



INTRODUCING A NEW CAT TO YOUR HOUSEHOLD

I DON'T HAVE ANY PETS IN MY HOME –

If you don't have any other pets in the house, you should still start your new cat in a "safe room." Cats like smaller, more confined spaces. Your new pet will acclimate better if started in a single room instead of being given access to the whole house right away.

The "safe room" should have a secure door and be away from the noise and activity of the rest of the house. Generally, you want to choose a room that does not offer a lot of hiding places (like under a bed). The room that you choose should be a place where family members can easily interact with the cat.

Set up the "safe room" before bringing your new cat home. The room should have food, water, litter box, scratching post and toys. When you bring your new pet home, leave him in the carrier until you get to the room where he will be staying. Once in the room, open the carrier door and let him come out at his own pace.

Remember, everything is new and could be scary for your cat – new sounds and smells, separation from the familiar, etc. Give your cat time to settle into his new surroundings before lavishing him with attention. It may take a few or several days before he becomes comfortable with you... be patient and compassionate. It may help for you or other members of the family to just sit in the room with him and talk to him. After a couple of days, try playing with an interactive toy, such as a laser light or feather toy. Also, offering smelly fishy food is always a good way to go. To paraphrase – the quickest way to a kitty's heart is through his stomach.

Once your new furry friend seems comfortable with family members, you can start introducing him to the rest of the house or apartment. In general, your cat should stay in the "safe room" for at least the first week. When the cat seems ready to venture out of his room, let him explore at his own pace. He will probably walk around carefully smelling every nook and cranny. Kitty should continue to stay in his room, usually a second week will suffice for an adult cat, but longer for kittens.

Once your new pet gets free roam of the house, you will most likely want to move the litter box to its permanent location. Any time you move the litter box, you should put the cat in the box (at the new location) and let him explore from that reference. Some cats will acclimate to a new home faster than others. Following the steps listed above will ensure a smoother transition for any cat. Best to be safe and go slow that to rush things and have a "scaredy" cat on your hands (or under the sofa).

I HAVE OTHER PETS IN MY HOME –

How do you successfully introduce a new cat into your household if you already have other pets? As cats can be territorial creatures, bringing a new kitty home to meet Fido or Fluffy can be a hair-raising experience for not only the owner but also the resident pets – if not handled correctly. A peaceful relationship between new and existing feline or canine housemates requires time, patience and work. The introduction process generally takes

a few weeks before the pets are all cohabitating peacefully. At times, though, it can take several weeks. The trick is to do it slowly and cautiously... and follow the guidelines below.

- **Isolate the new cat in a separate “safe room.”** That is a room closed off from other pets (make sure the door is securely shut and doesn't open easily). This smaller, confined area will help the new cat to feel safe and adjust more quickly to his new home. Provide a litter box, scratching post, toys, food, and water in the new cats' room. This separation will also give your current pets time to get used to the new cats smell and the idea of having a new occupant in the house. During the first week, the only interaction the new cat and resident cats should have is playing “paws under the door.”
- **Remember cats like routine not change.** Your resident cats' behavior may initially change when you first bring the new cat home. Most common is hissing, growling, hiding or fighting among resident pets. Your current cats might even act differently towards you by displaying aggression or ignoring you all together. With your new cat in his “safe room,” the new and resident cats will all have the opportunity to become familiar with each other's scents while safely separated by a door. As they begin to acclimate to each other, the cats will feel less threatened and, with time, the negative behavior should dissipate.
- **Always introduce a new cat to the resident cats before introducing him to the resident dogs.** In most cases, the cat to cat introductions will be more harried, with the cat to dog introductions being somewhat easier.

INTRODUCING CATS

- **The new cat and resident cats should have no face to face interaction for the first week.** This will allow the new cat time to get comfortable with his new environment and family. The stress of a new environment can cause a cat to show signs of an upper respiratory infection (watch for sneezing, eye and nose discharge) or diarrhea. Watch to make sure that the new cat is eating well, drinking and using the litter box. In almost every case, a cat that does not use its litter box is suffering from a medical condition. Any instance of inappropriate elimination (outside of the litter box) should be followed up with a visit to the vet.
- **After keeping the new cat in a room of his own for the first week, start introducing the smells of each cat to the other.** You can do this by brushing all the cats with the same brush to get their scents on each other. Also, try feeding them each a special treat on either side of the door. Doing so will help each cat to associate the smell of the other cat with the positive experience of eating the treat (usually wet food works best). You may want to have your residence cats go into the new cat's room (and vice versa) when he is not there to help them get acclimated to his scent.
- **After introducing smells for a few days, when you are ready for the first face to face introduction,** put the new cat in his carrier and let the residence cats come in to the “safe room.” This will give you an opportunity to observe the interaction among the cats while the new cat is protected in his carrier.
- **Usually with this initial meeting there will be some hissing and/or posturing.** If the interaction seems as though it could lead to aggression, you will need to do this controlled introduction using the carrier a few more times before removing the barriers and allowing the cats to meet face to face. If the cats all appear to be curious or simply wary with no outward signs of aggression, then you can open the carrier door and let the new cat walk out into the territory of the resident cats. Do not rush this process. It is very important to the long-term harmony of their relationship that the introduction process proceed at a pace comfortable for each of the cats.
- **Monitor all interactions closely during the first weeks.** Do not leave the cats alone, unsupervised, until you are comfortable there will not be aggressive behavior displayed by any of the cats.

- **If interaction among the cats deteriorates instead of improving**, return the new cat to his “safe room.” At this point you will need to start the introduction process again, this time, taking more time at each stage.

INTRODUCING A CAT AND DOG –

- When you bring a new cat into your house, you need to **set up a “safe room”** where the cat can stay for at least the first week. The room chosen must have a door and should be in a quiet part of the house. You will need to provide access to food, water, litter box, and scratching post at all times (see first bullet point above for more details). If you have cats as well as dogs in your home, the cats should have already been successfully introduced to the newcomer before initiating introduction of the new cat to your dogs.
- There should be **no face-to-face interactions** between the new cat and resident dog for the first week. Bring the cat into the house in his carrier and take him directly to his “safe room.”
- **Don’t introduce the cat to any other pets until he has settled in** and seems to be comfortable with the human members of the household. This comfort will be evidenced by the cat becoming interactive with you when you enter his “safe room.” Many cats will initially hide for a couple of days when brought to a new home, but will soon become comfortable if given time and space.
- **When your new cat seems to be comfortable with you**, it is time to start the introductions with your dog. During these introductions, the dog should always be crated or on leash, allowing the cat to approach the dog on his own terms. This may well be the first time that the cat is outside of his “safe room.” Allow him to explore at his own pace and approach the dog if he is comfortable doing so. All introductions should be supervised and conducted during quiet times of the day.
- **Carefully watch the first contact between cat and dog.** Let them sniff each other. Be ready with a towel or squirt gun in case of any aggressive behavior. The situation should be fairly well controlled, though, because the dog will be confined in his crate or on a leash. If either animal displays aggressive or fearful behavior, separate them immediately. Try again later (possibly the next day) after things have calmed down.
- If the initial meeting goes well, you will still want to **repeat the encounter several times** under controlled circumstances before letting the animals roam freely in the house or leaving them together unsupervised.
- If your new cat is a small kitten, **take special precautions whenever the cat and dog are together.** A large dog may not intend to harm a kitten, he simply may not know his own strength or understand the fragility of a young kitten.
- Be sensitive to the fact that **some dog breeds are naturally not good at cohabitating with cats**—certain breeds may instinctually be driven to chase or act aggressively toward a cat. You will need to evaluate your pet’s personality and determine if he is an exception to the general rule for his breed. Take extra time and care when introducing the two animals—always under close supervision. Be aware that your dog may behave better when you are present, so allow ample time for supervised interactions before letting them to be alone together.

TIPS TO ENCOURAGE HARMONY –

- To speed acceptance of a new cat, after following the above introduction processes, try feeding the cats at opposite ends of room. Gradually, over time, move the food bowls closer together. After feeding them side-by-side for a week, the cats should be ready to roam through out the house freely.
- Provide plenty of safe, comfortable sleeping/nesting places if you have several pets...cats especially need their space. They are not as social as dogs and often prefer isolation at times.
- Keep the cat's food in a location out of the dog's reach—either up on a counter or ledge or in an area that is barricaded so that the dog cannot enter.
- Maintain separate litter boxes (they eventually may share). The general rule is one litter box for each cat plus one.
- Make sure litter boxes are placed in quiet, easily accessible locations that do not present opportunities for a cat to be cornered by other pets. While litter boxes should be accessible to the cats, they should be out of reach of any resident dogs.
- Unfortunately, despite your best efforts, sometimes the resident pets will not accept the new cat into their home. After a month of working through the techniques listed above, if your pets have not progressed past outward displays of aggression, it is time to consider the possibility that the new cat may not be able to integrate into your family. If this turns out to be the case, please contact us at the Athens County Humane Society and we can help discuss options moving forward.