

Introducing a new cat into your home

Tips to make the transition easy for both of you!

How exciting! You've finally made your selection from among all those sparkling eyes and gentle purrs in the shelter, and you are now bringing home, quite literally, a new family member. You are also embarking on a lifetime relationship of love and companionship. Upon arriving home with your new cat, take a few minutes before letting him out of the carrier to quickly prepare his litter box, feeding area, bed, and scratching post, if you haven't already done so. Because cats can be particularly sensitive to the sort of upheaval in their lives that a move brings, the transition is easier if you start out using the same type of food and litter that he was used to. If you have a piece of bedding from his former home, even better. The familiar smells of food and bedding will help the adjusting problem. After making sure that all doors and windows are shut, open the carrier and allow your new cat or kitten to venture out at his own speed. Resist the urge for everyone in the family to pick up and cuddle the cat. Instead, allow the cat to spend time exploring and getting comfortable with his new surroundings. You may want to take turns spending time with the cat, talking to him or petting him. And remember, each time you speak to your cat use a quiet normal voice-no baby talk, please, and include his new name so he will become familiar with it. Begin by allowing your cat access to one room that you have selected. This actually is less overwhelming to the cat and is easier for you. Gradually allow him to explore other areas in the house where he will be allowed. Let the cat investigate one room at a time and always make sure that he can run back to the safe location of his bed and food should something startle him. This gradual

acclimatization may take several days and should precede the introduction to any other household pets.

When introducing a new cat to a resident cat in your home, do it gradually and in a non-threatening way. Initially allow each cat to smell the other's scent from a piece of bedding or rub each cat with a clean towel and leave this with the other to investigate. Their first meeting should be in an area that is familiar to both cats and it is often best if one of the cats is caged. This allows for sniffing, hissing, and nose-to-nose contact but will prevent any physically threatening behavior. If all goes well, the cage can be eliminated at the next meeting. If not, put the other cat in the cage this time. Giving the cats time in each other's presence and then separating them over a period of several days should allow them to become familiar and reduce any feeling of territorial threat. Do not allow them to be together unsupervised until you are confident that the fur will not fly when you leave the room.

Introducing the new cat to a dog should be a similar, gradual process. Introduce their scents first, and then begin with the new cat or kitten in his cage and the dog on a lead. If the dog and cat have been around the other species before, the adjustment can be quick. If not, be patient. The next step is to take the cat out of the carrier to let him investigate the dog. The dog at this time should still be firmly on a lead. If something startles the cat he will run and, even if the dog has been calm up to this point, he may try to give chase. Even after you feel they can be together unsupervised, it is best to provide an escape route for your cat.



Helping homeless and abused cats

Children are naturally attracted to cats and especially kittens. Teach them to speak quietly and be gentle. Always supervise young children or toddlers to make sure they don't scare or injure the cat. If a cat or kitten is squeezed too hard or perhaps cornered to be petted, he is likely to scratch or bite defensively.

Schedule an appointment for your new pet to visit your veterinarian right away for a thorough examination and any medications or vaccinations that he may need. With a little preparation and understanding, the introduction of a new pet to your home can be easy to everyone involved and you will enjoy a long and loving relationship with your new cat.

Written by Race Foster, DMV, Courtesy of Doctors Foster & Smith Catalog, printed in 1999, Vol. 99-18