



## Adding a New Cat to Your Household

Many people who adopt a cat from the Animal Humane Society enjoy their feline companion so much that they return later with the idea of adding a second cat. They often ask the questions, “How is Daisy going to react?” and “Is this going to work?” The answer is, “Probably, but it’s not always easy to predict how a cat will react; you won’t know for sure until you try.” Unlike canines, most felines do not live in social groups, yet there are millions of homes where two or more cats live in reasonable harmony. Here are some tips that can increase your chances for establishing a peaceful multi-cat home.

### *Selecting Your Second Cat*

- Don’t worry too much about the gender of the cats involved. (We are assuming that you are a responsible owner whose pets are spayed/neutered!) Although some sources recommend choosing an opposite-sex animal, many feline behavior experts indicate that the sex of the animals makes very little difference. The Animal Humane Society’s experience in thousands of second-cat placements also supports this conclusion. Age and temperament are the most important factors.
- The typical adult household cat will accept a new kitten much more easily than he will accept a new adult cat. Cats are by nature very territorial, and your cat may resent an adult feline intruder, attacking him or retreating under the bed as a result. He may, however, feel less threatened by a relatively helpless 8 week old kitten. Even so, you will want to monitor your cat’s behavior with the newcomer until you’re sure he will not harm the kitten. Follow the introduction protocol later in this handout for maximum success.
- Is there a special kind of kitten you should select for your second pet? If you are able to choose from a group of kittens, look for one that’s grooming or playing happily with the others, or sleeping comfortably. Avoid any kitten that’s hissing, growling or engaged in serious battle with his mates.
- What if you just fell in love with one of the adult cats at the shelter or just don’t want to go through the swinging-from-the-drapes kitten stage? Can you successfully integrate another cat into your household? Possibly, but it’s going to take a lot longer for both pets to get comfortable, and there is the possibility that the two may merely learn to coexist rather than becoming friends. Success in adding a cat depends largely on the personality of your present cat: if he’s easygoing and mild mannered and the new cat is also fairly laid back, you may have little trouble if you introduce them slowly and correctly.



### *Introducing Your New Cat to the Resident Cat*

Let's start with what *not* to do: tossing them together and hoping they will “work it out”. It's important to remember that cats are, by nature, solitary and highly territorial creatures who often require weeks or months to adjust to changes in their environment and lifestyle. For that reason, **first impressions are extremely important when meeting other household pets**. Cats who are introduced too quickly and fight may never learn to co-exist peacefully, so a gradual introduction is essential for long-term success. Here are some tips to guide the process:

- When you bring your new cat home, confine him to one room with his own litterbox, bed, food and water (we refer to this as a “sanctuary room”) for a week, or at the very least until he has been examined by your vet. At the next meal, place the two cats' bowls on either side of the door to that room. The aim is for the cats to associate the pleasurable activity of eating with the presence of the other cat. Gradually move the bowls closer with each feeding. When they can eat calmly with both bowls directly across from each other, open the door a crack – for just a few seconds – so they can see each other as they eat.
- Once the new cat seems comfortable in his new surroundings, is eating well and using his litterbox, confine your resident cat in another room and let the new cat explore the house. This allows the new cat to come in contact with the resident cat's scent without direct contact. An additional option is to exchange the cats' bedding for a night.
- Monitor the cats' first actual encounter closely and limit the time they spend together at first. Some display of fearful or aggressive behavior (crouching, hissing, ears back) is to be expected, but you want to avoid letting them establish a pattern of aggressive or fearful behavior, which may be difficult to change. If these behaviors intensify, separate the cats again and go back to Step One. If an actual fight breaks out, throw a towel over them (to distract them) or make a loud noise to separate them. Lure the new cat back to his sanctuary room (don't pick him up while he's still aroused) and give them a few days to calm down. *Do not hold either cat in your arms during introductions: if either one reacts aggressively to the other cat, you could be scratched or bitten.*
- Continue to provide supervised encounters with both cats, watching closely for signs of tension or aggression. If one cat appears to be freezing, staring or fixating on the other cat, have some treats or fun toys nearby to redirect them away from each other. This will also continue to teach them that good things happen when the other cat is near.



Be sensitive to what a big change this is for your resident cat. Even if you think he's being obnoxious and unreasonable, give him the security of his usual routine and his own special time with you.

Keep in mind that "success" doesn't necessarily mean your cats will be best buddies. Some cats become bonded to one another while others spend the rest of their lives avoiding and hissing at each other. Realize that either of these scenarios might happen. Your goal in facilitating introductions is to set the stage for the cats to peacefully share their living quarters, but understand you simply cannot "make" them like each other. Introducing two new adult cats can be challenging, but if done carefully and correctly, the results can also be very rewarding.

This process takes time: count on 2-4 weeks if integrating a kitten and an adult, and 4-6 weeks (or longer) if integrating two adults. While following this protocol will maximize your chances of success, know that some cats simply never learn to coexist peacefully. If you have followed the introduction process and do not see any improvement after a month's time – especially if one cat is terrorizing or injuring the other – long-term success may be unrealistic. Rehoming one of the cats or keeping them permanently separate may be necessary for everyone's safety.