

ADOPTING A CAT

Tips and Guidelines for a Successful Transition from Shelter or Previous Home to Forever Home

Congratulations! You have just adopted a cat or kitten from a previous home or a shelter. You are giving a cat another chance in a loving and forever home. This maybe your cat's third home so to help your new family member adjust quickly and with the least amount of stress, we suggest the following:

What will he need?

1. Select a small, quiet room such as a bathroom or bedroom. Make sure the room is well ventilated and warm, and keep the doors and windows closed.
2. Set up the room with food and water bowls, and a litter box. (Fill the litter box outside of the room or before you introduce your cat so he doesn't get scared by the noise.) Place the litter box away from his food and water. An open litter box is best (a closed one keeps the smells in which your cat will not like) and make sure that it is big enough for your cat. Clean out the box every day and wash it out with warm soapy water every week.
3. Find out what food your cat or kitten was eating in its previous home. Some shelters will give you a few tins of cat food that your cat will be used to eating. Keep your cat on this food which he is familiar with until he has adjusted to his new home. Then you can gradually change his food if you wish to over a period of about two weeks. Feed your cat a high quality food. Most cats like to be fed twice a day and you may want to leave some dried food down for him to graze on. Clean out the wet food bowls after every meal, the dried food bowls at least twice a week, and give fresh water daily.
4. Provide a cat bed or some cushions and warm blankets. Some shelters provide you with a blanket that has your cat's smell on it. Make sure to place this on his bed. It will help him to make the transition more quickly. You will also need to provide a place where he can hide. A card board box with holes cut in both sides and a blanket at the bottom makes a great hiding place. He will also need a scratching post and a few toys in the room.
5. Other items your cat will need is a brush and a collar with an I.D. tag. Your cat or kitten may have a collar with a bell on it when they leave a shelter. The bell is so you will be able to locate your cat whilst he is settling in. After this initial period of time it is recommended that you take bell off or use a new collar.

Getting to know your cat

1. Set the carrier with your cat in it down in a corner of the room, open it up and sit down quietly on the floor on the opposite side of the room, or leave the room completely.
2. Change is stressful and cats are very sensitive creatures. Therefore, it is most important that you allow your cat to adjust to his new home and family in his own time. Give your cat a few weeks to adjust before you invite friends and extended family to meet him.
3. Move very slowly and quietly around him especially for the first few days. Do not try to catch him or pick him up. You can use eye signals to communicate – blinking slowly, or a slow half-blink and then perhaps looking away. This will signal to your cat that you are not a threat. Look for him to blink back and you will start to build a bond of trust between you.

4. Offering your cat treats or some special food can also speed up the 'getting to know you' process. Place the treat in the middle of the room and let the cat go to the treat. Playing with a toy is also another good way to make friends with your cat.
5. Regularly spend time with your cat so he does not feel alone. If he is not immediately interacting with you, do not force it – he is getting used to your presence. If your cat is hiding or asleep do not interrupt him. He needs to have a place where he can feel safe. When your cat does begin to approach you, wait quietly until he comes to you. When you do begin to touch him do so slowly and gently with the back of your hand or fingers and then you can stroke him softly with your whole hand. Treat him with respect at all times and he will quickly learn to love and trust you.
6. After three days, or once your cat is comfortably walking around, expand his territory. For some cats it may take several weeks.

Signs of stress

It is important to make all changes with your cat slowly, especially changes to his environment. Watch for signs of stress and if you do see them, make certain they lessen over time. If stress is not slowly decreasing every day, you should seek the help of a behaviorist or your veterinarian.

Signs of stress include decreased appetite, decreased grooming, hiding, lack of interest in attention or affection, excessive vocalization and sleeping in unusual locations. A stressed cat may be quieter than usual and a highly stressed cat can behave aggressively or fearfully.

It is important to make sure that your cat eats regularly and sometimes an extremely stressed cat will stop eating altogether. Try a tastier food and mix it in with her regularly food. Baby food that does not contain onion or garlic can also encourage a cat to eat. If your cat does not eat for three days you should consult your veterinarian.

Introducing a new cat to a multi-cat household

Cats like people have different personalities and like us some get along and some don't. However, there are a few guidelines to increase your chances of creating a harmonious household.

To begin with it is best to select a cat that is different in age and sex to the resident cat(s) or the last one to come to the family. Cats who previously lived with another cat are more likely to get along with other cats than a cat that was an "only child". Think about the nature of your existing cats – are they playful or do they prefer to lie in the sun all day – and try to adopt a cat with a similar nature. A young kitten is probably not a good selection for an older or grumpy cat.

It is more important to give your resident feline family more love and affection than the new arrival in the beginning. They are the ones that will feel their space is being invaded and they will need the extra attention to prevent them from feeling jealous and insecure.

When the new arrival seems to be adjusting to you and their space you can begin to introduce them to your other cats by getting them used to the smell of each other. You can do this by rotating their bedding. After a few days you can begin to let them smell each other under the door.

Make sure that both spaces (the space for the new cat and the space for the other cats) have multiple hiding places. Large cardboard boxes with holes cut in two sides make great hiding places and the

second hole allows a cat to escape if cornered by another cat. Introduce the boxes before you introduce the cats so they have a chance to get accustomed to them.

Once they have had plenty of opportunity to adjust to each other's scent, you can begin to leave the door open. Observe the cats closely. If any cat shows signs of stress or aggression, separate them again and introduce them more slowly.

Begin again by allowing them to sniff each other through the door, then bring each cat into a large room on opposite sides. If you have a helper each person should play, pet and/or give food or treats to each of the cats. Over multiple sessions you can begin to bring the cats closer together.

If you use patience in the initial stages of the introduction process, most cats adjust to the new living arrangements relatively quickly. It may take time for them to become close, but they will be able to co-exist happily as long as each of them gets the love and attention from you that meets the very individual need of each kitty. If your cats still do not get along as evidenced by aggression or acute stress-related behaviors, you should seek the advice of your veterinarian or a behaviorist.

REMEMBER, IF FOR ANY REASON YOU WISH TO GIVE UP YOUR ADOPTED CAT AND YOU CANNOT FIND ANOTHER GOOD HOME, PLEASE SURRENDER HIM TO A NO-KILL SHELTER.