

# INTRODUCING YOUR NEW KITTEN TO YOUR OTHER CATS

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Most species of cats, including the domestic housecat, are basically solitary. They do not form highly structured social groups with the same types of social hierarchies or "pecking orders" as do dogs. Although cats can form close attachments to other animals, they are also very territorial. There is wide individual variation in how tolerant individual cats are of sharing their house and territory with multiple cats.

## How Will The Resident Cat Accept a New Kitten?

The factors which determine how a resident cat(s) will accept a newcomer are not fully understood. Cats who are well socialized, meaning they had many pleasant experiences with other cats during kittenhood, will likely be more sociable than cats who did not. Stray cats who were "street cats" and in the habit of fighting with other cats in order to defend their territory and food resources, may not do as well in a multi-cat household. If the resident cats have been in the habit of chasing intruding cats off their territory, or growling at neighborhood cats through the window, they may have a more difficult time accepting a newcomer.

Genetic factors also influence a cat's temperament, so friendly parents, especially friendly fathers, may be more likely to produce friendly offspring.

A new kitten will most likely either want to play with the older resident cat or may be somewhat fearful of him. Kittens are unlikely to show territorial or inter-male aggression as do adult cats. The resident cat may also respond in a playful manner, or may show defensive, inter-male or territorial aggression.

Cats who live in the same house may become the best of friends, or they may only tolerate each other with a minimum of conflict. However, there will be some individual cats who are better off in single-cat households. The initial interactions a newcomer and resident cat have can "set the stage" for their future relationship. It is much better to introduce cats to each other **very gradually**, over a period of several weeks or even months if necessary than to start off with an aggressive encounter which could take even longer to overcome.

## Introducing a New Kitten to A Resident Family Cat

1. Confine the kitten to one medium sized room with her litterbox, toys, scratching post, food, water, and a bed. Feed the resident cat and the newcomer near either side of the door to this room. Depending on your feeding schedule, this can either be the cats' regular meals or special "goodies" they will get only as part of the introduction process. This will help to start things out on the right foot by associating something enjoyable (eating!) with each other's presence. Don't put the food so close to the door that the cats are too upset by each other's presence to eat. Gradually move the dishes closer to the door until the cats can eat calmly directly on either side. Next, use two doorstops to prop open the door just enough to allow the cats to see each other, and repeat the whole process.

2. Switch sleeping blankets between the kitten and resident cat so they have a chance to become accustomed to each other's scent. Also put the scented blankets underneath the food dishes.

3. Spend some quiet time in the kitten's room. Sit down on the floor or the bed and let the kitten approach you. Don't stare at her, and scratch her gently under the chin or behind the ears. Before you go in her room, take a few minutes to pet the resident cat so you have his scent. Take some tidbits and/or a dangling toy with you so that the kitten associates you and the scent of the other cat with "good things".

4. Once the kitten is using her litterbox, eating regularly, approaching the door without fear or aggression while the resident cat is on the other side, and is comfortable with your presence in her room, let her have some free time in the house while putting the resident cat in the kitten's room. This switch provides another way for the cats to have experience with each other's scent without a face to face meeting, and also allows the kitten to become familiar with her new surroundings without being frightened by the resident cat.

5. After several of these switches, if both cats are becoming less curious about each other's scents and things have been going well on either side of the closed door during feeding or "treat" times, then it's time for a brief face to face introduction. There are a variety of ways to do this, depending on the cats and the physical environment. If either cat is used to and comfortable in a crate, one or both of them can be crated. Cover the crate(s) with a towel and allow only one side open so the cats don't feel so exposed. **Do NOT** use a crate if this will be the cat's first experience with one or if the cat is not calm while crated. If both cats are crated, the crates can gradually be moved closer to each other. Food treats should be offered to both. If one cat is loose, let this cat approach the crate at her own speed. Alternatively, one or both cats can be held on the owner's laps (if the cat enjoys this). Do not force the cat to stay there if she becomes excited - this could result in someone being bitten or scratched. Use food treats, allow the cats to approach each other on their own.

With either method, keep the interaction short, and end it while both cats are still curious and/or calm, not aggressive or fearful. Repeat this process, making each session a little longer if things are going well. In the meantime, continue to keep the cats separated.

**This stage in the introduction process may be reached in several days, or it may take several weeks. How well the cats are responding to each other will determine when it's time to move ahead - there is no one correct time schedule.**

6. Avoid any interactions between the cats which result in either fearful or aggressive behavior. If this happens during a face-to-face introduction, calmly separate the cats, and continue the introduction process using the gradual steps outlined above. You may need to find another intermediate step to work with before the cats will be ready for another try at a face-to-face interaction. **NEVER PUT TWO CATS TOGETHER AND ALLOW THEM TO "FIGHT IT OUT!"** If these responses are allowed to become a habit, they can be difficult to change.

**Precautions:** You'll need to add another litterbox, and probably clean all the boxes more frequently. Make sure that none of the cats is being "ambushed" by another while trying to use the box.

Try to keep the resident cat's schedule as close as possible to what it was before the kitten's appearance.

If problems persist or arise, consult your veterinarian for more information or for a referral to a behavior specialist. The certified applied animal behaviorists at Animal Behavior Associates, Inc. will be happy to consult with you and help you work with your pets.