

BRIDGEWATER VETERINARY HOSPITAL

INTRODUCING CATS

Adding another cat to a household can be a smooth transition or one fraught with problems. The worst outcome may include serious overt aggression between the cats and/or elimination problems. While it may be impossible to prevent all problems, certain introduction techniques may facilitate the process of integration.

- A transition room should be created for the new cat. This transition room will house the new cat as it is being gradually introduced into the family and should be a secure area. The door should latch securely and/or lock. Be sure to provide everything a cat may need including a feeding/watering site; a litter box; perches at different vertical heights, hiding spots, scratching posts/pads, toys, etc. Remove any items of value, any items that may be dangerous to the cat (e.g., plants, electric cords, strings), and any target items that may encourage inappropriate elimination (e.g., plush bath mats).
- About 2 weeks prior to introduction of the new cat, a pheromone diffuser, Feliway[®], should be placed in the home; one in the main area and one in the transition room.
- Make any necessary adjustments to the house prior to the arrival of the new cat. This may include adding cat perches/cat trees around the home, litter boxes, and feeding stations; closing off access to the transition room that will contain the new cat; adding bells to the collars of anticipated bully cats, etc.
- Identify favored activities/treats of the resident cats to use during introductions with the new cat.
- When the new cat arrives, it should be placed in the transition room.
- Place a dumbbell-type toy under the door that separates the new cat from the resident cats to encourage play at the barrier door; you can create a dumb-bell-type toy by tying two cat toys together with heavy string.
- Identify a common rag/towel/glove with which to pet each cat every day to facilitate scent transfer. Concentrate on wiping the towel against the cheek area and the base of the tail.
- If there is overt persistent aggression at the barrier door, a neutral zone will have to be created by closing another door.
- Identify favored activities/treats for the new cat.
- When the new cat appears comfortably settled in the transition room, start to rotate segregation locations. If the new cat is particularly fearful, you may need to retain its ability to access its transition room as it explores the rest of the house. In this case, the resident cats will need to be contained elsewhere.
- The next step is to progress to short (less than 5 minute) visual introductions. Cats are contained in some manner (in crates, on harnesses/leashes, behind doors with windows) so they can't make physical contact but they can see each other. Try to engage cats in a favored activity in their respective locations during these visual opportunities. Perform these two to three times daily until all cats appear relaxed and there is no aggressive posturing.
- The cats then should be allowed supervised physical contact; owners should have remote devices (water squirt bottles, canned fog horns, large blankets to cover the cats with) ready to interrupt any escalation in aggression, if it occurs. Owners should NEVER handle aggressively aroused cats, because cats redirect their aggression readily to the closest target.
- With success, interaction periods can gradually increase in duration and human supervision can gradually decrease until the cats are living in harmony.

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