

# Introducing your new cat to your home (and resident animals)

Adjusting to a new home can be a tense and frightening experience for a cat. Your patience and understanding during his initial adjustment period can do a lot to help your new cat feel at home.

## The ride home

Riding in a car can be traumatic for cats. Your cat or kitten should be confined to a carrier during the ride home as well as during subsequent trips to the veterinarian. Do not let your new cat loose in a moving car or allow children to excite him. Do not leave the cat unattended in the car or stop to visit friends, shop, etc. Keep your cat in his carrier until you are safely inside your home.

## The new home

Consider your companion's past experiences. Your kitten may have been recently separated from his mother and litter mates. The kitten or cat has had to cope with the transition of a shelter and the stress of surgery. The adult cat may have been separated from a familiar home and forced to break a bond with human companions or other animals. Now he must adjust again to totally new surroundings.

Allow your cat several weeks to adapt. He needs to get used to you as the provider of love, shelter and food. Be sure that all windows and doors are kept closed and that all screens are secure. A scared cat can easily get out of a high open window.

It's not uncommon for cats to display behavior problems during the first days in a new home, but these usually disappear over time. New cats and kittens often bolt under furniture. Some may spend hours or even days hiding. Sit and talk quietly to the cat. If you must take the cat out of his hiding place, carry him gently to a quiet protected area where he will feel secure. Be sure food, water and litter box are nearby.

## The first day (through the first week)

Introduce your cat to his new home gradually, restricting him to one room at first. A master bathroom is often a good choice. Have the litter box ready when you remove the cat from the carrier. Show him the location of the litter box. Offer a bowl of water but do not provide food for an hour. If possible, bring the bed and toys from its previous home for scents that are familiar.

Your cat may be bewildered, fearful or curious. Do not overwhelm him with attention or demands. Leave the room and give the cat time alone to become familiar with the new surroundings. Return in about an hour.

Isolate other animals from your new cat during this time. Supervise children, advising them to always be gentle with the cat. It is not unusual for cats to leap on top of very high furniture in order to explore or to feel secure. Do not panic, shout, or run to the cat. When he is ready, he will come down alone.

Try to spend several hours with your new cat as he becomes accustomed to your home. Your sensitive handling of the initial transition can ease the trauma and set the stage for a happy settling-in.

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## Introducing the new cat to a resident cat

Unfortunately, there are no reliable guides for deciding the best matches among cats. Some cats are very social and enjoy living with other cats, while others prefer solitary lives. The individual personalities of the cats are more important than any other factor, such as sex, age or size.

### Step 1: Controlling first impressions

***The first impression a new cat makes when she meets your resident cat is critical. If two cats display aggression during their first meeting, this may set the mood for their future relationship.*** For this reason, it's best to separate your resident cat from your new cat when you first bring her home so that you can control their initial meeting.

The two cats should be able to smell and hear—but not see or touch—each other. Each cat should have her own food and water bowl, litter box, scratching post, bed, etc. Feed the cats near the door that separates them so they learn that coming together (even though they can't see each other) results in a pleasant experience. In addition to regular cat food, feed the cats extra-special treats near the door as well, like tiny pieces of tuna, salmon, cheese, chicken or liver.

After two to three days, switch the cats' locations so they can investigate each other's smell. This also allows the new cat to explore a different section of your home. Some behaviorists suggest rubbing the cats separately with the same towel to intermix their scents. First gently rub one cat with the towel. Then rub the other cat. After the towel carries both cats' scents, bring the towel back to the first cat and rub her with it again. After a few more days, play with each of the cats near the door. Encourage them to paw at toys under the door. Eventually the cats may play "paws" under the door with each other.

Other ways to do scent exchanges:

- Bring the empty cat carrier out into the living area for the other cat(s) to smell.
- Bring the resident cat's bed into the isolation room so the new kitty can get to know its scent.
- Bring the new cat's bed out for the resident cat(s) to smell.

### Step 2: Letting the cats see each other

After a week or so, assuming that you see no signs of aggression at the door (some hissing is expected), you can introduce the cats to each other. One method is to replace the door with a temporary screen door so that the cats can see each other. If you can't use a screen door, you can try using two baby gates positioned in the door jam, one above the other.

Ask a friend or family member to help you with the introduction. Have one cat and one person on each side of the door and start the introduction by setting each cat down a few feet away from the screen or gates. When the cats notice each other, say their names and toss treats to them, aiming the treats behind them. Over the next few days, continue to encourage feeding, eating treats and playing near the barrier, gradually offering the cats' meals, treats and toys closer to the screen.

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## Step 3: Letting the cats spend time together

The next stage is to permit the cats to spend time together without a barrier between them. Supervise these initial face-to-face interactions carefully.

It's good to bring the cats together when they are likely to be relatively calm, such as after a meal or strenuous play. Keep a squirt bottle handy in case the cats begin to fight. As the cats become more familiar with each other, allow them longer and longer periods of time together.

Let the cats become familiar with each other on their own terms. It will take time, so don't force it. Hissing is to be expected. Don't leave them alone together until long after the transition period and once you're convinced they're friends.

## Introducing the new cat to a resident dog

### Opposite sides of the door

Feed Rover and Kitty on opposite sides of a closed solid door (not glass, screen, or see-through) for 1 week. They will begin to associate each others' presence (smell, sounds) with a pleasurable experience – eating! If Rover starts whining/pawing/barking at the door, correct him with a stern but calm “No!” and move the food bowls farther away, keep him on a leash, and gradually move his bowl closer to the cat's door each feeding time. Eventually when they are eating calmly next to the door, expose them to each others' scent more strongly by rubbing them with a towel (or use their beds), and placing it down with the food bowl, for them to smell as they eat.

### Get Kitty used to a crate.

You want Kitty to get used to spending short periods of time in a big wire crate (ideal) or molded plastic pet carrier. Bigger is better, but one you can carry into another room in the home. Many cats already associate a regular plastic pet carrier with scary things (vet visits, being abandoned at a shelter) so it can be worth investing in or borrowing a big wire dog crate.

Lure Kitty into the crate with a cat treat trail. You may need to start feeding kitty right outside the crate, then each meal slowly move the food dish farther back. Shut the crate door for 5 minutes, then let her out. If Kitty is nervous in the crate, practice this a 2-3 times a day until she is relaxed.

### Dog on leash & harness, cat in crate

This step is to have them see each other with NO physical contact.

Put Rover away.

Put Kitty in the crate, carry crate into your biggest room, and put it as far away from the Rover-entering door as possible.

Put a leash and harness on Rover and bring him into the crate room.

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Have him “sit” and “stay” just inside the door, but where he can see Kitty. Do this for 5-10 minutes 3x a day for several days, or until both animals are able to be in the same room and remain calm, with no signs of aggression.

With each 5-minute training session, allow them to get a little closer together, with Rover still on leash and Kitty still in the crate. Then leave with lots of praise for everyone being so good! If Kitty becomes frightened, or Rover starts ignoring you, increase the distance between the animals and progress more slowly. Eventually, the animals should be brought close enough together to allow them to investigate each other visually and calmly. Then you can allow Rover to sniff at the kennel and Kitty, as long as he is being calm, and listens to you if you say “sit” or “come.”

Now increase the length of the sessions together. If Rover or Kitty is agitated in any way, you may have to spend as many days as necessary with the cat in the crate, dog on leash, until they are calm and relaxed. You may find distracting yourself (a book, a DVD) will relax you, and that will help them relax too!

Once they’ve sniffed each other through the crate with no issues, and you can spend a half-hour in the room with everyone relaxed right next to each other, you are ready for the next step.

## **Dog leashed, cat loose**

With Rover on leash in a down-stay at the far side of the room, have a helper open the door of the crate. Keep Rover focused on you with training commands and treats. If Kitty stays in the crate, tempt her out by tossing a treat just outside the crate door. If she won’t come out, leave the room with Rover, wait for Kitty walk out of the crate, and come back in with Rover. Kitty may run and hide – just focus on keeping Rover in his down-stay. If he reacts to the cat walking or running, you’ll need to do the 3 daily sessions like in the previous step, until he’s once again ignoring the cat while she is loose. NEVER allow Rover to “play” by chasing Kitty, ever. This is a game that can turn deadly in an instant. I recommend keeping Rover on leash (when not locked away separately) for the next 2 weeks, gradually increasing the amount of time they are spending together until...

## **Both loose together!**

It’s been 2 weeks with Rover hanging out and seeing Kitty run, jump, play and they’re now always acting relaxed, mostly ignoring each other. You can drop his leash – congratulations, you’ve successfully introduced your new cat to your dog!

However, when you are not home: keep them separated with a physical barrier (crate, door, etc) to be certain they will be safe, for at least an additional 1 month. With bigger or high prey-drive dog breeds, you may always want to keep them safely separated when you are not home

## **Other Notes:**

The cat should always have a safe retreat, either up high or in a room inaccessible to the dog. A cat tower is ideal for this.

During the period when the cat is in the “isolation period,” isolate your dog while the new cat walks around and investigates its new home.

Sources: <https://www.paws.org/library/cats/home-life/helping-your-cat-adjust/>  
<https://www.paws.org/library/cats/home-life/introducing-cat-to-cat/>  
<https://www.adoptapet.com/blog/6-steps-to-introduce-a-new-cat-to-your-dog/>