



Mendocino Coast Humane Society
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Welcoming Home a New Cat or Kitten

Many cats are fearful when introduced to their new home; being moved from a small enclosure to an apartment or house is a big change. Start your new cat or kitten in a small room where it will feel safe. Provide a bed or something for it to settle down into. Avoid putting it in a room with a lot of furniture that it can hide behind.. Make sure that you provide your new cat with food, water, and a litter box and that you regularly spend time in this room with it, so that it is not alone. After three days to a week, or once your cat is comfortably walking around and living in this room, expand its access to the entire house. For some cats, it may take several weeks before they are comfortable in their room and can be allowed access to the whole house.

Select a veterinarian – all vets here on the coast give a free well health checkup to animals adopted at the shelter. Your appointment must be made within 3 business days of the adoption.

Scratching

Scratching is a natural habit of cats – however they can be trained to stay away from your furniture. Start by putting a scratching post near its food and rub it with catnip. If they start to go for your furniture, gently pick it up and take it over to its scratching post. Another alternative is to use a squirt gun when it tries to scratch furniture or get on counters. But don't use your voice along with the squirt gun. The earlier and more consistently you do this, the easier it will be for them to understand that the scratching post is where they should do their scratching.

Diet

It is extremely important to make sure that your cat is eating regularly (and adequate amounts) once you have brought it home. Initially, feed your kitty the shelter food that was provided with your adoption. For most cats, twice-daily feeding is ideal. After two days, or once it is eating regularly, slowly change it over to the diet that you would like to feed it (if different from what you got at the shelter). Changing your cat's diet too rapidly can cause upset to its system (decreased appetite, vomiting, and/or diarrhea). If this happens, call the shelter..

Litter box

Provide your cat with a clean litter box. Cats are often quite fastidious; they are sensitive to the smell of urine and feces, as well as deodorizers. Reducing the smell inside and around the litter box can be very important for them. Scoop out the litter box once daily, and empty it completely to clean it every two weeks. When you clean the litter box, use a mild soap, not strong-smelling detergents or ammonia.

The most common reason that cats are brought to shelters is litter box problems. Following the above recommendations can make the difference between a cat who is house-trained and a cat who isn't. Remember that if you do not like the smell of the litter box, your cat probably doesn't either; keep it clean and you'll have a happy cat.

Toys

There are many different toys that your cat might like to play with. Cats like novelty, so buy several different types of toys for her and try them out. Play with the toys with your cat; do not set them out and expect her to play with them on her own. Do not play with your cat with your hands. Using your hands as a toy teaches your cat that it is okay to bite or scratch you.

Indoors vs. outdoors

One of the big decisions cat owners must make is whether to allow their cat outside. There are many risks outdoors that can shorten your cat's life span. Keep your new cat indoors for 2 to 4 weeks. It needs this time to imprint your home as its home. For kittens, we recommend keeping them inside until they are at least 6 months old. When your cat/kitten is ready and comfortable in your home – start by taking it outside for brief periods with you. You may want to take it outside in a cat carrier and let it experience the out of doors in the safety of the carrier. This works very well in training kitties to be comfortable going outside and training them to stay around your house. Gradually work this process until it is comfortable with you, going outside and any other cats. ALWAYS bring your cat in at night.

You should have these items ready when you bring you new cat home:

- Food and water bowls
- Food
- Treats
- Collar with ID tag
- Cat bed
- Cat toys
- Cat brush
- Cat litter box and litter.
- Scratching post

Introducing a Cat and a Dog

Some dogs do fine living with cats; others simply cannot live safely with felines. Even if the dog has cat experience and the cat has lived with a dog before, proceed cautiously during the first introduction. It's best to have two people present, one to intervene with each animal if necessary. If you have more than one dog, introduce each dog separately to the cat.

The dog should be held on a loose lead. One person should watch the dog's body language and the other should watch the cat's. If the cat is not acting aggressively (raising his back, hissing) toward the dog, he can be allowed to move around freely. A cat is rarely a threat to a dog, but there are some cats who will meet dogs aggressively. If the dog is not acting aggressively toward the cat, then you can ask the dog to sit, or lie down and stay, while the cat moves around freely, sniffing the dog if he wishes. The dog should be praised and rewarded if she ignores the cat.

If the dog has a strong prey instinct, it will become very focused; stiffen and stare, and may start barking or whining. If you see these signs, do not allow the dog near the cat. Especially, do not allow the dog to chase the cat. If the dog lunges and tries to chase the cat, you should try a different strategy for getting them to share space.

Instead, put the cat in a bedroom with a tall baby gate across the door. Give the kitty all needed supplies: litter box, food and water. Allow the dog to view the cat briefly through the gate, and then get the dog to focus on something else, like playing or practicing cues. Praise and reward the dog for being

able to focus elsewhere. Continue to give the dog short viewings of the cat throughout the day.

The hope here is that the dog will eventually lose interest in the kitty. In some cases, the dog will lose interest in the cat within a couple of hours, but some need days, and others simply will not be able to share a space safely with a cat. If you don't feel you can trust your dog around your cat, you should keep them apart. Many dogs can injure or kill a cat very quickly, and dogs can also be injured by cats (eye injuries are not uncommon).

Now, about kittens and puppies: If you are introducing a kitten to more than one dog, again, introduce only one dog at a time. Small kittens may not have any fear of dogs, so you must watch the dog carefully. If your dog is young and high energy, he could hurt or kill the kitten simply by trying to play. Because kittens are small and want to run and play, dogs with a strong prey drive may be very excited by a kitten's movements.

In fact, kittens and dogs should not be left alone at all. Even if your dog is okay with your adult cats, she may become too rough with a kitten and hurt him. So, for safety's sake, keep small kittens and dogs apart any time you are not watching them.

Introducing puppies and adult cats can sometimes be easy, since a well-socialized adult cat will quickly stand up for himself and "tell" a puppy to respect his personal cat space. However, if your rambunctious puppy is chasing your shy cat, the cat may need your help to control the puppy. Until the puppy is old enough to have more self-control and has had some training, baby gates can be used to keep the animals safely and comfortably apart.

Animals with good past experience often adjust well and quickly. But, if introductions do not go well, seek professional help from an expert. Don't ever use punishment: It will not help and it could make matters much worse.

Introducing a New Cat

The first step in creating harmony between your new cat and the existing cats in your household is to pick the best possible new cat for your household and lifestyle. All cats are individuals, and some may merge into your household better than others.

How do I choose a new cat to add to my household?

Cats who previously lived with another cat are more likely to get along with other cats than a cat who was an "only child." Think about the things that the cats already in your home like to do. If they like to play, getting another playful cat is probably a good idea. If your cats prefer to lie in the sun all day, you're probably better off adopting a cat who has similar habits. A young kitten or adolescent is probably not a good idea for a household with an older or grumpy cat.

How can I reduce the likelihood of problems?

Even if the cat you are adopting is good with other cats, there is always the possibility of problems when introducing strangers to each other. There are several steps that you can take to reduce the likelihood of problems. Before bringing your new cat home, create a separate "territory" for her. This area should be equipped with food, water, a scratching post, a litter box, access to natural sunlight, and comfortable resting places.

Your other cats should have their own separate territory. Make certain that both areas (the space for the new cat and the space for the other cats) contain multiple hiding places so the cats can easily retreat if necessary. Large cardboard boxes with holes cut in two sides make great hiding places. The second hole allows the cat to escape if cornered by another cat. The boxes will come into play once you start allowing the cats to interact directly, but it can be helpful to introduce the boxes first, so that the cats

become accustomed to using them. Keep in mind that cats like to hide in high places, so remove fragile items from shelves or block access to the shelves.

Place your new cat in her space as soon as she arrives home, and spend a minimum of one hour with her (and the other cats in the household) per day. Play with them regularly and watch them closely for signs of stress or anxiety, such as hiding, aggressive behavior, decreased appetite, and/or excessive vocalization. If you see any of these signs, your cat could be suffering from stress. If the signs persist for more than several days and/or if your cat stops eating, consult with your veterinarian.

If any cat is showing mild signs of stress, give him or her time to acclimate to the new situation. If all the cats appear comfortable in their spaces, place the new cat in a different room (equipped with the same amenities) after two days, and allow your other cats to enter the new cat's original territory. This will allow each cat to become accustomed to each other's scent in a non-threatening way. Allow the cats to acclimate to their new areas for one day.

Here's another way to introduce cats to each other's scent: Cats have glands in their cheeks that produce pheromones. When your cat rubs her cheek against a wall, chair, or your leg, she produces pheromones, which are chemical substances that can help to relieve anxiety and provide information about the cat who is producing those pheromones. Exposing each cat to towels that were gently rubbed on the new cat's cheeks may be a good way to introduce them. Some cats respond very well to a synthetic pheromone (a spray or diffuser), a product that can be bought online or in pet supply stores.

Next, you can start allowing the cats closer access to each other by placing them on either side of a closed door so that they can smell each other directly. The next step is to allow them to see each other through a baby gate or a door that is propped open two inches. If the cats are interested in each other and seem comfortable, allow them to meet. Open the door to the rooms between the cats and observe them closely.

If any cat shows signs of significant stress or aggression, separate them again and introduce them more slowly. Once the cats have acclimated to being allowed to sniff each other through a door, bring each cat into a large room, on opposite sides. If you have a willing helper, each person should play, pet and/or give food treats to one of the cats. If you do not have a helper, place the more comfortable cat in a cat carrier with a bowl of canned cat food to keep him occupied and play with the other cat. Over multiple sessions, gradually bring the cats closer to each other. This exercise teaches the cats that they get special rewards in each other's presence, and that nothing bad is happening. With time, the cats will learn that they are not a serious threat to each other.

Remember, an anxious cat is much more likely to behave aggressively than a cat who is comfortable and relaxed. If you use patience in the initial stages of the introduction process, you will probably increase your chances of a harmonious household.

The above recommendations are guidelines to increase the likelihood that your new cat will get along with the existing cat(s) in your household. If you have tried these techniques and your cats are still not getting along, please seek the help of your veterinarian or a behaviorist.

**For More Information, the following website is extremely helpful:
www.bestfriends.org/Resources/Pet-Care/Dogs**