

### Questions to Ask

- Has the newcomer or resident cat been around cats in the past?
- Has the newcomer been socialized during the first few months of life?
- Does your resident cat sit in the window and howl when he sees other cats?
- If you have more than one cat already, do they get along or do they exhibit any type of behavior problems?

### The More the Merrier?

Cornell Feline Health Center  
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*Many cat lovers enjoy living with several feline friends. Here's how to make smooth introductions.*

Your resident cat seems lonely, and you want to adopt a cat companion for him. Or perhaps you volunteer at your local animal shelter and fell in love with the cat in cage C-12. It could be that an adorable stray kitten showed up on your doostep, and you decided to offer him a home - even though you have two cats already. No matter what the reason for adopting an additional kitten or cat, making certain the relationship works takes a bit of feline finesse.

Although we can't always choose the age of a cat when one crosses our path, selecting a kitten when we decide to adopt will increase the chances of successfully integrating a newcomer into the household. "Kittens are less threatening to adult cats," says Wayne Hunthausen, DVM, director of animal behavior consultations at the Westwood Animal Hospital in Kansas City, Kansas and author of Handbook of Behavior Problems of the Dog and Cat. "Kittens under the age of five months have a greater chance of being accepted."

Accepting other cats - whether by the resident or the newcomer - depends to a large degree on the cats. "Cats are different and have different personalities," says Dr. Hunthausen. "Some may take months to integrate while others can be integrated right away." Researching a potential newcomer's history whenever possible will help you choose the best cat to bring into your home.

### Steps to Success

When you bring a newcomer home, it's important to keep him separate. "How long depends on where the cat came from," says Dr. Hunthausen. Have the cat examined by a veterinarian, checked for parasites and tested for contagious diseases. Make sure the cat gets a clean bill of health before introducing it to resident cats. If the cat has a treatable condition, obtain medication from your veterinarian and follow his or her instructions.

"Make sure the new cat or kitten is physically doing well for a week before introducing him to any resident cats," says Dr. Hunthausen. Because it's possible to get negative test results for feline leukemia virus and feline immunodeficiency virus if the cat is tested shortly after exposure, it's best to keep him separate from other cats until he can be retested later. If the adoption is planned, Dr. Hunthausen



Making a slow and thoughtful introduction between the resident and new cat or kitten will help the likelihood of a peaceful union in the future.

advises spraying pheromones like Feliway™ into the environment for ten days prior to bringing the kitten into the house.

Pheromones are naturally deposited on surfaces when cats rub against them, and using a pheromone product can help make your resident cats feel more comfortable about the presence of a newcomer. You can also try ComfortZone with Feliway™ - it works like a plug-in air freshener by electronically dispersing the Feliway™ into the environment.

### **Signs That They're Not Ready**

Keep the kitten separate until all cats have become relaxed and calm. "Signs of stress or anxiety include hyper-vigilance, skittishness, not eating, and withdrawing," says Dr. Hunthausen. "If they display any behavior to suggest they are not relaxed, wait till they are calm to get them together."

Switch areas with the resident cats and the newcomer to allow them to smell each other without coming face-to-face. As an added safeguard - as well as a fun thing to do - Dr. Hunthausen recommends teaching the cats to come on command. "Use food rewards," he advises. Say 'come' and back away, showing the cat food. Continue the process until the cats learn to come for the food reward. "You can use the command to interrupt any behavior that indicates the cats are stressed when they meet," says Dr. Hunthausen.

Keep the door to the newcomer's room slightly open so the cats can see each other. "Feed them on either side of the door so they associate something pleasant with each other," says Dr. Hunthausen.

### **The Early Meetings**

Allow the cats to meet in the largest room of the house so they have plenty of room. Sit on a chair with the kitten and have someone bring in the resident cat to investigate. Use treats to make the experience positive. Don't hold them nose to nose. "Facilitate an introduction," says Dr. Hunthausen, "but don't force it." If you live alone, use a carrier or a crate to confine the newcomer while the resident cats check him out.

Keep the early meetings to 15 or 20 minutes, then gradually increase the time they spend together. "If the cats are relaxed, you can allow them to meet for as long as you want," says Dr. Hunthausen. "You may want to confine the cats unless they are supervised or allow them together when you are home, but keep them apart when you're gone." Whatever method you use, patience is key. If the introductions seem not to be working, start from square one again. If you feel you've given them enough time and they are still not mixing well, discuss drug therapy with your veterinarian or a veterinary behaviorist. "Drugs such as Prozac™ may help the cats to relax," says Dr. Hunthausen.

*By Karen Commings*