

If you're bringing a new cat into your home, be patient. The introduction must be gradual. Following the initial introduction, it can take some time for a relationship to grow. It can take months or even years for some cats to develop bonds with other cats. Although some cats certainly become close friends, others never do. Many cats who don't become buddies learn to live peacefully with one another, while others become fast friends.

Sadly, it's difficult to predict whether or not any two individual cats will get along. There are no reliable guides for deciding the best matches among cats. Some cats are very social and enjoy living with other cats, while others prefer solitary lives. The individual personalities of the cats are more important than any other factor, such as sex, age or size.

How to Manage Introductions

Step 1: Controlling First Impressions

The first impression a new cat makes when she meets your resident cat is critical. If two cats display aggression during their first meeting, this may set the mood for their future relationship. For this reason, it's best to separate your resident cat from your new cat when you first bring her home so that you can control their initial meeting.

- The two cats should be able to smell and hear—but not see or touch—each other. Your new cat should be in a comfortable acclimation room, for more information on this, please read the handout “Bringing Your new Cat Home”.
- You can start by swapping towels or blankets with each cat's scent on them. Take a towel or blanket that your resident cat has spent time on and the same for your new cat and swap them. This first introduction to one another offers them the chance to meet through scent, giving them notice that the other is there through a harmless meeting.
- Feed the cats near the door that separates them so they learn that coming together (even though they can't see each other) results in a pleasant experience.
- In addition to regular cat food, feed the cats extra-special treats near the door as well, like tiny pieces of tuna, salmon, cheese, chicken or liver.
- Once your new cat has settled into his acclimation room and seems comfortable with you and his new living arrangements, switch the cats' locations so they can investigate each other's smell. This also allows the new cat to explore a different section of your home. Allow the new cat access to the home for a bit and put your resident cat in the acclimation room. This scent immersion is another way for them to meet through scent without having to meet face to face.
- After a few more days, play with each of the cats near the door. Encourage them to paw at toys under the door. Eventually the cats may play “paws” under the door with each other.

Step 2: Letting the Cats See Each Other

The initial process should take at least two weeks and, assuming that you see no signs of aggression at the door (no hissing, growling, etc.), you can introduce the cats to each other. One method is to replace the door with a temporary screen door so that the cats can see each other. If you can't use a screen door, you can try using two baby gates positioned in the door jam, one above the other. It's good to do this when there is more than one person in the home, if possible. Open the door to the acclimation room with the gate or screen in place and let the cats meet naturally, don't force an introduction. Generally, the anticipation is so high that once the door is open, your resident cat will be very interested in checking things out.

If they can meet on either side of the door and remain relaxed, reward both cats for this with wet food or great treats. Let them sniff one another at the barrier, speak to them in positive tones and reward them throughout the interaction. You can move on to feeding them meals on either side of the barrier, making sure that these initial safe introductions are supervised and ended if things become tense.

If either cat vocalizes (hisses/ growls) redirect that cat away with food or toys and let them take a break. Do not pick the cat up. Give that cat something positive to do, away from the door. This could be play, attention or a great food motivator. You can allow them to meet at the door again but need to be prepared to redirect if either cat hisses or growls again. Some vocalizing is normal and to be expected, but in these initial stages, we want interactions to be as calm, positive and controlled as possible. Moving the unhappy cat away at this early stage in the game can build trust, you're proving to that cat that you'll protect them. If they can't meet without repeated hissing and growling at the barrier, close the door and take a step back. Go back to room swaps and feeding/ playing at the closed door. Repeat steps as necessary until meetings are a little calmer and more relaxed.

Step 3: Letting the Cats Spend Time Together

The next stage is to permit the cats to spend time together without a barrier between them. Supervise these initial face-to-face interactions carefully.

- It's good to bring the cats together when they are likely to be relatively calm, such as after a meal or strenuous play. Don't force interactions, let the cats meet naturally. Open the door to the acclimation room and allow the cats to move through the home like normal, making sure that you're there to supervise the actual meeting.
- If the cats meet face to face and can relax together, spend some time playing with them, offering treats and attention to create a positive association for them. Some tense body language (watch for hair rising on the back, tail swishing, ears erect and forward, pupils dilated, body stiff) may occur, this is fine as long as it doesn't escalate into something more. Allow the cats to move around the home naturally, keeping an eye on them in case you need to step in. Don't allow them to be out alone just yet. We really want consistent good behavior from both cats before giving both cats full access of the home without supervision.
- If either cat vocalizes (hiss/ growl) or moves in to strike the other, redirect that cat out of the room with a toy or good food motivator. You can clap your hands if needed, but simply directing them away from the other cat is preferred, if possible. Don't pick the cat up. Give that cat something positive to do in another room. Play, attention or a good food motivator are great for this moment. Once both cats are calm, you can try again. This may need to be repeated many times, the important thing to

remember is that reducing negative associations as often as possible makes a lasting relationship possible. If they just can't be out together yet, take a step back. Either go back to the open door with a barrier, or to the door being closed, whichever scenario feels more comfortable for your cats based on this initial interaction. You can revisit any of the previous steps as needed.

- Make sure that you're rewarding them any time they choose to be close to one another or spend time in a room together comfortably. We're teaching them that being together is a positive thing, enforcing the idea that good things happen when they spend time together.
- As the cats become more familiar with each other, allow them longer and longer periods of time together.
- If a fight does happen, do not attempt to step in. Make a loud noise and/ or redirect them with toys or treats if they respond to that. Once they've moved away from one another, separate them into safe spaces in your home to let them calm down.

Final Tips

If you're bringing a new cat into a household with multiple cats, introduce each resident cat to the newcomer individually. After each of your cats has met the new cat one-on-one, you can start to allow all of the cats to mingle as a group.

Your cats will be more likely to get along if they're happy in their environment. Look at the layout of your home. Make sure there are plenty of hiding spots for your cats. Some like to sit up high, on shelves and on kitty condo perches. Frightened cats, on the other hand, tend to hide under and behind things, so make sure you provide spots at floor level as well. Make sure you have multiple feeding stations and multiple litterboxes, all set up so that they're out in the open and there's no chance for an ambush while eating or using the litterbox. Make sure there are enough toys, beds and comfort items, as well. Increasing their resources will lessen any potential territorial behavior.