



Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA

# It Takes Time to Make a Friend: Cat-Cat Introductions

**You'd like to bring home a companion for your beloved cat. Making this selection is a bit like a blind date. Some cats who are strangers to each other get along fine from day one. But, we do recommend that adopters consider the slower, more careful approach outlined below to have the best chances for a successful integration.**

What can do you do to make the new pairing succeed? First, consider your cat's age and energy level. A kitten may charm you, but could overwhelm her. Would a youthful playmate be welcome or is your cat better paired with a sedate companion for mutual grooming and napping? Consider the gender of the cats. Males tend to be more territorial with other males, so while this is not a hard and fast rule, male/female and female/female pairings may have a better chance of achieving domestic harmony.

When you've found the perfect partner cat, you need to introduce them. To do this, show cats who don't know each other that the stranger in the house is not a threat. Because cats are territorial by nature and instinctively defend their home turf, you're asking both cats to make a big adjustment. To succeed, move slowly and enlist the cats' superb senses.

## **A Room of One's Own**

1. Keep the new cat in his or her own room at first. Outfit the room with a litter box (or two if you cannot scoop more than once a day), water, food, places to retreat (both up high and down low), and a window, if possible. Give New Guy lots of time to explore, so the room begins to feel familiar. Visit often and stay a while so you become part of the new, safe environment.

Why? A cat derives peace of mind from knowing the territory. Getting used to a new place is easier if the new cat is not also worrying about meeting the stranger cat around every corner.

Tip: To ease the transition, consider spraying Feliway in New Guy's room and along the jambs and threshold of the door to the room. Feliway mimics the reassuring pheromones that cats leave for each other when they rub against objects, other cats, and people whom they accept.

## **Leave Calling Cards**

2. When you visit New Guy, bring with you a piece of cloth you've rubbed over your resident cat. Leave this cloth in New Guy's room. Rub another cloth over the new guy and take that away with you when you go. Place it where your resident cat will find it. Repeat this process, focusing on stroking the cats' cheeks, several times every day.

Why? Both cats are alerted to the presence of the stranger in safe circumstances, where they can gradually become accustomed to the "stranger" smell. You don't want to surprise them.

## **Make the Introduction**

3. Feed treats to the new cat near the door to the room and to your resident cat on the other side of the door. (Enlist the aid of a friend or someone else in your household.)

Why? Each cat begins to associate the presence of the other with something good. Because the door separates them, any hostility or fear cannot escalate into conflict.

## **Have a Play Date**

4. Entice the cats to play with a toy under the door. Maybe they'll get a game of tug-of-war or pat-the-paw going. Interactive play extends the non-threatening experience of getting acquainted, with the door providing security.



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### **Timesharing**

5. Give New Guy a chance to explore a different part of your home, while your resident cat checks out the newcomer's room. Enlist a helper to scoop up one of the cats while you transport the other. Both cats are digesting the news that they share territory. Observe their reactions and judge whether they are ready for the next step. Is there hissing or fearful behavior or do they seem curious, alert, relaxed? It's always better to move slowly to the next step than to hurry and set this process back.

### **Meet Face to Face**

6. Open the door to New Guy's room while feeding both cats within sight, smell, and hearing of each other, but at a distance of some yards. Close the door after a few minutes if all goes well, and repeat for a longer period next time.

Why not just open the door for good at this point? Perhaps you can if your cats either ignore each other or approach with ears and tail erect in friendly greeting. One or both may be too upset to continue; watch for these signs:

- Tail is tucked, drooping, thrashing or fluffed.
- Ears are flattened.
- Fur is rippling or standing on end.
- The cats are staring at each other, unblinking.
- They are growling or meowing
- They seem to be getting ready to pounce.

Cats don't want to fight. Most of their posturing is meant to intimidate the other into retreating. Give each cat a safe place to which to withdraw. If they do seem headed for conflict, close the door between them or distract them with a loud sound. Never attempt to separate battling cats with your hands.

The length of this process depends upon the individual personalities of your cats. You may have to repeat a step over days, weeks, or even months before tolerance or friendship is achieved.

### **Keep the Peace**

Once your cats accept each other, preserve harmony by providing multiple litter boxes (so no one has to wait or worry about being ambushed) and vertical perches or cat trees that allow cats to share territory without feeling crowded.

Call the free PHS/SPCA Behavior Hotline at any point in this process for phone advice.

**For more info, call our free Behavior Helpline (650/340-7022 x783 or, for Spanish, x786) or consider a low-cost consultation. To make a consultation appointment, call 650/340-7022 x667. The PHS/SPCA Behavior Department, like many shelter programs, is funded by donations.**