



## Introducing a New and Resident Cat in the Home

When introducing a new cat into the home, the most important thing to keep in mind is that it can be a slow process, so be patient. While some cats may hit it off immediately, the majority will not, and it could take days to even months before a successful introduction is complete. Following the steps below will give you the best chance at success, but remember that the timeline and pace you move at is ultimately up to your cats, so listen to what they are telling you and let them guide you.

### **Before You Bring Your New Cat Home**

Getting your space set up before you bring the new cat into your home will not only set everyone up for success right away, but it will also simplify the process right from the start.

1. Choose a room where you can keep your new cat completely separated from your current resident cat. This room should be “cat-proofed” so be sure there’s
  - a. No holes in the walls or the ceiling where they make be able to get stuck
  - b. Nothing breakable on a shelf or ledge that they may able to knock off
  - c. No clothing or other fabric materials that cannot be replaced if scratched, etc.
2. This room should be able to fit and should contain all of your new cat’s essential needs: a litterbox, food bowl, water, toys, bedding and/or a box where they can rest and hide if needed
3. Confine your current resident cat to separate room before leaving to bring home your new cat. This will help eliminate the chance of an unscheduled greeting right from the start.
4. Bring your new cat directly to “their” room, and close the door to the room. Once the door is closed, open up the carrier door and allow your new cat to come out and explore the room. It may take seconds or even hours for your new cat to come out of the carrier if they are fearful. If this is the case, you should allow them to come out at their own pace; it can be a completely normal behavior for shy cats.
5. Leave the room, being sure to close the door behind you, and take your new cat’s carrier out with you. Place the carrier outside of the closed door and now bring your resident cat out of their room and allow them to sniff and inspect the carrier. They may have any or all of several reactions including sniffing with a relaxed body and face, hissing or growling with a tense body and face, or acting fearful.
6. As your resident cat inspects the new cat’s carrier, you can try feeding them treats and/or play near the carrier to help build a positive association with the new cat’s scent.

### **Tips:**

- A baby gate is not essential to the introduction process, but it can be very useful to set up in the doorway to help act as a safety net and prevent accidental greetings.
- A Feliway diffuser may also aid in the acclimation process for both your new and resident cats.
- Be sure to check in with your new cat several times a day to see how they are settling in. Don’t try to interact with them if they are showing signs of fearful behavior or arousal. They may take a few days to decompress from the move. Once they have settled in, then you may move on to the next step.

### **Introducing Your Cats Together**

Be sure that you have not witnessed any stress signals from either cat for at least 48 hours before moving on to this step. Stress signals may include vomiting, over-grooming, excessive sleeping or feigning sleep, eliminating outside of the litterbox, and fearful or aggressive behavior. If none of these behaviors are present, follow the steps below.

Also, be sure to allow the cats to decide the pace of the introduction process and wait for each cat to be relaxed and not showing any stress signals along the way. Be patient and don't rush, as any mishap has the potential to send your cats back to the beginning. Listen to what your cats are telling you, and allow them to be your feedback. If either cat begins showing signs of stress, drop back to the previous step and try again.

All feeding should now be done on opposite sides of the new cat's room door. This will help create positive associations with each cat and their scents.

1. Begin with scent swapping. Rub each cat with a small towel, ideally just before feeding time.
2. Place food bowls down for both cats on opposite sides of your new cat's room door.
3. Place the towel with your resident's cat scent on it underneath the food bowl of your new cat, and place the towel you rubbed your new cat with underneath the food bowl of your resident cat.
4. Start with the food bowls and towels at the distance from the door in which neither cat shows any stress signals. As they continue not to show any stress signals, gradually move each food bowl a few inches closer to the door during the next feeding.

Once you are able to move both food bowls up against the door and both cats are eating without signs of stress, you can begin to switch their living areas.

5. Without allowing the cats to see or otherwise greet each other, allow your resident cat into the room your new cat has been staying in, and allow your new cat to explore the rest of the house
6. Continue this until both cats are comfortable in the other's space. You can do this as little as once per day or as often as a few times per day.

You can create your own schedule but keep in mind that it's often better to do several short living area exchanges a day than it is to do one long. Once both cats are showing no signs of stress being in the other's living area, you can move on to the next steps of introducing them visually.

7. Allow the cats to have visual contact with each other. Let them see each other behind a baby gate (that no one can jump over or squeeze through) or through a partially opened door. Ideally, neither cat would be able to have more physical contact with the other beyond being able to touch noses or paws with each other.
8. As they see each other, offer food/treats to each cat to continue to build positive associations with each other.

Be sure to end each greeting on a positive note for the best success. Seeing more stress signals at this stage is common, but be patient and make sure to wait until both cats stop showing stress signals before moving on to the next step. If no improvement is being made or you feel the cats are remaining over-threshold, then try making the visual space they can see each smaller. As with the previous steps, several shorter interactions are better than one long one.

9. Now we will allow the doors/barriers to be fully open so the cats can completely see each other. Be sure to continue to maintain some sort of barrier between them, such as a baby gate or X-pen.
10. Follow the same process as when you were feeding them together with the door between them. Start at a distance where neither cat is showing stress signals and offer them treats and/or feed them their meals. As both cats get comfortable with each other and are no longer showing stress signals, allow them to move closer while continuing to feed them treats or moving their bowls closer together

Now that both cats are comfortable seeing each other and interacting up close through a barrier we can begin to let them free range in the same area together. Be sure to prepare the home for two cats, adding another litterbox (ideally in a different area than the current box) and set up another feeding station. The second feeding station can be in the same room but ideally in a different location so both cats aren't eating directly next to each other and potentially stealing each other's food. All interactions at this stage must have direct supervision so you can intervene and separate the cats if/when you begin to see stress signals from either cat.

11. Open the door and any barriers to allow your new cat to come into the same area as your resident cat. Do not try to force any interactions, and allow both cats to approach each other at their own pace. Again, several short interactions throughout the day are better than one long one, and try to end each interaction on a positive note. Engaging in interactive play with both cats together may be beneficial as well. This, as well as feeding them together, will help create positive associations between both cats.
12. Provide plenty of vertical space for each cat to utilize, if they desire. Cats are often more comfortable up high, rather than hiding behind or underneath things, so having tall furniture, shelves, or cat trees that each cat can access may help alleviate stress and make each cat more comfortable.
13. When you are unable to provide supervision, then interactions should end, and your new cat should go back into their room.
14. With each successful interaction, and as both cats continue to get comfortable with neither cat showing any stress signals, you can gradually increase the amount of time that they spend together until they are able to be free in the home without supervision.

If you see any aggression or increase in stress signals at this stage, or any other, then you should stop the interaction and go back to the previous step. If something as serious as a fight occurs, or you are seeing increasingly negative interactions between your two cats then you may need to backtrack to previous steps. Continue to drop back to whatever step your cats do not show stress signals at if this should occur.

### **If Introduction Process is Unsuccessful**

For cats who still do not get along and are showing continued or increasing stress after going through the protocol, including taking each steps slowly and back tracking to previous steps, you may want to consider anti-anxiety medication during the introduction process. This will need to come at the recommendations of both a behaviorist and veterinarian, or a veterinary behaviorist.

If all else does not work and your cats are unable to live calmly and comfortably together, then rehoming your new cat may be your best option, as living together can be very stressful and result in a poor quality of life or create additional behavior/ medical problems. Some cats are happier living as the only cat in the home, and if this turns out to be the case, then we should note that information, and respect and do what is best for each cat.