



INTRODUCING CATS



Introducing cats is not a speedy process. In fact, it can take weeks or months before some cats will start to truly feel comfortable around each other, and other pairs of cats may never be able to coexist peacefully.

For the best chances of success, move through these steps at your cats' pace, without rushing either pet through the process. Moving too quickly through these steps can backfire, stressing your cats and possibly requiring you to begin the process all over again from the start.

1. Begin by completely separating your cats.

Give new kitty their own room with all the essential supplies. Keep the door closed so your other cat can't enter, and be careful when opening the door to prevent unexpected encounters. This stage is all about letting both cats establish a base level of comfort before moving on to more direct interactions. Give your cats a day or two to get used to their new space before moving on to the next step.

2. Start a scent exchange.

Your cats will be able to smell each other through the door, and they'll pick up scents on you, too. Allow the cats to sniff your hands and clothing when you interact with them, so they get used to each other's smells.

You can also rub a towel or blanket all over one cat, then place it on the floor for the other to explore. Sprinkle favorite treats or catnip (if your cats like catnip) all over each towel and allow them to approach and sniff. These will help your cats form a positive association with each other's scent. Repeat this towel game daily.

3. Swap the cats' spaces.

Next, let the cats explore each other's spaces—while keeping them physically separated through a closed door. Watch each cat closely as they move around the other cat's territory. You can let the cats explore for a few hours or even an entire day.

Again, allow the two cats to sniff each other under the door, and monitor for signs that either cat is uncomfortable. Since there is a door between them, you will be listening for any unhappy vocalizations, such as growling and hissing. If you see or hear either cat show these signs of stress, go back to the previous step.

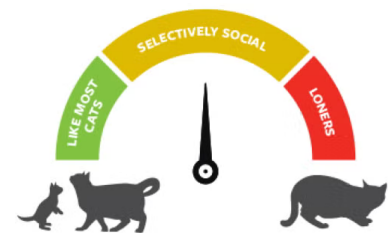
4. Encourage play near the door.

If you don't witness signs of upset, it's time to initiate contact—but don't open the door just yet. Use a string toy to encourage one cat to bat at it near the door. Use another string toy under the door to lure the other cat over. Allow the cats to bat at their respective strings, gradually bringing them closer together at the base of the door. Encourage the cats to play "patty cake" with each other's paws beneath the door, if space allows.

Look out for hissing, growling, yowling or hitting with force, all signs that one or both cats are agitated. If those signs occur, go back to the previous step.

Feline sociability spectrum

Love, hate and everything in between



5. Let the cats see each other.

If the string toy experiment is a success, it's time to let the cats see each other. Open the door an inch and allow the cats to peer through. You may hear a little hissing or growling when they first lay eyes on each other. Distract them from staring at each other by diverting their attention to a toy. If hissing or growling occurs despite your distractions, go back to the previous step.

If the cats do not display signs of agitation, offer them treats, praises and petting. Try to get them both to bat at a string toy. As long as they remain calm, allow the cats to sniff and see each other for short sessions, about 5-10 minutes 3-5 times throughout the day.

6. Let the cats interact through the gate.

When the cats are able to remain calm when they see each other through the door, it's time to open the door. If you haven't already put a pet gate in the doorway, now may be the time to set it up so the cats can see more of each other without any physical contact.

Start with short periods of interaction, gradually lengthening the time of each session. While they are interacting through the gate, look for soft eye contact, blinking and elevated tails—all signs that they are feeling friendly.

If both cats display these signs, you can use two string toys, one for each cat, and allow them to play on either side of the gate. Continue to watch for relaxed body language. If you see signs of fear or aggression, try to distract them with a toy; if that fails, go back to the previous step.

7. Let the cats meet face to face.

Remove the pet gate, and supervise closely. Distract the cats with a toy or a loud noise, like hand clapping, if they begin staring intently toward each other.

Let the cats interact in person for 5-10 minute sessions, 3-5 times each day. If one of the cats appears overwhelmed or fearful, shorten their periods of interaction. If aggression rears its ugly head, separate the cats and revert to the previous step.

Even if all goes well during these brief sessions, keep the cats living in separate areas for a few days and supervise all interactions. Gradually extend the length of each session in 15 minute increments. If both are behaving well, you can periodically leave the room, remembering to listen for aggressive signals.

8. Try letting the cats spend time together without you.

Without signs of fear or aggression, you can start leaving them home alone for short periods of time. You can use a pet camera to watch how the cats behave in your absence—but remember, if either cat has displayed any sort of stressed or aggressive behavior, it's best to keep them separate when you're not around.

If they appear to be getting along, on the other hand, gradually lengthen the amount of time the new kitty can be alone with your resident cat. Eventually, they'll be safe with each other 24/7.



The right environment—with multiple litter boxes, food and water bowls, scratching posts and other resources sprinkled throughout your home—will go a long way toward establishing multi-cat harmony.

Use cat trees and perches to add vertical space, and place resources in a way that one cat can't ambush another.

Since most cats dislike change, introductions should be controlled and gradual.