

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. Ask a friend or family member to help you with the introduction. Have one cat and one person on each side of the door, and start the introduction by setting each cat down a few feet away from the screen or gates. When the cats notice each other, say their names and toss treats to them, aiming the treats behind them. Over the next few days, continue to encourage feeding, eating treats and playing near the barrier, gradually offering the cats' meals, treats and toys closer to the screen.

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.
- Use positive reinforcement with treats, toys, praise and attention when the cats are in the same room with one another and behaving well.
- 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 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.
- Please contact the behavior helpline with any concerns of any kind. 734-662-5585, ext 303.

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. Place food, water and litter boxes out in the open so your cats don't feel trapped when they access these resources. Make sure you have a litter box for each cat, plus at least one extra.