

# Appendix 5

## Introducing an Additional Cat to your Household

### Points to Consider Before Getting Another Cat

Although descended from a primarily solitary species, domestic cats have evolved the ability to be social and to enjoy and benefit from the company of other cats that they have a close bonded relationship with. However, not all cats get along well and living in the same house with another cat who may be regarded as a threat or a rival is a common source of feline stress, often resulting in behaviour problems such as fighting and indoor urine marking.

If you already have one or more cats, it is wise to be aware of the following factors that might influence the likelihood of a good or bad relationship developing between the resident cat (or cats) and a potential newcomer.

#### The age of the cats

The younger the cats are, the more likely it is that they will accept each other. If littermates remain together into adulthood, they will often continue to have the same close relationship they had as kittens. But even unrelated kittens have a better chance of developing and maintaining a good relationship with each other if they stay together than cats that meet for the first time when they are older. As cats become adult there is an increased chance that they will regard each other as rivals rather than as potential companions.

#### Early experience with other cats

Cats that had positive encounters with adult cats, not just their mother, when they were kittens (preferably between the ages of 2 and 7 weeks) are more likely to be tolerant of other cats when they grow up.

#### Previous experience of living with other cats

Previous positive experience with other cats can increase the chance of acceptance. But if the resident cat is grieving the recent loss of a close companion, the introduction of a possible adult rival or energetic kitten may add to, rather than alleviate, the cat's overall distress (see Appendix 6).

## **Introducing a kitten to an adult cat**

Even if a kitten is accepting of a new adult cat that it is introduced to, a boisterous and playful kitten can sometimes be too much for, and may even frighten, an adult cat that has little experience of kittens.

## **The health of the cats**

A cat that is elderly or unwell needs to have a stable sense of security within its core territory. Introductions to other cats at this time may heighten stress and cause increased damage to health and general welfare.

## **The relationship between currently resident household cats**

If you already have more than one cat at home, the state of their relationship may provide some idea of how well another cat may be accepted. An additional cat might be less likely to be accepted if the resident cats exhibit any of the following:

- Occasional fighting, even if mild.
- Indoor urine marking.
- Over-eating, by one or more of the cats.
- Blocking behaviour: sitting in doorways or corridors leading to areas where there are resources such as food, litter trays or access to the owner.

Any of the above can indicate an already fragile relationship between the cats. The introduction of another cat could precipitate further breakdown in the relationship and the escalation of behaviour problems.

## **Correct Introductions: Increasing the Chances that a New Cat and Resident Cat(s) will Accept Each Other**

### **Preparation**

#### ***Scent introduction***

A few days before bringing your new cat or kitten home, take a cloth containing the scent of your home and cat(s) to the place where the new cat or kitten is resident, e.g. the breeder's home or rescue centre. Ask for this to be placed with your new cat. At the same time bring back home something containing the scent of the new cat or kitten for your resident cats to investigate.

#### ***Preparation of a 'safe room'***

Prepare a separate 'safe' room for the new cat. This should be somewhere quiet, away from other pets (especially other cats), children, loud noises, and lively activity.

The room should contain all that the cat needs:

- Food.
- Water, placed away from the food.
- A litter tray, placed away from food and water.
- Comfortable and warm bedding.
- Toys.
- Hiding and ‘safe’ places, for example, cardboard boxes, access under furniture and/or high places.

The safe room should also be somewhere that the new cat will later have easy access to. Meanwhile, in readiness for when the cats are introduced, ensure that around the rest of the house there are plenty of places where the cats can hide, get up high or otherwise get away from each other (Fig. A5.1).

### Bringing the new cat home

- Always transport the cat or kitten in a secure purpose-built cat carrier. Hold the carrier close to your chest rather than by the handle because the ‘swinging’ motion when you walk might be disorientating and unpleasant for the cat or kitten.
- A cloth or item of bedding containing scent from the cat’s current home should go into the carrier with the cat.
- If transporting by car, the carrier should be well secured using a seat belt or similar, to prevent it from moving around.
- When you reach your home take the cat in the carrier straight to the pre-prepared ‘safe room’.



**Fig. A5.1.** Ensure that there are plenty of elevated areas and hiding places around the house so that the cats are able to avoid each other if they wish.

- Open the carrier and allow the cat or kitten to exit in his own time. Don't lift the cat out or make any fuss.
- Allow the new cat to explore the room and/or hide as he wants. Don't try to restrain him or remove him from a hiding place. Give him time.
- Keep the carrier containing the 'familiar scent cloth' open and in the room with him, or if he finds another preferred hiding place put the cloth there.
- Allow the new cat or kitten to become settled and relaxed in this safe room before allowing access to the rest of the house, and before meeting your other cat(s).

## Scent swapping

This allows your cats to become accustomed to each other's scent before meeting each other. It might also give you some idea of how well, or not, they are likely to get along.

- Using a clean dry cloth stroke the new cat paying particular attention to the following areas: under the chin, the side of the face and along the side of the body.
- Take the cloth to your resident cat and allow him to sniff it. Then, but only if he is happy for you to do so, stroke him with the cloth as you did with the new cat.
- Take the cloth back again to the new cat and repeat the same actions. Do this a few times daily.

**Good signs:** Attempting to rub against the cloth after sniffing it or no reaction. Happy to be stroked with the cloth.

**Bad signs:** Drawing back away from the cloth, hissing or growling. Not happy to be stroked with it. Urine spraying after having sniffed the cloth.

## Room swapping

Once your new cat is settled and relaxed in his own room, try swapping areas; in other words, shut your resident cat in the new cat's room for a short time while the new cat has a chance to explore other rooms in the house. Do this over a few days.

## Introductions

By now both (all) cats should be aware that there is another cat in the house and as long as everyone appears to be reasonably relaxed it should then be time for gradual 'safe' introductions.

- Start by wedging the door of the new cat's 'safe' room open sufficiently so that the cats can see and sniff at each other but are not able to get to each other and are able to retreat back to their own safe territory.
- Playing games, e.g. with wand-type toys and giving a few tasty food treats, can be an effective way for them to make good associations with each other.
- As long as the signs are good, repeat often and in other areas of the house.
- If the signs continue to be good, eventually allow them out together. Continue to play games and offer treats when they are together.

**Good signs:** Vertical raised tail. General relaxed body posture. Slow eye blink. Rolling. Interested in play.

**Bad signs:** Staring at the other cat. Ears flattened to the side or rotated backwards. Low body posture. More interest in the other cat than in play or treats. ‘Swishing’ tail. Growling. Hissing. Attempting to get away. Urine spraying after meeting the other cat.

## Keeping the Peace

After initial introductions, if all goes well, the cats may not necessarily develop a close bonded relationship, where they seek out each other’s company and sleep wrapped around each other, but more commonly they may have a relationship where they are tolerant of each other and can live together with minimum stress or conflict. The following advice can help to support and maintain this relationship:

- Ensure that the new cat still has access to his safe room and continues to be fed and have access to all other resources in the safe room for as long as necessary.
- Make sure that there are always lots of easily accessible hiding places or high places around the house that the cats can retreat to if feeling threatened.
- Ensure that there are always adequate resources for all the cats in the household.
  - Feed the cats in separate areas and supply additional food dishes in other areas.
  - Provide extra water dishes in areas away from food.
  - Cats can be reluctant to share litter trays and many prefer one area to urinate and another to defecate. The general rule regarding the number of litter trays to provide is one per cat plus one extra. The litter trays need to be located some distance away from each other. Two or more trays placed side by side will be regarded by the cats as one litter location.
  - Ensure that they all have access to plenty of warm and comfortable resting places so that they are not forced to share sleeping areas, which might be stressful for them, unless they are closely bonded.
  - Ensure that they have plenty to do to keep them entertained and allowed to engage in normal feline behaviour. For example: interactive games, such as wand toys, and things to chase, bat and grab; food foraging toys, such as food balls and, if possible, puzzle feeders; and outdoor access (see also Appendices 1 and 2).

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