

Introducing a New Cat to an Existing Cat



Should I introduce my foster cat to my existing cat(s)?

In some cases, it is not necessary to introduce your foster cat to your existing cat at all but particularly for long-term foster placements, it can be more practical. It can also be helpful when trying to rehome your foster cat to know if he/she gets along with an existing cat.

If your foster cat is coming directly from a pound or other environment where there may be a high prevalence of infectious disease, it's important not to introduce a foster cat to your existing cat(s) for the first 14 days. This is to allow for an initial quarantine period in case the foster cat is incubating a disease but not yet showing clinical signs of it.

If either cat has a disease like [FIV](#) or previously had [cat flu](#), there's a chance that it could be spread between the cats. FIV will generally only spread through deep bite wounds from vicious fighting so it is very unlikely to spread if both cats are desexed and they're introduced slowly and properly.

Take it slow!

The most important thing about introducing cats is to take it slow! Do not put the new cat right next to the existing cat immediately to 'see if they get along'. Some cats cope with change quicker than others, and if you push them too far too quickly, it could set both of them back, decreasing the chance that they'll eventually get along.

Preparing & bringing the new cat home

Before you even bring the new cat home, prepare him a room of his own with his own bedding, food bowls and litter tray. A bedroom, laundry or bathroom is suitable, but it must have a closable door. It is very important to make sure you do not change your existing cat's feeding and sleeping arrangements once the new cat arrives, so giving the new cat his own room for a few days will minimize any disruption to your old cat's routine.

When the time comes to bring your new cat into the home, bring him straight to his 'room', open the cat carrier door and allow him to explore his new surroundings. He may hide at first or seem nervous - this is perfectly normal. Do not force him to come out of his hiding spot or to interact and play if he does not want to. Just shut the door and give him some space and quiet time in the room alone to get used to his new home. Please also read the relevant sections of "Fostering cats & kittens" in the [Foster Care Manual](#) for more tips.

Step 1 - Investigating new smells

After a few days or so (depending on how your existing and new cat are coping and if they need to be quarantined for 14 days), take a blanket or toy with your new cat's smell on it and place it in the main living area of your existing cat. Do the same again but taking something with your existing cat's smell and placing it in your new cat's room. Monitor each cat's reaction to the item.

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A few days later, have the two cats on either side of a door eating their favourite food. It means that they are building a positive association with the other cat by being able to smell and hear the cat while eating something great! How far from the door itself will be determined based on the reactivity level of each cat - ensure the bowls are kept at each cat's comfort zone. Each session you should be able to gradually move the bowls closer and closer to the door. You can also play with each cat on either side of the door with toys to make it more fun.

The next step is to open the door just enough to allow the animals to see each other and repeat the feeding process. You may need to do this over a few weeks, depending on each animal's reaction.

Step 2 - Time to explore

When the cats are comfortable eating in front of each other as per above, move onto this step. Confine your existing cat to the new cat's room and let your new cat out to explore the rest of the house (ensure they don't directly meet during this process). This can initially be done for sessions lasting 15 minutes and it can be increased gradually. Allow each of them time to explore the other's living areas and get used to one another's smells. Repeat this over a few days before allowing them to meet face-to-face.

Step 3 - At last we meet!

Ensure you have one person with each cat for this step. Have the two cats once again eating on either side of the semi-open door - with a much larger distance between them this time. While they are eating, and as long as they are only showing positive reactions towards each other, open the door completely. If you are worried one cat may charge at the other, place a baby gate in the doorway as this will allow the cats to see each other but adds extra precaution just in case. Always be ready to close the door in case the worst happens.

There will probably be some stand-offs and it may take quite some time for them to become 'friends' (if ever). Continue short sessions of this over a period of time until you feel comfortable with both cats roaming the house together.

If your cat is toy-orientated, ensure you have fun toys on hand as a 'positive distraction' once they have finished their food so that the two cats aren't so fixated on each other.

Keep the new cat's room set-up as it has been for a few more days to give him a place to escape to if he is getting bullied by the existing cat. There is no need to continue to lock him away unless you feel that you can't trust the two cats together without your supervision. In this case, don't leave them alone in the same room together until you feel comfortable that they won't fight. When you do feel at ease, move your new cat's food bowls, litter tray, bedding etc out of his room and into another area if you prefer.

Remember to give your existing cat some extra time, attention and treats to avoid excessive jealousy.

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It takes time

- DO NOT force the two cats to come together and 'make friends'. Allow them the time to make up their own minds about each other and accept that some cats will eventually become friends, but some may not.
- It can take days, weeks or months for cats to learn to get along with each other.
- Cats living in multi-cat households MUST each have their own space in which to escape and spend time apart from one another if they so wish. Each cat should also be provided with his own litter tray and food bowls, separate from the other cats'.
- Cats are not humans and they are not dogs. They are generally good at tolerating others in their environment that they don't particularly like. As long as you provide each of your cats with their own space (as described above) and don't place unrealistic 'human' expectations on them (i.e. that they have to be best friends otherwise it's not going to work), they will adapt to their new situation eventually and settle down.

How do I know if one of the cats is not happy?

Sometimes there are obvious signs of a cat not enjoying the company of another cat (eg. fighting, growling, hissing etc) but there are also signs that might not be as obvious. If one of the cats suddenly goes to the toilet outside the litter tray, this could be his way of telling you he isn't happy. Hiding more often than normal or not eating could also be the cats way of saying he isn't comfortable.

When following the steps above, if either cat is displaying signs of not being happy, go back a step and take it slower.

Modified from a handout provided by AWL Queensland