample bedding so that this change in bedding does not leave any cats with limited places to sleep or rest.
- Swap rooms - in addition to the swapping of bedding, the resident cat(s) could be briefly confined (such as confining resident cats to your bedroom during the night) to allow the new cat to inspect the home. However, confinement should only occur if it is unlikely to cause any distress such as frustration. Conversely, the new cat could be temporarily removed from its room to allow resident cats to explore the environment. It is recommended that the latter occurs only when the new cat is entirely relaxed in their new home, and therefore this is unlikely to be advisable until several days after the introduction of the new cat.



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Step 3

ALLOW VISUAL CONTACT

Visual contact should only commence when there are no signs of any aggression around the door that separates the new arrival. Once commenced, visual contact should be as frequent as possible. The resident cat(s) and the new cat should be allowed to see each other, but still be physically separated. This can be achieved in a number of ways including:

- A transparent or netted door
- A small crack in the door, narrower than the width of a cat's body
- Having one cat inside a crate (see below)



Using a crate for introductions

This method should only involve one cat per crate and is therefore best when a new cat is only being introduced to one resident cat.

Make sure the crate itself is never a source of distress for any of the cats – you can do this by first placing the crate in each cat's core area (where they spend more of their time) with enticing resources such as food and soft bedding in order to make the crate both familiar and perceived positively. Experiencing being shut in the crate as a positive experience (eg, associating it with food treats) should only occur in their core area so that the cat is fully comfortable with this confinement before experiencing it in the presence of another cat.

The crate should always contain a hiding place so the cat can remove itself from visual view. This could be provided by placing a cardboard box or igloo bed in the crate or by covering a portion of the crate with a towel or blanket.

When observing one another, the cats should always be provided with pleasurable experiences. If one cat is free (not in the crate) provide special toys and a fun game for it, while providing delicious treats for the cat kept inside the crate (resident or new arrival).

Initially visual contact should occur between just two cats (one resident each time and the new cat) and then progress to more cats (more residents and the new cat). Keep the sessions short and finish while they are still doing well, this is, interested in the food/toy provided and showing no anxiety, fear or frustration.

If either cat shows any signs of negative emotions, separate the cats physically and visually immediately. Luring the free cat to its own room with a wand toy is a better option than picking it up, as it may redirect aggression towards the handler if experiencing anxiety, fear or frustration.

In case of aggression from the cat that is free, distract while access to the victim is blocked by instantly placing a towel over the crate to hide the cat.

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Step 4

GIVE PHYSICAL ACCESS, BUT SUPERVISED CONTACT

Physical supervised access can occur as long as there are no signs of fighting or aggressive behaviour displayed by any cat during 'visual contact'. Once commenced, physical supervised access should be as frequent as possible.

- After a period of positive visual contact, allow the new cat and one resident cat to have the opportunity to physically interact for a short time and in a restricted space (such as one room) and under the owner's supervision.
- Special treats and toys are highly recommended during these sessions and the owner should be encouraged to use them interactively to distract cats from staring at one another or directing too much attention to other cats, and to disperse any tension.
- Punishment should never be used.

Step 5

ALLOW FREE ACCESS WITHOUT SUPERVISION FOR SHORT PERIODS

- Free unsupervised access for a short period of time (a few minutes) can occur as long as there is no aggressive-type behaviour between any of the cats during step 4.
- Once commenced, free unsupervised access should be as frequent as possible. At other times the new cat should still be kept separate.
- If friendly behaviours are seen between the new cat and any of the residents, for example playing, grooming, rubbing against each other, these particular two cats (or more) can be kept together for longer periods. At this stage, enrichment is particularly important in terms of providing multiple resources including litter trays, hiding places, food and water bowls.
- With time, if things are going well, the separate room can be kept open and the new cat and residents given freedom to come and go as they please.
- It is important to note that in some cases the addition of a particular cat to a household with existing cat(s) proves to be too challenging/stressful for the owner, for the resident cat(s) and/or for the new cat. Rehoming of the incompatible cat may need to be considered.

How many resources?

Your cat's 'resources' are all the essential items they need including, water, food, scratching post, hiding place, bed, litter tray and toys.

Resources need to be plentiful, at least one more resource than there are cats. For example, if you have two cats, you will need at least three hiding places.

Where should resources be located?

Resources need to be spread throughout the house taking care to place them within easy access to every cat based on where they spend their time. For example, if one cat tends to spend their time in the upstairs of the house make sure they can access all their resources without having to come down.



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