

Making Harmonious Cat to Cat Introductions

By Brenda Barnette, General Manager, LAAS

Two (or three) cats can be better than one! With two cats in your home, your family will be able to enjoy the true social nature of cats and their relationship with each other. Having a playmate provides companionship and active stimulation during your absence and keeps both cats more playful and youthful in their later years. How you prepare for the new cat's arrival and how you manage the transition is very important.

Cats, in general, are very cautious of new places and things. They don't like change in their lives, and it will take time – the amount will vary with each individual cat – for your new cat to adjust to unfamiliar surroundings. A kitten is usually easier to integrate into the household with a full-sized adult. Cats of opposite sexes usually get along better.

Here are a few tips to help provide a friendlier transition:

- Set the new cat up in a small "safe room," a bathroom with a tiled floor or a confined space he can call his own for a week or so. Get new food and water bowls, a litter box, scratching post/pad and bedding. Visit him frequently with interactive toys, special treats and lots of hands-on loving during the first week.
- Feed your resident cat and the newcomer on opposite sides of the door of the "safe room" so they can smell each other and associate the new cat smell with an enjoyable experience. Gradually move the food dishes closer to the door until they are eating calmly directly opposite each other.
- Switch scents by switching their beds between the new cat and the resident cat so they have a chance to become accustomed to each other's scent. Another option is to rub a small towel on each cat and place the towel from the opposite cat under the food dish of the other cat.
- Begin an exchange of living space once your new cat is settled in and eating regularly in the confined room. Let the new cat have some free time in the house while you confine the resident cat in the "safe room." This is another way the cats can experience each other's scents without meeting face-to-face. It also helps the new cat get comfortable with her new surroundings without experiencing the other cat.

- Securely prop the door open a crack so they can safely see each other for the first time when the cats seem to be relaxed with everything you have done so far. Place treats on each side of the door and connect two toys with several inches of string slipped under the door so they can try playing with each other.

- When the cats seem to be calm in each other's presence, it's time to open the "safe room" door and let her out for a few minutes. The length of time should be increased gradually. Always allow the new cat an escape path back to her "safe room", if needed.

This process may take a few weeks or a few months depending on the personalities and territorial needs of the cats. If from time to time your cats become hostile or fearful, return the newcomer to the "safe room," close the door and let them calm down. Back up one stage in this process and begin again. Minor setbacks don't ruin a growing friendship, but an aggressive encounter will be remembered a long time and should be avoided. The time you spend slowly orchestrating a proper introduction of your cats will eventually be rewarded with years of harmonious habitation and loving companionship.