



Royal Animal Hospital – Introducing a New Cat

Bringing a new cat or kitten into your home and introducing it to your resident cat or dog can be quite nerve racking. You want them all to get on together and welcome the new feline into the house, but this seldom happens quite so easily - even though your reason for getting another cat may be to keep your resident cat company, it may not rush out and welcome the newcomer with open paws! Careful introductions can help to smooth the way towards harmonious merging of animals - controlling the situation rather than leaving the animals to sort it out for themselves will give a much better chance of a smooth meeting and the best possible start together.

Remember that cats do not need to be social creatures - unlike the pack-orientated dog they function happily on their own without a social structure around them. They are unlikely to feel the 'need' for a companion even though you would wish to have another cat around. You cannot force cats to like each other - some will live with a newcomer easily, others will never get on or they may just manage to live alongside each other in an uneasy truce - you can only try. However, if there is no competition for food or safe sleeping places (as in most good homes), then most cats will accept each other eventually and some will even seem to form close bonds with one another.

While it may be a matter of feline choice as to whether cats get on, how you introduce a new cat or kitten into your home and to a resident cat or cats can make the difference between success or failure. Once a relationship becomes violent or very fearful and the cat feels threatened, it can be very difficult to change the behaviour patterns. Thus careful introductions which prevent excessive reactions and take things slowly are vital. Here are some factors involved in bringing cats together successfully:

Adults or kittens?

A kitten is less of a threat to a resident cat than an adult cat because it is still sexually immature. It can also be better to get a kitten of the opposite sex to the resident cat to minimise competition. Neutering helps to remove most of such problems, but may not eliminate them altogether. If you are getting an adult cat again it can be better to bring in one of the opposite sex.



Timing

Choose a quiet time when the household is calm - avoid festivities, parties, visiting relatives or friends and find time to concentrate on calm reassurance for both cats.

Smell is important

Remember that scent is the most important of the cat's senses in terms of communication and wellbeing. You can try and integrate the new cat into your home and make it less alien by getting it to smell of 'home' before you introduce it to the resident cat. To do this stroke each cat without washing your hands and mix scents in this way. You can also gather scents from around the cat's head area by gently stroking it with a soft cloth and dabbing it around your home and furniture to mix and spread scents. Likewise letting the cat get used to the new smells of the house and another cat before the initial meeting can make it more tolerable. For this reason it can be very useful to delay letting cats meet for a few days or even a week. During this time keep them in separate rooms allowing each to investigate the other's room and bed without actually meeting.

Using cat pheromones Cats often rub their chins on objects in their territory. This places a hormone marker substance (a pheromone) on those objects. Cats are more comfortable in areas they have marked this way. Spraying your pet's premises with **"Feliway"**, a synthetic cat pheromone, reduces stress and inhibits territorial behaviour by making your cat think the area has been chin rubbed already.

Using a pen or carrier for introductions

It is up to you to make both the new cat and the resident feel as secure as possible and prevent the newcomer from being chased or threatened (or, occasionally, the other way around). Problems can arise if initial meetings are allowed to deteriorate into a fight or chase. The best way to avoid this is to use a kitting pen for initial introductions. Kitting pens are metal mesh pens about 1 m by 0.75 m by 1 m high with a door which can be left open or shut securely. The cat inside can see what is going on around it but feels safe inside its 'den'. You can put a blanket over the top initially to make the cat feel more secure if you think it feels vulnerable - let it see out of one side at least. The pen allows the cats to see each other, sniff through the bars and have a hiss and moan at each other without any attack or intimidation. The bars allow them to be close together but provide protection at the same time.

If you have taken on a new kitten then it can be very useful to use the larger pen as a base for the kitten to be kept in initially. Introductions can be made using the pen and you can shut the kitten in with its bed and litter tray if you are going out and don't want to leave it where it can get up to mischief or get into danger. The kitten can be shut in the pen at night (ensure water is available) with the other animals in the same room and they can get used to each other in safety.

If you can't get hold of a pen or crate then you can use a cat carrier or basket for initial introductions. Of course you won't be able to use it as a den to shut the cat or kitten in for long periods because it is too small, but it can be better than nothing.

How to use a carrier or pen for introductions

Place the new cat or kitten in the pen/carrier and let the resident cat come into the room. If you are using a cat carrier place it above ground level so that the cats are not forced into direct eye contact with each other which can cause aggression. Let the resident cat come into the room and give it attention and calm reassurance. If the cat decides to run away without investigating the new cat do not force meetings but accept that things may take a little time - this is probably the type of cat which will not initiate aggressive meetings but will stay out of the way and gradually accept the new cat in the household over time. If the cats do show signs of aggression distract them with a noise and then praise them for quiet encounters. You can use tit bits to encourage the cats to stay near each other and accept the other's presence and make it a positive experience - you want the cats to associate each other with pleasant happenings, not shouting or chasing.

If you are using a large pen then you can allow the resident cat free access at times when the kitten/cat is in the pen over a number of days so that they gradually get used to each other. If you are using a carrier then you will need to be little more proactive and orchestrate frequent meetings. With both methods you can start to feed the cats at the same time, the resident outside and the new cat inside the pen or carrier on the floor. Throughout this process there may be some hissing and spitting but this should gradually change into curiosity and gradual acceptance - this may take several days or weeks, depending on the individual cats.

Face-to-face meeting

When you feel the time is right to let them meet without the pen then you can again use food as a distraction. Withhold food so that they are somewhat hungry and then feed them in the same room. Choose a room where either cat can escape behind furniture, or jump up high or hide if it wants to. Put down the resident cat's food and then let the new cat out of its basket to eat - you will have to judge how close they can be - don't attempt side by side initially! Be calm and reassuring and reward the behaviour you want with praise and tit bits of a favourite food. Gauge how the cats are getting on - they may find their own spots and curl



up for a sleep or you may need to keep the new one separate again for a little longer, using meals as a time for them to get together a bit more. Once you are sure they are not going to fight or chase then you can start to utilise the whole house - the cats will probably find places to sleep and routines which allow them to live peacefully in the same house and partake of all the benefits of food, warmth and attention while gradually becoming used to and accepting one another.

How long will it take?

It may only take a day or two or it may take several weeks for cats to tolerate each other. It may take months before the cats are relaxed with one another, but you are on your way to success if you reach the stage of a calm truce between them. It is amazing how a cold wet day outside will force even the worst adversaries together in front of the fire after a large bowl of food.

Creating Friendships

Here are some ways to help your original cat and a newcomer become friends.

- Make the original cat feel special. Give her the most praise and attention, even if that means ignoring the newcomer. The new cat will understand. Her feelings won't be hurt!
- Do fun things. Help the cats associate pleasant experiences with each other. Play with them together. Or feed them together.
- Don't Force Things. Never force the new cat to come out of her room or associate with the other cats. She'll do these things when she's ready. It may be weeks before she's ready!
- Set A Time Limit. Decide how long it should take for a new cat to begin feeling comfortable in your house. If after, say, three weeks she's still not fitting in, it's time to look for a new home. It's better to end the relationship before the new cat forms a strong bond with you.
- Try to place the cat yourself, or work with a cat rescue group.