



If you are thinking of adding another cat to your home, this guide has tips to help you with introducing cats to each other.

Be prepared that cat introductions can take longer than we expect (or want), and sometimes cats will simply co-exist with each other, rather than becoming best buddies. The introductory process can take a few weeks or months, and that's ok! Letting your cats have as much time as they need helps them to determine their relationship with each other.

What To Consider Before Adopting


Before bringing a new cat into your home, consider:


- What is the temperament and history of the cats you want to introduce?
- Has either cat lived with other cats before?
- Are their energy levels similar?
- Is there an age difference between cats?

For example, introducing a rambunctious kitten who is used to the company of other playful kittens to your relaxed senior who has *always* lived alone may require a longer introduction process and more management than other matches.


Cat Behaviour

There are three important things to understand about cats:

 **Scent** - Cats use scent to communicate with each other and understand their environment, which is why cats rub on and mark things. A group of cats will have a group scent, created by rubbing on and grooming each other. This group scent helps cats feel comfortable with each other.

 **Territory** - Cats are territorial and need to feel secure about the available resources in their territory. This impacts how they feel and move around a space, especially if the layout doesn't give them many opportunities to avoid other cats or promotes competition over resources, like food.

Cats who live together often create a routine around their common spaces called "time sharing," where one cat occupies a certain space during a certain period, while others occupy another space. They'll rotate spaces throughout the day.

 **Environment** - Introducing a new cat into the home changes the scent of the home, which can cause stress for the resident cat. The features of a cat's environment, like how much security it offers via hiding spots and space, and the degree of integration with other cats in that space, can also impact a cat's well-being.



Introducing Your Cats

It's important to introduce your cats gradually. The pace of the introduction will need to be set at the pace of the cat who is *least* comfortable and must be a controlled introduction. Working at the pace of the least comfortable cat will help your cats adjust to each other.

Signs of stress to watch for from cats include:

- Ears back
- Dilated pupils
- Licking their lips
- Fur raised
- Hissing
- Swatting
- Loss of appetite
- Change in litterbox use
- Excessive grooming that they wouldn't be doing otherwise
- One of the cats hides more or all the time

The following steps outline how to successfully introduce your cats. Note: if you spot signs of stress when introducing the cats, you'll need to repeat the previous step and not move on until both/all cats are comfortable.

Step 1 - Settling In

Before bringing your new cat home, create their own space that can't be accessed by the other cat(s) and where the cats can't see each other. Thoroughly clean the room to ensure it is free of the other cat's scent. The room will need a litterbox, food, water, various hiding and resting spots, a scratching post, and toys.

Bring your new cat into their room, open their carrier and allow them to exit at their own pace. You'll know your cat is relaxed in their space when they're doing normal things like eating and using the litterbox, playing and approaching you more.

We recommend giving your new cat at least a week to become comfortable in their room before moving to the next step.

Your cats may smell each other from under the door, which is okay if it doesn't cause high levels of stress for either cat. Feed your new cat treats, play and pet them near the door because this teaches your cat that pleasant things happen near the door. Also, it lets them become used to the scent and sound of the other cat without meeting yet.



We recommend placing your new cat's feeding dishes at least 3 feet away from the door to start with. Eating too close to another cat too early can be too much exposure for your cats and may create tension and competition around resources.

Step 2 - Scent Swapping

Once your new cat is comfortable, start collecting each cat's scent to use for scent introductions. Do this by taking a towel and rubbing it over your resident cat's face and then placing the towel in your new cat's room beside their food bowl. Using a second piece of fabric, do the same with your new cat and place it beside the resident cat's food bowl.

Placing the scented fabric by their food bowls while they eat creates positive associations with the other cat's scent. When the cats finish eating, remove the bowl.

With each cat's food dish 3 feet from the door, begin slowly bringing the dishes closer to the door each day. If either cat is hesitant to eat, eats less or shows signs of stress, then move the bowls back and do not progress until they're comfortable.

Repeat this process for a few days, watching how the cats react to the scent and being closer to each other. When each cat responds neutrally or positively; like rubbing against the cloth or relaxing, you're ready to start making a combined group scent.

Combined group scent is made by purposefully saturating an item with the collective smells of other animals and the environment which you want to prepare a new animal too experience.

Continue collecting and presenting scents, but now collect scents from every cat and leave this new group scent in each cat's space. Before presenting the cloths, rub them on spots your cats would regularly rub on, like furniture.

Step 3 - Space Swapping*

Now that your cats are used to each other's scent and your new cat is comfortable in your home, it's time to let them exchange scents by letting them swap spaces!

This step still requires you to continue keeping the cats physically separated. Using a cat carrier, place each of them in the different rooms. Once they are in the new space, open the carrier door and let your cats explore each other's areas freely.

Doing this allows your cats to smell each other without meeting face-to-face and creates opportunities for a group scent to be created in the house. It also gives your new cat a chance to safely explore the rest of the house and discover hiding spots or other places they can later rest in.



Repeat this for a few days and monitor how your cats respond to their environment during each switch. When your cats show they are comfortable in the environment and have a positive or neutral response to each other's scent, you will know they're comfortable and ready to become exposed to each other.

**Throughout this step, continue presenting the combined group scent during feeding times and removing food while site swapping.*

Step 4 - Visual Contact

When your cats are comfortable at home and have a group scent developed, you can start letting them see each other.

Your new cat should be in their room and some barriers like a mesh barrier or baby gate should be placed at the door so your cats can see each other, but not be able to touch each other. If you are unable to use a barrier, you can open the door a few inches and secure it with a door stop. The opening shouldn't allow for the cats to fit through it and you need to supervise these interactions if you aren't able to prop the door open.

Start by having the door open for a few minutes during their mealtimes. Move their food bowls back to at least 3 feet from the divider and gradually bring them closer to it over the course of a few days. While you do this, continue scent swapping by placing a rubbed towel beside the food bowl daily and rub the group scent onto the divider. Remember to remove the bowls when cats have finished eating.

Repeat this daily and expose the cats to each other for longer periods of time. Once both cats show they're comfortable with the presence of each other by readily eating, playing, and relaxing near the divider you can begin supervised introductions.

Step 5 - Supervised Introductions

At this point, your cats are ready to be in the same room, but under controlled conditions to prevent any conflict.

Before you introduce the cats, make sure the space is large enough and has escape routes like cat trees or shelving, and hiding spots, so neither cat feels trapped. Ensure there are plenty of these resources per cat and that they are placed at a distance.

It's a good idea to have two people present during these supervised introductions, so each cat is rewarded or redirected by a person.

At one end of the room interact with your resident cat and keep their attention on you by petting, feeding, or playing with them. At the other end of the room let your new cat enter and explore, but try to keep them occupied at a distance with food, toys, or petting. Try to avoid having the cats face each other directly, as this can create tension between them.



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Cat to Cat Introductions



Start with small increments of time of up to 5 minutes and reward your cats for coexisting in the same space or when they look at the other. As long as both cats are comfortable, you can increase the amount of time of these supervised introductions each day.

If your cats approach each other and are relaxed or engaging in play, allow them to. But if your cats start to show signs of discomfort or aggression, like a change in body posture, vocalizations like growling or hissing, or prolonged staring, then try to redirect their attention. This can be done by creating more space between them. The interaction should be ended if they aren't relaxing or if they are starting to get aggressive with each other.

Signs of conflict include:

- Quiet, tense stare downs
- Chasing each other out of a space
- Avoiding the other cat by leaving the room, hiding or perching up high away from them
- Not eating or using the litter box when another cat is near
- One cat "blocking" another from accessing something

If a fight breaks out

- 🐾 Don't put your hands in the middle! Use a towel or something else to drop between the cats and help you separate them without injury to yourself.
- 🐾 Do not punish the cats by using things like squirt bottles, yelling, or swatting your cats. This will agitate them further and can lead to more aggression towards each other or you.
- 🐾 Give them at least 24 hours before trying to reintroduce them and take a step backwards in the introduction process, by exposing them to each other for less time during the next session.

Step 6 - Coexistence

At this point, your cats will be familiar and responding positively or neutrally towards each other. You're now ready to have them live together freely in your entire home!

Before you let all your cats occupy the same space without supervision, make sure they won't have future conflicts around space or resources by setting up their environment for success:

- ✓ Give each cat their own food bowl, water bowl, multiple beds, multiple resting spaces, multiple vertical perches and scratching posts. Place their resources far apart from each other to prevent conflict.
- ✓ Provide multiple litter boxes. The general rule is one litter box per cat plus one. Place litter boxes far apart from each other to prevent conflict.



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- ✓ Give your cats ample space and exits in your home by creating vertical spaces and providing hiding spots using cat trees, shelves, bridges, and other types of cat furniture. You can provide more hiding spaces throughout the house by using cardboard boxes or beds in easily accessed areas.

It's important to continue monitoring your cat's behaviour to gauge how well they're adjusting. If conflict occurs, don't punish your cats by using things like squirt bottles, yelling, or swatting your cats to manage conflict. This can lead to them avoiding you, redirecting their aggression to nearby people or animals, or forming more negative associations with each other and leading to more conflict.

Adding a new cat to your home is an exciting time, but sometimes introducing your resident cat(s) to the new cat can be challenging. By following these six steps and keeping in mind cat introductions can take longer than we expect, you will allow your cats to successfully develop and determine their own relationship.

Additional Resources:

For more general supports for pet guardians, including links to training guides, help with a lost pet, vet and foodbank supports, and even emergency preparedness, visit us here:

<https://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com/pet-resources/>

For behaviour resources specifically or to reach our pet behaviour hotline please visit us here:

<https://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com/what-we-do/education-training/behaviour-resources/>

Did You Know?

You can also ask us behavioural questions by emailing:

askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com

It takes approximately \$7 million to keep the Edmonton Humane Society operational for one year and 40% of these funds come from generous donations made by supporters like you. [Donate Today.](#)