



We have put together some suggestions that will help settle your new feline companion into your lives.

The first few Days – Set up for Success!

Congratulations! You have just adopted a new cat into your family, and you will need to be a Guardian Angel for her. She will rely on you to provide all the necessities for a healthy, contented life. We hope this pet will become a much-loved and valued part of your family for many years to come.

Bringing a cat into a new situation requires special attention and some patience. Please read the following information, regardless of the age of the cat.

To understand how scary this experience is for your new pet, consider it from her point of view. Prior to a car trip in a carry box, she has spent some time in the RSPCA Shelter and may be feeling distressed and unsettled by this new phase of her life. Remember that Shelter cats have just experienced a very difficult time as they have lost their previous home and routine. Giving her the space and time she needs to get used to her new surroundings is the kindest thing you can do.

Coming home

It is best to let her settle in a quiet room to begin with. (Laundries are not ideal, as they are often high-traffic, noisy areas, where laundry appliances suddenly burst into life. They also provide potentially dangerous hiding places for cats, as well as an easy escape when someone forgets to close the back door.) Provide a litter tray, water, and some food to help her feel at home (make sure the eating area is on the opposite side of the room to the toileting facilities). After eating, cats usually have a grooming session, and this may help to calm her.

Leave your new cat in the room while you begin the bonding process. Some cats will want to hide initially, so you should provide a box or a cat bed which allows puss to feel invisible until she is confident enough to emerge and explore.

The New Family

Each person in the household should pay frequent visits to the room, bearing little gifts such as tasty food treats or a new toy. Sit on the floor and place the treats near you or wave the toy around. Wait for the cat to come to you – do not grab or attempt to hold her. Talk to her a lot – a cheerful, high pitched but quiet voice will help to reassure.

Don't stare at her, but if you do get eye contact, blink slowly – the cat will see this as non-threatening, and will likely respond in the same way. When a cat blinks and momentarily shuts its eyes, it is saying "I feel safe and I trust you" and is sometimes known as a "cat kiss".

If puss comes to you, stroke her gently under the chin. Every cat is different, and while some will be happily curl up on your lap immediately, others may watch you from a distance. Let your cat set the pace. It may take just a few hours, some days, or even weeks before you feel you have really bonded.

Once your new cat is coming towards you, tail held high and perhaps waving or with a 'hook' on the end, you are ready to start showing her the rest of the house. Make sure all escape routes (windows, doors, cat flaps) are closed before taking the next step. If she is showing signs of stress (puffed up tail, dilated pupils), return her to the room and continue the settling in process. You might like to just leave the door ajar and let her start coming out when she feels confident enough, whilst still having a safe have to return to any time she feels threatened.

For new kittens

Follow the same settling in process as with an adult cat, but remember you have a new baby in the house.

She will need to be fed more often (3-4 times a day), and may be easily confused about toileting in this big new world. Small rooms such as a bathroom can be good, but tiled floors are cold, so put an old rug or some newspaper on the floor. Also, make sure the toilet lid is closed at all times to prevent drowning.

Kittens need a lot of sleep, but when they are awake, they will want to play and explore. The kitten may not have learnt about heights, and while they often think they are famous mountain climbers, getting back down from a

chair is a greater challenge than getting up, and kittens will need some help to avoid injuries.

Supervise exploring expeditions closely. Fragile little bones can be easily damaged.

Introducing your new cat to the resident feline

It would be nice to think that all cats are going to immediately like each other, but that rarely happens. Exercising caution during the introduction period will increase the likelihood of them living in harmony, eventually.

So what is the best way to introduce a new cat to the resident cat? Carefully, and with patience! We should not be surprised that the resident cat does not immediately want to welcome the intruder into her domain, share her food bowl and toilet, and offer up her favourite chair.

Initially, keeping the cats in separate areas allows them to exchange scents without the danger of confrontation, and it will also give them both time to calm.

Try the following:

- Initially put the new cat into a room, provide her with a box or a safe hiding place, food, water and a litter tray (make sure the cat's dining area is not near its toilet!)
- Over the next few days, move both cats from room to room. This will allow them to check out the smells of the other cat in each room
- In her book, 'Cat vs. Cat', Pam Johnson-Bennett suggests using a "sock exchange". This involves placing a sock on your hand, gently rubbing along the cheeks to collect facial pheromones from one cat, then leaving that particular sock with the other cat/s, and vice versa.
- Allow one cat to be outside the door of the other cat's room. Pat, play and feed with both cats in that situation.
- Once things appear to be calming, the next step could be with the new cat safely contained in a carrier. Allow both cats to see each other, but not necessarily at eye level (you might sit the carrier up on a table or a chair). You should make these meetings brief, and end them before either cat starts to get upset. Try to get a few minutes of controlled exposure, several times a day.
- If you are able to have two carry boxes, put a cat in each carrier and sit them at opposite ends of the room, dropping in tasty treats. Alternate the boxes each time you go through the exercise – this will also help them get used to each other's scent. Repeat the exercise

several times a day, and gradually move the carriers closer together as you feel appropriate.

- During these short introductions, watch the body language of both cats. Are they showing signs of relaxing, or are they tense and alert? Never admonish any shows of aggression – this will only make the situation worse.
- As you see the cats becoming calmer, you can start leaving them in a room together, with one or both cats in carry boxes.
- Giving some tasty treats (cooked chicken, mild cheese) will also help the cats form pleasant associations about each other – i.e. ‘having the other cat around means I get rewards’.
- Once you have decided that the cats appear settled enough to let them have some freedom, you should watch closely for signs of aggression. When one cat runs, the other is likely to chase, and the precedent for future meetings has been set.
- Remember - slowly and calmly, and your cats should be able to share the same house without altercations. They may never become bosom buddies, and toleration point might be the best you can hope for. Some cats, however, will welcome another cat into the household and within a short period, they will be playing together and grooming each other. Let the cats set the pace, and be guided by their reactions.
- Introducing a kitten to an adult cat should follow the same procedures, but adult cats will generally accept a kitten much more readily, and the process should be able to be shortened. Care must be taken, however, to prevent injuries occurring to the kitten if the adult cat takes offence, so it is important that they are supervised until you are sure the situation is safe.

Meeting Fido, the family dog

Even if your dog has lived with a cat before, care will need to be taken when introducing a new cat, who – remember – will still be in a high state of arousal. Patience, vigilance and training are required to help settle both parties, and it may take a number of weeks for the dog and cat to become used to each other.

Take the following steps:

- You will need to give your new cat a room of her own while she settles. Your dog will immediately be aware through his keen sense of smell that there is a cat in the house. Keep them separated for a few days. You might even try the sock exchange (as when introducing two cats) on each of the pets and taking it to (and leaving it with) the

other to allow them to have a really good sniff. Move the cat from room to room, and allow the dog to check out the vacated area.

- During the early days, work on your training exercises with your dog, such as sit, down and stay, so that you have some basic control. If the cat is nervous, a Feliway diffuser may also help to relax her.
- When you first allow the dog and cat to meet, do so in a quiet part of the day (e.g. not when you have just arrived home), such as a lull period when both the dog and the cat are more likely to lie around and not be full of energy. You may wish to take the dog for a walk, or play an energetic game for 30 minutes or so prior to the meeting.
- Bring the dog into the house on lead and settle it down on its mat with something really yummy, such as a pig's ear or beef chew. After several minutes when the dog is calm and engrossed in his treat, and making sure he is securely tethered, bring the cat (in her carry box) into the same room. Place the carry box up on a table or chair to prevent the cat feeling too vulnerable. Use calm, soft, happy voices as the cat arrives, and give the dog plenty of attention and praise.
- Have some small, extra tasty treats (such as liver treats or chicken) to distract the dog should it react negatively or show any aggression, such as growling at the cat. Do not correct or admonish the dog for any negative reaction, as he will associate the punishment with the appearance of the cat. Be careful not to praise the dog if he is growling.
- If the encounter does not go well, spend a few more days with the pets in separate areas of the house.
- If you have more than one dog, it might be best to let them meet puss individually, as there is likely to be great excitement, and the cat may feel very intimidated by the sudden appearance of two or more dogs.
- Never leave the pets unsupervised for an instant. It is critical in these early stages that the dog does not get a chance to learn that it can be fun to harass the cat. As the introductions go well, allow them more supervised time together. Always ensure that when either of them is in the room, there is something better or more interesting, such as treats/chews/toys, and attention for each of them.
- As well as providing hiding places for the cat, baby gates on doorways may help in managing/supervising the pets as they learn to live together. These will also prove useful for keeping the dog out of the cat's food bowl and litter tray.

Take things slowly, in a calm and controlled manner, letting them learn to live together at their own pace. Keep in mind that they may never be buddies, and they may well live happily in the same household, simply by ignoring each other!

Don't leave the door open!

Once your new cat appears settled enough to have access to the rest of the house, the entire family will need to be very aware of escape routes. Until the new pet has accepted that this is her home you need to ensure that she does not get out of the house, unattended. Make sure all windows, doors and cat flaps are firmly shut. Children often need to be reminded of this, as they may not understand that once a cat is outside in unfamiliar territory, she is likely to take fright and disappear.

If your cat is going to have access outdoors, wait until you feel she is readily responding to your voice. Then you can start with short excursions into the garden. The back yard is best, as it will generally be further away from road noises. Leave the door open so that she can get back into the house easily if she is startled by something, and allow her to start exploring at her own pace. Talk to her constantly using a calm, soft voice, to remind her that you are still close by. Again, short, controlled exposure is best.

Gradually, over a number of days, you should be able to start taking her into the garden for longer periods of time, and then short unsupervised forays.

Let your neighbours know that you have a new pet, so that they will recognise her if she wanders onto their property.

Kids and Cats

Studies have shown that children who grow up with pets are more likely to become responsible, caring adults. The bond formed between a child and their pet can be very special, and should be encouraged. Children will learn about caring for others, the responsibilities involved in having a pet in the household, the essentials of good animal welfare, and the unconditional love that a pet will give. As animals do not live as long as humans, children will also learn about how bodies and needs change during the ageing process, and in the end, important life lessons about death and grieving.

Bringing a cat or a kitten into the household is likely to be a very exciting event for the whole family, and children may find it difficult to control their exuberance. Parents need to make an effort to keep the settling in period as low-key as possible.



for all creatures **great & small**

Very young children have a tendency to run straight to a cat, try to pick it up and hold it. Toddlers will often grab an animal by handfuls of hair. This can be both painful and frightening for the cat, and the only way it can communicate the fear it feels (if it is unable to escape) is by scratching or biting. This undesirable situation can be avoided by ensuring that the children sit back and allow the cat to come to them (always closely supervised), on her own terms and in her own time. If the cat is then stroked gently, and perhaps given little tasty treats by the child (small pieces of mild cheese dropped on the floor near the child may help), she will develop a pleasant association with children. Keep voices and movements quiet and calm.

If you are bringing a very young kitten into the household, extra care will need to be taken. Small kittens are physically fragile and easily injured (sometimes killed) by children running and falling on them or dropping them when they struggle to get away. Very young children may also squeeze a struggling kitten tightly. Kittens need very consistent, gentle handling to prevent the development of serious behaviour problems as they mature. Children must be taught that they should not force the kitten to be held, as it will grow and quickly learn to avoid contact with the kids.

With patience, kindness and diligent supervision, the bond will grow and form a very important part of the young person's life.

For further information or advice, please contact RSPCA ACT on 02 62878100.