

HEMCOMING OF YOUR NEW KITTY

As described in “Adoption Necessities” (.....) you have prepared a safe-room with all the required equipment already.

As soon as you arrive at home, release your new kitty in her safe-room. Don't let her see or even sniff parts of the home. Leave her alone for a couple of hours. She will be busy investigating, getting used to the new smells and sounds, looking for hidden “dragons” (other cats) and mark the territory as her own.

After a few hours, enter the room quietly, sit with your kitty and let her come to you. Play with her, bring her a treat, but leave after a short while again. Repeat this process several time and take turns with the family members. Avoid going into the room all together at the same time. Your kitty will feel crowded and get scared.

Trust your cat to let you know she is ready to start exploring the house. A cat which still hides when you come into the safe room or who isn't eating yet, still has some adjusting to do. A sign that she feels at home and getting settled is, when she starts her own daily routing of eating, drinking water, using the litter box and moving freely around the safe room. The cat needs to be curious and relaxed about you, so go into her room, bring food, clean the litter box and let her be the one who approaches you.

Once you reach this point, you can open the door of the safe room and let her explore further at her own pace. Don't force her to come out or carry her out – let her take it one step at a time.

Even if she started to explore the rest of your place, during the first week or two, it is best to put her back into the safe room every time you go out and at night. This prevents the kitten getting hurt or scared or having accidents when not finding its way back. This is even more necessary, if you introduce a new cat to your existing cat/cats household.

Multi cat household - ADDING ANOTHER CAT

Bringing a new cat into a home where there are already cats can be stressful for the cats as much as for you. Unfortunately, let them sniff each other through the grid of the carrier and then let them get on with it is hardly ever working. You need patience and understanding for the situation of both cats in order to make a successful integration.

Interestingly, most of the integration process has little to do with the cats liking each other, but rather with the territory that has now to be newly divided. With this knowledge in mind, the integration strategy will be much easier already.

Your cat will not be pleased, because she marked and secured her territory and will be protective about it. She will be irritated, on the edge and confused. The new cat is “dumped” into the terrain of a strange (hostile) cat, with nowhere to escape to and has now to claim her own part of the space in order to feel comfortable and relaxed. She will feel insecure, threatened and in need to fight.

Part of this arrangement is based on the hierarchy: who is dominant, who is “top of the ladder”. This is not always based on size. But it is many times based on gender. Female cats (even after being spayed) will fight more vicious and persistent for what they think is rightfully theirs and usually need longer to adjust. Young and older cats are more inclined to back down.

Therefore, a successful mixing is mainly about creating space for both cats to relax, feel safe and tolerate each other. Only then can a friendship develop. Some cats might never become close. But they are fine having the other one “in their space” (cats work on a time and space sharing basis – more about this later). Therefore we recommend to get a pair that is bonded right from the beginning. Saves you a lot of work. Thankfully, most cats start seeing the benefit of having a playmate around and we hear of great success stories with adorable pictures of two cats cuddling up together.

So here is how to go about arranging the acquaintance.

As a start, if you introduce a new cat to a household with cats, you do exactly the same as with a new kitty on its own. Make sure they don't see or sniff each other when you bring the new one to her safe-room. An alternative to the safe room is a wire foldable indoor cage (available at ACE or Vets). Make sure you provide food/water, scratch pad, litter box and a hiding place in the cage. Cover at least two sides of the cage with blankets, preferably have the cage on one side against the wall.

The only additional thing you do, is to swap your cats around. That means, you place the new into the carrier and take it out of the safe-room. Put the carrier with the cat somewhere, where your own cats can't get to. Then move your own cats into the safe-room and close it. Leave her in there for a couple of hours. Release your new kitty to the rest of the house and let her have a proper sniff and walk around. Let her eat from the other food/water bowls and let her sniff/use the other litter box. Leave her to investigate and mark this new territory to her satisfaction.

After a couple of hours, swap around again. Do this for a number of days.

When using the wire foldable indoor cage you lock your own kitty away out of sight, while you open the door of the cage and let the new kitty have a sniff and walk around. Leave the cage door open, many times the new kitty will happily go back into the cage, when she had explored enough and needs to feel safe again. Lock the door and let your own kitty back to “read” the message, the new one left on furniture and in the litter box.

After a while, you will see when it is the right time, let them meet each other:

- Leave escape routes. Don't lock them into one room
- Expect hissing and growling, spitting. It is normal part of the introduction process. Even claws flying should get you not involved.
- Always give your resident cat attention first; avoid public affection for the new cat in the beginning
- Keep the introduction short and sweet. Work your way up to more and more time together

Please note: the one who is hissing and growling is the one with the biggest fear. Serious aggression is mostly shown in more subtle ways: intense staring down, ears flat back, arching and sideways walking. If you hear noise from the stronger cat it will be more a howling.

As nerve racking it can be to see the two circling and measuring each other, posing, threatening and making noises, stay out of it. There is nothing you can do, they have to get on with it. We have many fosterers who have done this many, many times and they report, there was never blood or body parts lying around. Cats, like actually most animals, will try to avoid fighting physically. It is all psychologically with threatening, imposing and staring. If they make contact and fur is flying, distract them with a toy or a sound and separate them in their original spaces. Then restart the process again.

Differences between playing and fighting:

- One or two hisses are o.k.
- Hissing with chasing is friendly
- Yowling or screaming indicates that it is not friendly any longer, but watch out for body signs (if the kitty is screaming when fighting, but runs away with the tail up or arched to a bow it is all part of the play)
- Taking turns on the offensive is healthy cat play. If the cats don't take turn in "attacking", one cat is bullying
- Scratching and biting is normal, even though it looks sometimes rough. In play, a cat is never injured. Watch if the cats "return for more" after each wrestle. If one is hiding and doesn't come out anymore, it is scared.
- Cats bat each other. In happy play, cats take pot shots at each other but mix it up with leaping, wrestling and teasing. Especially older cats will show their dominance and position in the hierarchy this way. Don't scold them or interfere. It is all part of social education.
- If after a "fight", one cat seem anxious or fearful and is avoiding the other cat(s) there is a problem. Watch if the behavior persists or was only a temporary "sorting of the hierarchy".
- Cats can play-fight sometimes quite fiercely. Don't get nervous. They almost never will hurt or injure each other. As long as they behave normal around each other, or even groom each other, all is fine.

It is important, that you stay calm and don't start screaming and chasing them. This will only increase the tension. It will also associate negative feelings when they meet. Try to make their get-together as pleasant as possible. Play with them together, give them treats (close enough to see each other, far enough to not cause reason for territory-fight), feed them at the same time.

While in this process, add more cat trees in different places. Add more food/water bowls in different places and, last but not least, add more litter boxes in different places. If possible add more furniture, which allows to hide and to provide additional surfaces to occupy. This way you create additional territory that the new cat can claim without taking anything from the existing one. Spray FELIWAY everywhere to create calm.

If one kitty is persistent in chasing the other, put a bell on the aggressor to give the victim early warning. Also, certainly the first few weeks, lock each cat (yes, both of them) in a different room for the night to allow each of them to calm down. Next day, both of them meet at the same time together in the common territory.

When the cats sit peacefully in the same space and no cats is hiding constantly, you'll know it is working.

