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## Introducing a New Cat to Existing Cats

Written by: Sam Kabbel, CPDT-KA

Cats vary widely in accepting other cats into their household. Some cats are extremely social, gladly accepting their new roommates while others prefer to be the reigning king or queen of the cat household. Of course, finding the right blend of personalities is always essential. Unfortunately, cats don't do as well as dogs at meeting and "interviewing" potential housemates! So what is a cat owner to do when wanting to integrate a new cat into the household?

First, before deciding to get another cat, you should ask yourself a few questions. Are you looking for a cat to be a companion to your existing cat? If so, does your cat really want a companion? Has your cat ever lived with another cat? If so, did the cats timeshare their existence or play together and mutually groom each other? If not, how has your cat reacted when he has seen other cats? While cats are definitely social animals, many can be perfectly happy living without other cats. This does not mean that they cannot enjoy sharing their home with another cat. In deciding to adopt another cat, you *and* your cat should both be looking for another companion. Be prepared for anything from close bonding to mutual avoidance or possibly even conflict between the cats. There are several specific steps you can take to ensure the most successful integration possible.

There are several goals in the process of integration. The first is to keep any negative reactions to a minimum. The second is to go exclusively at the cats' pace. The third is to be sure that the cats associate good things with each other's presence.

- Set up food, water and a litter box for the new cat in a separate room. The cats should not see each other when the new cat is first brought into the home. This adjustment is very stressful for both the new cat as well as the existing cat. They should only be permitted to hear and smell each other through the door.
- Be sure that the new cat has adjusted to the new room before progressing to the next step. This can take anywhere from a few hours to a few days depending on the cat's reaction.
- Swap the new cat and the resident cat. Put the resident cat in the new cat's room and allow the new cat to explore the rest of the house. This will help the cats to become familiar with each other's scent.
- Try to encourage the cats to play "footsy" under the door by passing a toy under the door for both to play with.
- Once the cats are playing "footsy" under the door or are curious of each other, prop the door open an inch or so and allow the cats to see each other, but not to gain access to each other.
- If the interactions are inquisitive and friendly, you can progress to the next step. Double stack baby gates in the doorway and allow the cats to see each other. Be sure to supervise the cats so no one climbs up and over the gate. You can feed each cat tasty food treats at this stage. The cats should learn that good things happen when they are together.
- Do not progress beyond this step if you observe hissing, growling, or hair bristling. Repeat the above steps more gradually if you notice any of these behaviors.

- Open the door without the gates up and allow the cats to have access to each other. Do this for very short sessions and keep things calm and positive, ensuring that good things happen when they are together.
- Should either of the cats hiss or growl, calmly distract the cats with a toy or a food treat. If this doesn't work or continues to occur frequently, repeat several previous steps and progress more slowly. Do not punish either cat for these behaviors. Punishment will make them more uncomfortable with each other.
- Do not allow the cats alone together until they have been friendly toward each other for approximately a week or neutral toward each other for several weeks.

Many cats can be successfully integrated with a slow, methodical introduction. By following this process, you will be reducing the stress associated with bringing a new cat into your household. If you are still having problems integrating cats after following this process, please contact us for further assistance.

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