

# Helping Them Adjust to the New Home

There are several key aspects to take into consideration when helping your new cat adjust to the home - getting them accustomed to the new litter box and food.

## **Shifting to the new food**

Most likely you will be providing different food than what we used in the shelter. Shifting too fast may cause your cat to experience stomach discomfort. The best way to avoid that is to blend the two types of food slowly over several days.

<b>Days</b>	<b>% of Old Food</b>	<b>% of New Food</b>
1-2	75	25
3-4	50	50
5-6	25	75
7+	0	100

## **Adjusting to the new litter box**

### **Location**

Make sure the box is easy to find. If your home has multiple levels, provide a box on each level if possible. Additionally, do not place boxes near noisy appliances like washing machines or heating units that may frighten your cat. Avoid moving the box, as many cats do not like change. If you must move the box for some reason, try slowly moving it one foot per day toward the desired location.

### **Litter**

Whether you use clay litter or a natural product like wheat, corn or recycled newspaper, stay away from perfumes and fragrances. These unnatural scents are added to make litter appealing to people, not to cats. Choose dust-free, soft fine grains rather than crystals or pellets. Most cats prefer large, uncovered boxes. Although you might like to keep it covered, most cats don't care for hooded litter boxes. Covers keep odors in and don't allow them to keep see the surroundings while taking care of business. Another common mistake is having too few litter boxes. Experts recommend one litter box per cat, plus one more. That means a household with three cats needs four litter boxes and in different areas.

The feeling of familiarity is very important to your cat. It can take up to two months for cats to "feel at home." Stay away from harsh cleaning chemicals like bleach, pine or citrus cleaners, which can leave a scent in the box your cat won't like. Simply wash the litter box with hot, soapy water and rinse well. Avoid litter box liners and scoop the box at least once per day to keep it fresh and clean.

### **Indoor/Outdoor?**

Cats are safest indoors, but they enjoy "outdoor" stimulation. Windows and see-through doors are "kitty TV". Indeed, research shows that given access, most cats spend hours looking at the outdoor world. Provide your cat with window perches, sills, climbing perches close to windows, etc. and they will spend lots of time watching birds, lizards, etc. You may even hear him or her "chatter" in excitement at the sight of prey!

## Learn to “Read” Your Cat

Cats are good at hiding illness. Learn your cat’s normal habits and make notes if they change how they eat, drink, or use the litter box. Changes could mean problems. Always check with your vet if you see changes in behavior, eating, drinking, or litter box use.

## Scratching Posts

Cats have to scratch, this is not misbehavior. Scratching is a normal and necessary cat behavior. It exercises and strengthens toes, pulls off sharp tips of nails, and reduces stress for your cat. It is one of the ways they mark their territory. Provide your cat with scratching posts, poles, or other scratchers. Watch how your cat likes to scratch. Are they vertical or horizontal scratchers? Scratching boards come in many different shapes and styles - there is one that you’ll kitty will love and use every day!

# Introducing Them to the New Furfamily

## Cat to Cat Introductions

Introducing a new cat to your household can be very stressful for both the new cat and your resident cat. The time spent in the introduction process is well worth the effort to create a harmonious relationship for years to come. The behavior of your resident cat may change toward you during this time and the loving behavior of your new cat may not be immediately apparent. Until both cats are ready for a face-to-face introduction, they should NOT SEE each other. Once your new cat is comfortable with you and the surroundings, you can start the introduction process. Be sure to keep them in separate areas behind closed doors until they become comfortable.

**Create a lovefest:** One way to get cats accustomed to each other before they meet for the first time is to place a soft sock on your hand like a glove and gently rub your new cat focusing on the areas close to the whiskers and the top of the head. These areas release pheromones (happy hormones). The next step is to take the same sock and repeat the process on your resident cat(s). Repeat this process multiple times each day.

**Site Swapping:** When introducing cats, it’s important to let both own the territory (the home). To start, place the resident cat in the safe room and allow the new cat to roam freely. Remember to do this without letting them see each other. Swap their location every 24 hours once your new cat is somewhat comfortable in the safe room.

**Interactive Play Therapy:** In nature, cats hunt (play), eat, and sleep. Interactive play is a very powerful tool that helps your cats become friends and helps your new cat bond with you. Playing next to the closed doors lets the cats know there is a safe and friendly cat on the other side.

**Feeding Times:** Putting their feeding bowls on both sides of the door furthers the introduction process. Initially set bowls of their favorite food far enough away from the door to ensure that both cats are comfortable eating. Gradually move the bowls closer to the door. During this time monitor the cats' behavior when they approach the door that separates them, however, do not interfere with this process. Cats may hiss, growl, flatten their ears as well as twitching their tails. If you see any of these warning signs, be patient and continue the lovefest. It usually takes no longer than two weeks for the cats to adjust to each other's presence.

**Meeting Time:** When the cats are showing positive behaviors such as playing footsies under the door, it may be time for them to meet. Open the door and let them meet for the first time watching them closely. You can expect some hissing; however, your cats should be able to get along. Continue to confine the new cat to her room at night and when you are absent to help her feel secure.

## **Cat-to-Dog Introductions**

While dogs and cats have often been portrayed as enemies, it is usually a great deal easier to introduce a new cat to a dog than to another cat. While both animals may be wary of each other initially, they do not see the other as direct competition and can actually get on very well.

If your dog is rather excitable, take it for a walk first (to get rid of some of its energy). Keep your dog on the leash and have it sit quietly. The new cat should be given a safe position in the room and allowed to get used to the dog and approach it. This requires patience and rewards for the dog if it behaves well.

Repeat the introduction process until both animals show no signs of aggression and behave comfortably in each other's presence. Never leave the dog and cat together unattended during this process. The cat's food will be hugely tempting for any dog, so sit it up and out of the way of thieving canine jaws! Likewise, a litter tray can be pretty tempting and should be kept out of reach of the dog if it is likely to snaffle the contents.

## **Cats and Children**

For many kids, the family pet is their best friend—a companion who not only provides unconditional love, but who also teaches them about friendship, responsibility, loyalty, and empathy. The key to creating a true "family pet"—one who is gentle, loyal, and loving to both animals and people—is to treat the animal as a beloved family member and to provide the training and care they deserve. It's not enough to get a pet "for the kids." A pet is not a temporary playmate for children, but a lifelong family member who depends on the entire family, especially adults.

### **How old should my child be before we get a pet?**

Although many experts recommend a child be six years or older before a pet is brought into the home, you are the best judge of your child's maturity. At the very least, your child should exhibit self-control and understand (and obey) the word "no." If you think your child is ready for a pet, first introduce them to friends' well-behaved pets and observe your child's behavior around them.

### **Should we get a young animal or an older one?**

Many families with young children choose a kitten or puppy, believing these pets are safer, easier to train, and more adaptable than older, larger pets. But this isn't always true. Since puppies and kittens are fragile, require extra time and care, and are prone to play-related scratching and biting, they may not be appropriate for a household with young children. Adopting a friendly, calm, adult animal who has a known history of getting along with young children may be the best choice for your family. Before making a decision, talk with animal experts such as veterinarians, animal trainers, and animal shelter adoption counselors who can help you select the right animal for your family.

### **How should my child interact with pets?**

To protect both your child and your pet, it's critical that an adult supervise all pet-child interactions. It's also important to help your child see the world through your pet's eyes. Ask your child how they would feel if someone poked at their eyes or pulled their ears. Explain that even the most docile pet has limits and that all animals must be treated with caution and respect.

### **Help your child understand that:**

Pets need space and may not always welcome human attention, especially when eating, playing with their toys, or resting.

Pets may become upset by too much petting or stimulation. Teach your child to heed warning signs (such as hissing, retreating, and growling) that indicate their animal friend wants to be left alone.

Teach your child to get permission from an adult before touching another animal. Explain how some animals may feel threatened when approached by someone they don't know.

### **How can I help my pet feel safe?**

Pets, like children, need to adjust to new surroundings and circumstances, and need opportunities for "downtime." Provide pets with a place of their own where they can retreat from children. Teach your children when your pet is in this place to leave it alone. Don't put pets in situations where they feel threatened. Pets live longer, healthier, and safer lives when kept indoors with family.

### **How can I teach my kids to take good care of pets?**

Allowing children to help care for a pet teaches responsibility and instills a feeling of competency and accomplishment. Choose tasks appropriate for the age of your child. Even young children can be involved in some aspect of caring for an animal friend—selecting a new toy or carrying a food can. The best way to teach your children how to be responsible pet caregivers is to be one yourself. As soon as you bring a pet into your family, set up and enforce rules regarding proper pet care. For example, tell your children not to pull the animal's tail, ears, or other body parts, and insist that they never tease, hit, or chase the pet. Teach children how to properly pick up, hold, and pet the animal. These simple lessons are essential to helping kids become responsible caretakers.

Your children will pay close attention to how you react when a pet scratches the furniture, barks excessively, or soils in the house. Frustrating as these problems are, "getting rid of" the pet isn't just unfair to the pet and your children, but it also sends the wrong message about commitment, trust, and responsibility. When faced with pet problems, get to the root of the problem. Often a veterinarian, animal shelter professional, or dog trainer can help you resolve pet issues so you can keep the whole family together.

Remember - A pet is not a temporary playmate for children, but a lifelong family member who depends on the entire family, especially adults.