



Introducing a New Cat to Existing Cats

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We receive many calls about integrating cats together. Unfortunately, by the time we are contacted, things have already gone awry. This is frequently due to cats being integrated too quickly. Most cats need time to acclimate to another cat coming into the house. Cats need time to normalize their new experiences and most cats are not able to do this rapidly.

Cats vary widely in accepting other cats into their household. Some cats are extremely social, gladly accepting their new roommates while others prefer to be the reigning king or queen of the cat household. Of course, finding the right blend of personalities is always essential. Unfortunately, cats don't do as well as dogs at meeting and "interviewing" potential housemates! So, what is a cat owner to do when wanting to integrate a new cat into the household?

First, before deciding to get another cat, you should ask yourself a few questions.

- Are you looking for a cat to be a companion to your existing cat?
 - If so, does your cat really want a companion?
- Has your cat ever lived with another cat?
 - If so, did the cats timeshare their existence or play together and mutually groom each other?
 - If not, how has your cat reacted when he has seen other cats?

While cats are definitely social animals, many can be perfectly happy living without other cats. This does not mean that they cannot enjoy sharing their home with another cat. In deciding to adopt another cat, you *and* your cat should both be looking for another companion. Be prepared for anything from close bonding to mutual avoidance or possibly even conflict between the cats. There are several specific steps you can take to ensure the most successful integration possible.

Phase One of Integration:

There are several goals in the process of integration. The first is to keep any negative reactions to a minimum. The second is to go exclusively at the cats' pace. The third is to be sure that the cats associate good things with each other's presence.

- Set up food, water, and a litter box for the new cat in a separate room. The cats should not see each other when the new cat is first brought into the home. This adjustment is very stressful for both the new cat as well as the existing cat.

They should only be permitted to hear and smell each other through a closed door.

- Be sure that the new cat has adjusted to the new room before progressing to the next step. This can take anywhere from a few hours to a few days depending on the cat's reaction.
- Swap the new cat and the resident cat. Put the resident cat in the new cat's room and allow the new cat to explore the rest of the house. This will help the cats to become familiar with each other's scent.
- Try to encourage the cats to play "footsy" under the door by passing a toy under the door for both to play with.
- Once the cats are playing "footsy" under the door or are curious of each other, prop the door open an inch or so and allow the cats to see each other, but not to gain access to each other.
- Do not progress beyond this step if you observe hissing, growling, or hair bristling. Repeat the above steps more gradually if you notice any of these behaviors.
- Should either of the cats hiss or growl, calmly distract the cats with a toy or a food treat. If this doesn't work or continues to occur frequently, repeat several previous steps and progress more slowly. Do not punish either cat for these behaviors. Punishment will make them more uncomfortable with each other.

Many cats can be successfully integrated with a slow, methodical introduction. By following this process, you will be reducing the stress associated with bringing a new cat into your household.

Phase Two of Integration

Cats need time to accept the presence of a new cat in their house before they can begin to socially negotiate the new relationship. This section is designed to help people through the actual social interaction stage of integration. Once cats have acclimated and tolerate a new cat in their home, we are ready to have them learn about each other and help them to negotiate any conflict between them.

Cats should have visual access to each other without having physical access. We don't want the cats to have full access to each other because we want to control their ability to smack, scratch, grab, bite, chase, or ambush each other. Cats are not pack animals like dogs, so they are not as good at negotiating conflict. Cats

don't have a hierarchy like dogs. Dogs are generally better at working out social conflict because at their core – they are far more social than cats.

Cats use five different strategies to work through conflict with each other. They engage in offensive and/or defensive threat displays, avoidance, immobility, and deference. Also, cats shouldn't take on only one of those tactics nor should they assume one role. This means that cats should use ALL of those tactics and should adjust their role based on the situation. When cats fall into roles where one cat is the bully and one cat is the victim, it can be very difficult to adjust those roles. Good cat negotiation consists of frequent role changes where one is in charge of a location one moment and the other yields. Then at another time, the roles change. This way both cats are negotiating each other.

To accomplish this negotiation, each cat should be on the other side of a gate, fence, or some other barrier that still permits the cats to see each other. They should be supervised closely to ensure they are kept separated by the barrier. They should also be supervised so you have an idea of how things are going between them.

Don't punish threat displays including hissing, swatting, or growling. It is important to let this play out since they are unable to actually hurt the other and will be unable to fully carry out a threat with the barrier between them. We want the cats to learn from each other. This means that what matters is NOT whether or not a cat hisses or growls. What matters is what the OTHER cat does in response to that hiss or growl. If one cat engages in a threat display, the other cat should disengage that threat through the use of body language.

Non-threatening signals include:

- Squinting or slow blinking at the other cat
- Doing something else like sniffing something, bunting or rubbing on something, grooming themselves, etc.
- Doing nothing while looking away from the other cat
- Moving away in extremely slow motion

Threatening signals include:

- Hissing or growling
- Moving directly toward the other cat
- Maintaining direct eye contact
- Tracking the other cat's movements
- Body language that makes the cat look bigger

It is important that they don't both frequently engage in threatening signals at the same time. While this may happen early on in their integration, it should happen less and less. Instead, the cats should begin to take on opposing signals as a

complement to each other. As they become more acclimated, there should be fewer threatening signals in general. Once we are seeing more and more negotiation or even friendly curiosity, you are ready to take down the barrier and allow them to have full access to each other. This should be done for a short time and then the cats should be separated again. We can gradually work up to having them together longer and longer. We should continue to keep them separated when they are left alone until we are completely comfortable with both cat's ability to negotiate conflict.

Most cats are able to accept a new cat in the household as long as we work to reduce the stress that is involved with that process. Going slowly helps BOTH cats to negotiate conflict with as little stress as possible. Understanding how cat's negotiate social conflict is key to ensuring the best integration possible. If you are still having problems integrating your cats after following this process, please contact us for further assistance.