

Introducing your Cats

Owner information sheet





Before adopting a second cat, chat to our team about why you think your existing cat may benefit from living with another cat. Some cats find it very stressful living with another cat, and generally cats tend to be happier living alone.

However, with sufficient access to their resources, some cats may be able to successfully share their home with other cats but how you introduce them will affect the cat's perceptions of each other and contribute to their relationship.

“Resources” play an important role in helping build a positive relationship between cats. These are things that cats need such as a litter tray, beds, hiding spaces and scratching posts. If you are going to adopt an additional cat, remember the rule of thumb for resources is to provide one per cat – plus an extra spare. This is to offer sufficient choice and decrease potential competition and stress. If you place two litter trays side by side, cats may consider this as one option, so you should ensure these are in separate locations.

PREPARATION

It is really important to set up the cats' introduction for success, so getting your home ready before your adoption day is key.

1. Set up a safe area for your new cat. This should be somewhere that is separate from your existing cat, and somewhere that your existing cat doesn't use very much. If available, a spare room would be a good choice. Place all your new cat's resources here – this is everything they need including litter tray, food, water bowls, beds, hiding places and scratching posts. Remember these items must all be distinct from your existing cat's resources. You can also use Feliway plug-ins – these release pheromones which help cats feel more comfortable. We recommend having these plugged in at least 24 hours before your new cat's arrival.
2. Scent is very important for cats, and “scent swapping” can be utilised even prior to adoption day. Scent swapping helps both cats become familiar with each other's scent. If possible, speak to our team to coordinate exchanging some of your existing cat's bedding with the new cat's bedding before they come home.
3. To prepare for the introduction stage, look into getting a tall stair gate or mesh barrier if you are introducing adult cats or if you're introducing a kitten, we recommend using a dog crate as they may be able to get through gaps in a stair gate.

INTRODUCTIONS

As with any new cat, we would advise that you follow our “cat settling advice” and that they stay in one room for the first couple of days. This will allow the new cat to acclimatise and give them space to settle away from your existing cat.

1. You can now scent swap between both your existing cat and your new cat, whilst your new cat is still in their set up room in the first few days. This can be done very easily – for example, you can spend time with one cat stroking them, then go to the other cat's area and stroke them. You can also swap their bedding between each area. A cloth can also be used to gently stroke the cheeks of your new cat, whilst they are still in their separate



area. Then take the cloth and rub this on other areas of your home such as furniture. The scent-swapping step is very important to cat-cat introductions and should not be rushed – we generally recommend this is done over at least a week, until both cats are comfortable around the scent of the other cat and this also gives your new cat time to become familiar with their new surroundings. During the scent-swapping stage and whilst the cats are still separate, you can allow them to explore each other's separate areas, without them meeting each other.

2. After at least a week and if the cats are relaxed, identify a suitable area for the initial introductions to take place. Both cats should need to be in an area where they have plenty of space to retreat separately should they need and preferably the safe space they've been spending time in prior to the physical introduction. If using a stair gate to introduce adults, put this up prior to introducing the cats. If introducing a kitten and if you are using a crate, ensure this is partially covered so the kitten feels a little more secure. We also recommend providing somewhere for them to hide inside, such as a box or igloo bed, as well as all their important items such as litter tray, water and so on. Before using the crate for an introduction, introduce the crate to the kitten positively before the other cat is present. This will mean the cats can see each other without physically being able to get to each straight away.
3. Once the area is set up, allow either cat on their respective side to see each other. Do not force the cats to interact with one another. Due to the scent swapping, the cats should already be familiar with the smell of each other but allow them time and space to see how they respond to seeing one another. You can provide both cats with some tasty food to help them learn that positive things happen around one another, but only do this at a distance and not to "encourage" them to be close to each other. These sessions should be short and positive, rather than prolonging initial introductions which can potentially lead to stress or aggression.
4. If either cat or kitten is showing signs of fear, stress, or aggression, end the introductions and give either cat more time in their own designated space, and continue scent swapping. If the cats seem relaxed and interested in one another, continue with gradual introductions over time. This may take days or even weeks for both cats to be relaxed around each other. We advise you to always supervise these introduction sessions. Again, if there is any aggression or stress, go back a few steps. Remember, cats are not typically highly social with other cats so you may not see signs of social behaviour. If both cats appear relaxed and are sharing space comfortably, this may be how their relationship will work.
5. Once you have completed the visual introductions and both animals have appeared relaxed and comfortable, you can begin allowing them to share space without a barrier. Remember to provide plenty of escape routes, hiding areas, and high up options for the cats, allowing them to retreat and feel safe. Once there have been several positive sessions, you can open up other areas of the house. Always ensure you have plenty of distinct resource options, even after successful introductions. As mentioned, we advise one resource per cat plus one, in separate locations.

We always advise maintaining pet insurance and check that this covers behaviour advice. If you have ongoing issues with your cats' relationships, we advise contacting a Clinical Animal Behaviourist through the Animal Behaviour and Training Council.