

# Adopting a Fearful or Shy Cat

---

## Why Are Some Cats Fearful?

Fearful behavior in cats can be caused by various factors. Insufficient exposure to humans and/or a variety of stimuli during kitten hood as well as traumatizing events in their lives can teach them to react fearfully towards people or new situations. Cats can also be genetically predisposed to being fearful.

## How to Introduce a Fearful Cat to a New Home

Fearful cats usually do best in relatively quiet homes. They are often not suitable for young children as children can easily scare them with loud noises or sudden movements.

Many fearful cats that come to us slowly become more confident as they get used to their living space and daily routine. Going to a new, strange environment can throw some of these cats off and cause them to regress at first. However, if you follow the procedures outlined in this handout this should only be temporary. The amount of time it takes a cat to settle into a new home varies from case to case. Some cats may take a week; others may take months, depending on the individual personalities.

Bring your fearful cat home to a secluded room set up specifically for the cat. This "home base" provides a quiet place to adjust to new surroundings. Include a litter box, food dish and water bowl as well as a cat bed and some toys. Make sure the room is warm and comfortable. The first step is to calm the cat and help him feel secure. Your new cat will become curious about the rest of the house before you know it.

Please refer to our handout "Bringing Home Your New Cat" for more information and tips on helping a kitty acclimate to their new space.

## How to Establish a Trusting Relationship

Many fearful cats bond to their caretaker(s) and make wonderful pets but retain shyness with strangers and hide when people come over.

## Tips that Will Help to Bring Your New Kitty Out of Her Shell

- Establish a schedule for feeding, litter box cleaning, and visiting time. Training a cat involves first obtaining the cat's trust. Once this animal sees you as a provider, she will warm up to you. Visit the cat at regular times each day to care for her basic needs. A desperately afraid animal also seeks something to ease that desperation. Be calm, encouraging and supportive.
- Always talk softly and move slowly around the cat. Avoid staring at her, since this can be perceived as a threat. It helps to get down to the cat's level when interacting with her instead of towering over her. Gentle handling, petting around the face, head and ears are the best calming tools for frightened cats.
- Food can be used as a bonding tool by feeding the cat special treats at a scheduled time, in addition to offering the cat dry food at all times. This will help the cat make a positive association between you and the food. Try a particularly smelly brand of wet cat food or traditional cat treats, it can take some time to determine what kitty likes best.
- Never attempt to pull the cat from his hiding place or force him to be held. This will increase his fearfulness and may even result in bites or scratches. When he is ready he will come to you. Until then, gently pet him in his hiding place.
- Encourage play with interactive toys (e.g. cat dancer, fishing pole type toy), but make sure that the toy you are using is not big and scary. Some cats are very play-motivated and regular play sessions can help bring them out of their shell and out of hiding.
- Try not to startle the cat. If you have to do anything noisy in the house (e.g. vacuum, moving furniture, having a dinner party), confine the cat to her "safe" room.
- Once the cat has full access to the house, move the dishes, litter box, toys, and bed to permanent locations in the house. You may want to leave a litter box in the "safe room" for a bit to make sure that she has access to a litter box should she become frightened again and retreat to her room again. Leave the secluded room door open so your cat can hide if she wants to, but encourage your cat to be part of the family. Recognize that adjustment to a new home takes time, especially for a frightened animal. Remember to maintain the same reliable schedule of feeding, litter box cleaning, playtime and grooming
- Lavish love and attention on your new cat. Regardless of your cat's history, your care is what matters now. Keep earning your animal's trust with daily care, playtime and routine.

Patience and understanding are essential with fearful cats. They will give you plenty of love and purrs in return!