INTRODUCING YOUR NEW CAT TO YOUR EXISTING FELINE FAMILY

Lifelong bonds take time to form, and feline friendships are no exception. Here's what to expect:

- It may take weeks or longer for them to get used to each other
- Some cats may not get along, and that's okay, some cats do not like sharing their space
- Many cats find change stressful, it is important to introduce them slowly and step by step
- Be there to support and guide your cats and watch them closely so you can step in if needed to keep everyone safe

Understanding Your Cat: Happy vs Upset

Understanding your cat's body language can help you see how they are coping with changes at home:

- **Signs a cat is upset include:** Hissing, growling, swatting, hiding, ears flattened, tail puffed up, refusing to eat or avoiding others.
- **Signs of a happy cat include:** relaxed body, slow blinking, purring or kneading, eating, playing and exploring normally.

Before introducing your cats, set your new cat up in a separate space. Make sure all cats have their basic needs met, such as food, water, litter trays, scratching posts, cosy hiding spots, and opportunities to climb and play. Providing enrichment like toys and familiar smells helps them feel comfortable. Once all cats are settled and relaxed in their own spaces, you can begin a slow, step-by-step introduction process.

This project has been assisted by the NSW Government through its Environmental Trust.

RSPCA New South Wales

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1: Scent swapping

Let your cats get used to each other's scent before they meet. Swap bedding or use a cloth to gently collect each cat's scent (from their face) and place it in a neutral area for the other to explore.

If they seem upset by the scent (e.g., avoiding or even hissing at it) slow down, maybe try again in a few days. Once both are comfortable, return the bedding so their scents mix and become familiar.

2: Additional Resources

Provide plenty of resources around the home, especially in narrow areas such as hallways. Add things like scratching posts, tunnels, shelves and raised resting spots to allow the cats to easily avoid one another in passing and reduce the chance of conflict. Make sure each cat has their own access to essentials by spreading out litter boxes, food, water, and toys. Always feed cats separately, even cats that get along prefer to eat on their own.

These environmental adjustments promote safe avoidance and help keep interactions calm.

3: Supervised visual contact

Start with short, supervised visual sessions (2-3 minutes) behind a barrier such as a floor to ceiling pet gate; let the cats go about their own activities, glimpsing or sniffing one another occasionally, and gradually increase the time as they remain comfortable. Give each cat something enjoyable to do like play or a puzzle feeder, placed a little away from the barrier so they focus on the activity instead of each other.

4: Supervised time together

Start with short sessions without the barrier, a few minutes at a time, then gradually increase the time over many sessions. Encourage each cat to engage in their own activity (play, puzzle feeders, or resting spots), and allow them to approach each other if they choose.

Always have a sheet or towel ready to hold up between the cats to stop them seeing one another if you see either cat is not happy. Never attempt to touch a cat when they are stressed as you might get injured.

If either cat becomes upset, reinstall the barrier and return to Step 2.

5: Free access without supervision

If supervised time together goes well, start with short periods unsupervised. Let your cats spend more and more time together unsupervised but make sure they always have access to their own space and resources. Remember to make sure your cat has lots of time to play and spend with you, without other cats around!

Contact your veterinarian and a behaviour consultant if you observe any signs of tension in the home. The earlier you reach out, the better!

Visit our website for more information, encouragement, inspiration, and to sign up to our community of cat lovers keeping their cats safe at home.

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