



ALLEY CAT RESCUE

AN ALLIANCE FOR CAT PROTECTION

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Tips for Safely Introducing a New Cat

The most important tip to remember when introducing new cats to one another, is to ensure all individuals are spayed or neutered and vaccinated prior to initial contact. You do not want to contribute to the cat overpopulation problem due to accidental pregnancies, nor do you want to transmit any disease, so please take all precautions. It is also highly recommended that all cats are tested for disease (FeLV/FIV) prior to making any new introductions. And cats should be treated for internal (worms) and external (fleas) parasites to prevent transmission. Make sure there are no visible signs of illness in either cat, such as an eye infection or upper respiratory infection, prior to making introductions; it is much easier to treat one cat over having to treat two or more cats for an illness. And take it SLOWLY when introducing new animals to one another.

The best way to introduce a new cat to another cat (or dog) is to confine the new cat to a single room for a few weeks; this is also recommended even if the new cat is the only animal in the house. This will allow her some time to adjust to her new environment without any intimidation from her housemates, while also providing her a place where she can feel safe. The new cat can make her initial acquaintance with a protective barrier (closed door) in place, where they can begin to smell and communicate with each other.

When making first nose-to-nose introductions, it is highly recommended that you also use a large crate or playpen to help facilitate safely. Initially, the animals should show interest in wanting to smell each other and they may even reach through the bars to bat at each other. Hissing, growling, and some swatting is to be expected. Promote good behavior and help keep the cats calm by offering treats (meaty baby food, without onion, fed on a spoon or your fingertip is a particularly tasty snack), petting them, and using a soothing voice to praise. Use a wand toy to coax them to play together through the bars. Be consistent in training them on what actions are viewed as acceptable and which are not. Always supervise and only allow one additional animal in the room with her at a time.

After a week or two of getting acquainted through a barrier, you can slowly allow more intimate interactions. It is advised to have a spray bottle of water on hand to correct any bad behavior and to safely break up any fighting. It may take some time for the cats to work out their hierarchy of who is "top cat." Sit on the floor in front of the cage and gently coax the new cat out into the room, while keeping an attentive eye on your other cat.

At this stage, they should be fairly familiar with each other and engage in a nose-to-nose greeting. As they continue to thoroughly smell each other, some hissing and swatting may occur. Be prepared to correct any behavior before it escalates into fighting. A few squirts from a water bottle should defuse any fighting or you can make a loud noise, such as clapping your hands, to startle them. Never use your hands to break up a cat fight; this is very dangerous and could result in injury. Allow the cats to interact with each other for short

periods of time, building up to longer visits. Use your best judgment to gauge each cat's ability to tolerate the other in deciding how long each visit should last.

Utilizing products, such as sprays and plug-in diffusers that simulate natural cat hormones, can help alleviate stress and tension and aid in relaxation. You may consider using lavender scented candles or oils in the room or adding a few drops of a calming agent to the cat's water. Always read the labels before using any products and provide supervision during initial use to make sure your cat(s) do not have any allergic reactions.

Toys can be a great way to facilitate interaction between cats, while relieving stress. Most cats can be easily coaxed into playing with one another, because it creates a distraction that is positive. When both cats are enjoying themselves and having fun, they are less likely to be bothered by the other's presence. Wand toys and laser pointers are especially helpful in directing joint play sessions, as well as the circular cardboard scratchers that have a track for a ball; get the ball spinning and watch as the cats dart after it! Use treats, catnip, and praise to reinforce positive behavior.

Once she has made introductions with her other housemates and they seem to get along for the most part (some initial minor fighting is to be expected until everyone has reached an understanding), you can slowly introduce her to the rest of the house. Allow her to explore the remaining rooms for short periods of time, while supervised of course, and confine her back to her room so she can feel safe. It is helpful to keep bedrooms and other spare rooms closed to help minimize the amount of new space she has to explore and the amount of hiding places available. At first, you might also want to confine your other companion animals to allow the new cat to explore; this can be a delicate balance, so use your best judgment of the situation. Continue with periods of exploration and periods of confinement until you and her feel comfortable with her having free-range of the entire house.

Remember, each cat is different. Some will take to their new family members and living situation with ease, while others may need more time and patience to adjust. Take your time during this transition period and try not to rush or force the new cat; allow her to take as much time as she needs to feel comfortable. If you're not sensitive to her needs, you could cause undue stress which will make her frightened, reserved, and more likely to hide. So be PATIENT and your new member of the family will find the trust and confidence she needs to be curled up on the couch next to you.