



## Introducing Your New Cat to Your Other Pets

Wouldn't it be nice if all it took to introduce a new cat to your resident pet were a brief handshake and a couple of "HELLO, My Name is...." nametags? But, since we're dealing with cats, not people, it's just not that simple, so you'll need to have some realistic expectations.

### **The Nature of Cats: Realistic Expectations**

Cats are territorial, and in general they don't like to share. A cat who's unhappy about a newcomer may express his displeasure by fighting with the other pet and marking territory (peeing on the floor, wall, etc.). Cats also dislike change, and a new cat in the house is a huge change.

First, recognize and accept that you cannot force your pets to like each other. We cannot predict whether or not your pets will be friends, but you can use techniques to increase your chances of success. Most importantly, choose a cat with a similar personality and activity level.

### **Slow and Steady Wins the Race**

It's better to introduce your pets to each other gradually so that neither animal becomes afraid or aggressive. Once the cats are face to face, though, there will be some kinks for them to work out.

If you're really lucky (and your cats are inclined), they may do some mutual sniffing and grooming, and you're on your way to success. They may sit and stare at each other. They might sniff each other, hiss, and walk away. That's to be expected. This may go on for a few days to a few weeks, and then you'll probably find them both sleeping on your bed.

### **Being Social**

Some cats are more social than other cats. For example, an 8-year-old cat who has never been around other animals might never learn to share her territory (and her people) with other pets. But an 8-week-old kitten separated from her mom and littermates for the first time might be glad to have a cat or dog companion.

All of this means that your current pet and your new cat need to be introduced very slowly so they can get used to each other before a face-to-face meeting. Slow introductions help prevent fearful or aggressive behavior from developing. Below are some guidelines to help make the introductions go smoothly.

### **Confinement**

To allow time for the newcomer to adjust to you and her new situation, keep her in a small room with her own litter box, food, water, scratching post, toys and a bed for several days to a week.

- Feed your resident pets and the newcomer on each side of the door to this room, so that they associate something enjoyable (eating!) with each other's smells.
- Gradually move the dishes closer to the door until your pets can eat calmly on either side of the door.
- Be sure to spend plenty of time with your new kitty in her room, but don't ignore your resident cat.
- Tie a toy to each end of a string, then place it so there's a toy on either side of the door. Hopefully, your pets will start batting the toys around and maybe even batting paws.



### **The Old Switcheroo**

To animals, smells are far more important than appearances, so you want to get your pets used to each other's scent before they meet face-to-face.

- Swap the blankets or beds the cats use and put it underneath the food dish of another. If there are more than two animals in the house, do the same for each animal.
- Once your new cat is using her litter box and eating regularly while confined, let her have free time in the house while confining your other pets to the new cat's room. It's best to introduce your new cat to a room or two at a time and increase her access to other rooms over a few days. This allows the newcomer to get familiar with her new surroundings without the other animals frightening her. You can do this several times a day, but only when you're home to supervise.
- Next, after you've returned the cats to their designated parts of the house, use two doorstops to prop open the dividing door just enough to allow the animals to see each other.
- Repeat the whole process over a period of days—supervised, of course.

### **Avoiding Fights**

If you're not so lucky, they may be very stressed. Fortunately, they may only posture and make a lot of noise. But, as soon as there are signs of increasing aggression (flattened ears, growling, spitting, crouching) make a loud noise by clapping your hands to distract them. If the standoff continues, very carefully herd them into separate parts of the house to calm down.

If the cats fight repeatedly, you may need to start the introduction process all over again and consider getting advice from a vet or animal behaviorist.

NOTE: Never try to break up a cat fight by picking one up; you are bound to get hurt.

### **Reducing Tension**

There are other things you can do to help ease tension between feline roommates.

- Have your cats examined by your vet before introductions to make sure they're all healthy.
- Have one litter box per cat plus an extra one.
- Try to keep your resident pets' routine as close to what it was before the newcomer's arrival.
- Make sure all cats have a safe place to escape to.
- Provide an elevated cat post or windowsill to allow one to escape but monitor the other's activity.