



Guide for Bonding with a Shy, Frightened, or Traumatized Cat

Think like a scared cat. Allow the cat to be scared. Reset to his/her needs.

What will you need?

- Patience

A lot of patience is required to socialize shy, frightened, or traumatized cats. Each cat will come around at their own pace regardless of their age – although generally the younger socialize the fastest. You have to follow the cat at their own pace and don't expect too much too soon.

- Routine

If you can, interact with the cat at the same time each day, so they begin to anticipate your visits. Cats feel more secure when they can predict their environment. They feel insecure & therefore are more likely to be aggressive when things happen unpredictably.

- Frequency

Short, frequent visits work best in the first few weeks. A five minute session twice a day will do wonders. However if the cat can see and hear humans most of the time, that is ideal. For example a cage in a living room of a home is better than a quiet bedroom where the cat is rarely exposed to humans. If the cat is in a quiet area, leave a talk radio station on and place T-shirts with your smell in the cage.

- Confinement

Confining the cat to a cage or small room with limited hiding spaces will greatly accelerate the taming process. Ideally the cat should be at waist level where he feels less threatened by your size. A small room can be equipped with a cat tree so the cat can get up off the ground. Block off hiding places like under a bed because if the cat can retreat fully you can't initiate interactions. The cat should feel secure, so provide a cardboard box on its side or a partially enclosed bed such as a kitty cube.

- Isolation

It is important to isolate the cat from other cats, because cats will often bond strongly with other felines, and the result is that they have no need for human comfort. If you can separate them for a few weeks they will still retain their fondness for other cats when re-introduced. It's important that the cat starts to see humans as the source of food, comfort and love.

A Step-by-Step Plan:

1. *Day 1:* Bringing Kitty Home

Once the cat is in your home, keep the cat in a very small area (such as a bathroom). Too large of an area will stress & frighten the cat. Make sure that this room is quiet & calm and that there are no other animals or small children in this room. First, only visit the cat to take care of his/her personal needs such as food, water, and the litter box. Food is a very big motivator for most animals so get the cat used to the fact that you are the one taking care of this need. While taking care of the cat, feel free to talk to him/her very slowly & softly, this will get them used to you & your voice. Always move slowly around the cat.

2. *Week 1:* Beginning to Build Trust

Once the cat seems comfortable with your presence, try sitting with him/her for a few hours a day. Don't try to touch the cat yet — just sit near & talk to them. Each time you visit, you can also try to sit closer & closer to the cat. Be sure to pay attention to signs of discomfort. Any time the cat gives you a signal to 'go away', do so. Never push. Let things go at the pace the cat chooses.

3. *Week 2-3:* Touching

Once the cat seems comfortable with you near, you can *try* to touch the cat. You may want to wear a long shirt or gloves just in case you get scratched or bitten. When you start, always move your hand slowly towards the cat & let the cat smell your hand before you touch him/her. If the cat seems calm enough, you can try to pet the cat gently. Again, don't push things. Start slow. Pet the cat for a minute or two on the first time. Work your way up to more time. At any point, if the cat seems to be angry or scared, stop. Remember, most cats strongly dislike their paws and backsides/tails to be touched so try to stay away from those areas at first.

If the cat is resisting touch, you can try a few tricks: try to give the cat a little treat on a spoon before touching to coax the cat into trusting you. You can also tie a sock or a piece of clothing of yours (with your smell on it) around a stick and 'pet' the cat with it from a

distance. This contact is a big step, so be patient.

Cats that are not ready to be touched: try using a feather wand (sold as cat toys) or a stick with a piece of soft flannel wrapped around the end to touch the cat first. You can use Feliway on the feathers or fabric to help soothe the cat further. First, slowly move the stick towards the back of the cat's neck. Gently start to stroke the back of the neck & head. Rub the top of their head, avoid ticklish areas such as the sides. Over a few days, move your hand down the stick each time you use it when the cat relaxes so eventually your hand is right beside the cat when you are rubbing gently. Finally, you can start touching the cat with your own hand. Distract the cat with a toy or food while you reach your hand around behind his/her head to touch. Do not reach towards the cat's face with your hand, try to sneak your hand around behind so they think it is still the stick. Rub the back of the neck & head — don't touch any other areas yet. Once the cat is appearing to enjoy this, you are well on your way!

4. *Week 4: Holding*

Once kitty can sustain long term contact & seems comfortable with your touch, you can try to hold them. You can start off by holding the cat for short periods of time & working your way up to longer 'hugs' & putting the cat on your lap. If he/she allows this, and seems comfortable with you & the room, you may want to then try to show the cat other parts of the house or introduce them to your other animals. You may also want to try to get the cat to play.

Tips:

- Speak and move slowly and calmly and avoid high-pitched sounds
- Do not make sustained direct eye contact, look down and to the side.
- Watch for body language signals & back off if the cat is warning you by growling, spitting or swishing their tail.
- Keep fingers and fist together when approaching the cat – spread fingers resemble unsheathed claws which is a sign of aggression to cats.
- Feeding treats can be a good way to some cats' hearts. Others may become aggressive and try to "scare" the food out of you by lunging or spitting. In that case don't use treats, they don't work well for every cat! You can start by placing treats such as kibble, cooked deli meat, or small chunks of tuna at the front of the cage, Once the cat is comfortable eating with you watching, try to get kitty to eat while your hand remains nearby. Try rubbing kitty with the

stick while they eat the treat, and if they accept that, rubbing with your hand.

Introducing the Cat to the Household

You have bonded with the cat, and it is time to introduce the cat to other people and to the rest of your household.

If family members haven't previously been involved, get them to sit in the room talking to the cat and playing with him/her with string or wands. At first, kitty will refuse to play with strange people, but sooner or later, they will overcome the shyness. If you have other cats (or animals), they will have figured out that something is going on. They will have smelled the new cat's scent.

If your cat seems ready to integrate with the others in your household — at first, introduce them to one another's scents by exchanging articles of bedding. Allow the cats to spend time with one another's blankets to mix their scents. You may use a screen door or barrier to the new cat's room — the cats can watch each other and new kitty will learn from your pets' behavior. Make a point of interacting with your pets in view of the new cat, especially picking them up (if they enjoy this!), loving them, and putting them back down. Make sure the new cat sees how much your cats find this enjoyable (stick to interactions that your cat[s] enjoy otherwise new kitty will learn to be fearful of interactions).

When the new cat is relaxed, you can leave their room open. Make sure to first cat-proof the rest of the house so new kitty can't escape or get into problems. They may become overwhelmed at having access to the whole house once so you may want to decide which rooms the cat can visit & which ones will be kept closed. At first, new kitty will make forays out into the rest of the house to explore & find some hiding places. When they return to their own room or settles into another 'safe place', spend time with him/her — this reinforces the bonding & socialization work.

If new kitty hides around the house, always talk gently when you are near one of their hiding places. Don't force them out of these hiding places, though you can try luring kitty out with food or toys. As they explore and learn more & more of the house, you can start to leave other rooms open. Gradually, move the cat's litter, food, and water out of its original room to encourage the cat to spend time in the rest of the house. At first, they may hide from you in

the daytime, but the combination of night-time forays, moving the bowl, morning feeding, & continual reinforcement will eventually bring kitty out during the day.

Adoption

Congrats & thank you for all your hard work! We at Save the Meow Meows greatly appreciate you for your efforts and for taking a chance on a shy kitty. If you ultimately come to the conclusion that the kitty is not the right fit for your home, message us. We all want what is best for your family & for the kitty. If you have decide to adopt, let us know & we will finalize all the paperwork with you!

For any questions or updates, please reach out anytime! We would love to assist you & would love to see how the kitty is doing at home! (760)363-0720