

## Introducing a New Animal into Your Home: Cat to Cat

Having more than one cat share your household can sometimes be a bit tricky, but it can also be very fulfilling for your pets as well as for yourself! Before getting a new cat, there are many factors to consider. Territory, age, background, the personalities of each cat, gender and spay/neuter status all play a big role in how well the cats will get along.

Cats can be very territorial, therefore making sure your household can accommodate multiple cats is important. Four cats in a studio apartment are unwise; however four cats in a large apartment or home could be ideal. Make sure that each cat has his own place to nap, hide or just hang around. Remember too, cats like to perch, so make sure they have high places to jump and play.



Preferably the new cat should be younger than, or very close in age to, your current cat(s). An older cat who is dominant or aggressive may intimidate your current cat. Be careful not to get a kitten that is too young. Kittens younger than three months may have not developed the social skills they will need to protect themselves. They can easily be intimidated and/or abused by older cats to the point where it can cause damage to their personalities.

A "middle aged" cat, between eight and ten years is more settled and may be less active. Be considerate of these things when you are looking for a pal cat. A spitfire ball of energy may not be much appreciated by this type of cat.

Elderly cats, twelve plus years, may have health problems and could be a little crabby. They may not tolerate any new cat, no matter the age. Though this is not an impossible situation, consult a veterinarian and a behavior specialist before you bring in a new kitty.

The gender of each cat can be very important. Although each cat and each environment is different, statistical evidence supports SAME genders get along better than opposite. This is contrary to what most people have believed. This is probably because among dogs, opposite genders tend to get along better. Until recently, little research has been done regarding cat behavior. Experts simply based much cat behavior on what they knew of dogs.

However, if one or both of the cats have not been altered, no matter the gender, there can be hormonally related problems such as urine marking, fighting, or breeding. Cats that have been altered have a greater chance of getting along.

To avoid reproduction it is not advisable to have cats who are of the opposite gender and able to breed. If your current cat is not "fixed" (spayed or neutered), have that done before you adopt another cat. Wait six to eight weeks after the surgery to bring a new cat home. Since a "fixed" animal's scent changes somewhat after a spay or neuter surgery, he will need this time to adjust. If your current cat is altered, but the new cat is not, try to have that surgery performed before you bring him home.

Try to find out as much about the new cat's background as possible. Has this cat lived with other cats before? Did he get along well? Was he an indoor or an outdoor cat? What type of personality did the parent cats have? What was his previous household like? Were there children there? Has he exhibited any behavior problems in the past? If the cat is a stray from a shelter or the streets, obviously there will not be much information. In this case, try to get as much information about the cat from shelter employees or from your own observations of the cat.

It is also important that each cat has his own litter box. While they may not use the box you assign them, each cat also may not appreciate having to share one box with another cat. Try not to move the boxes around as this may be too disruptive. Separate food bowls, away from the litter boxes, are recommended, though a communal water bowl is fine.

When you finally bring the new cat home, keep him in a separate room for up to seven days. This is very important. The current cat needs time to become accustomed to the scent of the new cat before seeing him. The new cat also needs time to acclimate in his new environment. This is also a good time to assess the health of the new cat without jeopardizing your current cat's health.

Once you feel most of the tension has passed between the cats, allow them to see each other through a screen or a small opening in the door. Continue to do this for a few days. When the hissing has turned to interest it's time to introduce the cats face to face.

Make sure you are home on the day you decide to introduce the cats. Don't leave them alone together. Be sure to be calm and relaxed. You will be creating the atmosphere in which your cats will be meeting for the first time. If you are nervous, they will be too.

Do not restrain either cat in any way. This does not allow the cats to feel they have a choice to run away or to stay. It may make them feel defensive and a fight could break out. Instead, let the new cat out of isolation and let the cats encounter each other on his or her own. Expect some hissing, growling, swatting, and general nastiness. You are best not to interfere unless the cats are causing severe physical damage to each other. At that point, break up the cats by squirting water at them or throwing a pillow at them. Do not punish either cat. They are doing what is normal for cats who are strangers to one another. You also do not want them to associate punishment with the other cat.

It is all right to leave the cats out and about when someone is home, but when they are to be alone it is wise to separate them again. Be patient. It may be several weeks before you feel comfortable to leave them alone together. The first time you do, leave them alone for a very short period and gradually increase the time as they get along better.

These cats may become great friends or they may learn to just tolerate each other. Whatever happens, feel confident that your cats will work things out one way or another. Be aware that even cats that are well bonded to each other will sleep together, groom each other, and still have an occasional spat.

Signs of a big problem include litter box lapses, severe fighting (in which blood is drawn), lethargy, depression, and lack of appetite. If your cats show any of these signs, or if you have a question, do not hesitate to call The Anti-Cruelty Society's animal behavior specialists for advice.

Remember that good relationships do not happen overnight. It sometimes takes months for your animals to iron things out. Your patience and perseverance will pay off in the long run.

## Introducing a New Animal into Your Home: Dog and Cat

The old tale that a cat and dog cannot live together peaceably is untrue. What is true, however, is that it does take some skill and patience to make it work. It also takes a dog who is already well trained and an owner who has excellent control of his dog. Without this you may be putting a cat (or even the dog) in a potentially dangerous situation. All dogs should be trained to be gentle and well behaved, but particularly those who will be asked to live with a cat or two.

Successful introductions have much to do with each animal's previous experiences with other animals, if any at all, and how well their guardians introduce them. When choosing an animal (whether a cat or a dog), be considerate of each animal's background, and, in some cases, breed.



For instance, a dog that has been around bully cats may not be too keen on your idea of adding a cat to the family. Or a cat living in a household with a dog who has a nasty habit of chasing other animals, may just decide to live the rest of her days perched in fear atop the refrigerator or dressers.

But let's say you go to great lengths to choose the right cat or dog to live with you and the rest of your animal family, do not ruin things by introducing them improperly. First impressions between cats and dogs are as important as they are between people. Making sure that there are as few problems as possible is an important guide to helping these animals form a lifelong friendship (or maybe just to get along.)

Keep a positive attitude and don't apologize or agonize over your decision to bring another animal into your home. The stress it causes you will reflect in how you interact with your companion animals. In other words, if you are nervous, you will make your companion animals nervous, too. This will certainly affect how they view the other animal and you may be sabotaging your efforts for a successful relationship.

Begin by keeping the new animal in a separate room or area for several days. Make sure they are kept comfortable with food, water, bedding and a litter box for cats. The current pet(s) should have free roam of the rest of the home. Allow them to sniff and growl under the door. After all, they have to accept the presence of an animal of another species. If you wish to let the new animal out of confinement for short periods, it should be done only when they can be supervised by an adult and the current pet is kept in another room or area.

Once the grumbling has lessened, allow the animals to see each other through a screen or slightly opened door. This allows each animal to work out defensiveness or aggression without really being able to harm each other physically. Do this exercise for several days until you feel comfortable enough to introduce them face to face.

When you can be home all day and are feeling quite relaxed, allow the new animal out of his confinement. Unless you are certain that the dog(s) involved is very well trained and has been gentle with small animals in the past, introduce the dog on a very loose leash. Do not force them to be together. Doing so could make each animal feel out of control or threatened and a fight could easily break out. Instead, be casual and let them encounter each other on their own.

It is perfectly normal and expected that these animals hiss, growl, chase, swat, and bat at each other. This may go on for several days or several weeks. Do not punish one animal and/or rescue the other. This may only serve to teach one animal that the other causes him to be punished, or that he has to make no effort to defend himself. Be patient. If your animals are well adjusted, they will work things out in their own time.

However, if there is severe fighting in which the animals are being injured, separate by throwing water on them or making a loud noise. Do not try to separate them with your body. In the frenzy you could be bitten and scratched by accident. Keep the animals apart, and after a few days, try to introduce them again.

Do not expect your cats and dogs to become pals right away. Friendships take time to develop. It is not wise to set a short time period or to expect too much from your companion animals too soon. Have realistic expectations and goals. If problems persist, or if you have any questions, do not hesitate to call The Anti-Cruelty Society's animal behavior specialists.

