



Jasper County Animal Rescue League and Humane Society  
5411 Liberty Avenue Newton, IA 50208  
641-792-5407, [www.jcarl.org](http://www.jcarl.org) jcarl@iowatelecom.net

## Introducing a New Cat to Your Resident Cat(s)

Having more than one cat in your household can sometimes be a bit tricky, but it can also be a bonus for yourself and your resident cats too. Cats are very territorial and need to be introduced to other animals very slowly in order to get used to scents before a face-to-face introduction is done.

### **Selecting the right cat:**

Consider the following factors when selecting a new cat:

- ◆ Age
- ◆ Background
- ◆ Personalities of the new cat and the resident cat(s)
- ◆ Energy levels of the new cat and the resident cat(s)
- ◆ Gender – are all of the cats spayed or neutered?

Cats can become very territorial, so make sure your home can accommodate multiple cats. More than one cat in a studio apartment is unwise, but more than one cat in a large apartment or home may work out. Make sure each cat has its own place to sleep or hang out, easy access to litter boxes and its own food bowls.

Preferably, the new cat should be younger than or very close in age to your resident cat(s). An older cat intimidate your current cat. Kittens younger than three months don't always have their social skills that are needed to defend themselves against older cats. They can be intimidated or abused by older cats.

A 'middle aged' cat between eight and ten years is more settled and may be less active. It is probably best if you don't get a very active cat or kitten that may antagonize the older cat.

Elderly cats over twelve years may have health problems. They may not tolerate a new cat no matter what age. Though this is not an impossible situation, consult with a veterinarian before you bring in a new kitten or cat.

Try to find out as much about the new cat's background as possible. Has this cat lived with other cats before? Did he get along well with them? Was he an indoor or outdoor cat? What was his previous home like? Were there children there? Has he exhibited any behavior problems in the past? If the cat is a stray from a shelter or the streets, obviously there will not be much information about the cat.

### **Bringing the new cat home.**

The best way to think of how introductions should proceed is to consider that the newcomer AND the resident pet must show signs that it is ready to move on to the next stage before doing so. Moving too fast in 'cat time' is by far the most common mistake adopters make; however, some cats go through the stages in a matter of days or even hours. For the most part, factors such as advanced age, limited socialization, or timid personality will increase the time the process will take. A young,

well socialized, and confident cat will progress through the stages quickly; however, the adopter must also consider their resident cat(s) and dog(s). All must be ready to move on to the next stage.

So how do you know if the cat is ready to move on to the next step? Body language and facial communication are the best ways to know (see the Cat Mood Score). A cat is only ready for the next step when they are displaying stress levels of a 3 or below. When you first introduce the newcomer face-to-face, they may elevate their stress behavior to a 4. This is perfectly normal, but should resolve in a short period of time. If the cat is displaying behavior that resembles a rating of 5 or 6, you have moved too fast for the cat.

### **Things to do:**

- Be patient. This seems to be the hardest thing for humans to do.
- Establish a routine. For existing pets, keep things as they were. For the newcomer, start things as you would like them to be – just be consistent.  
**\*\* Consistency + Routine = Predictability = Safety = Stress reducer \*\***
- Introduce pets slowly - one at a time. Don't make the newcomer meet everyone at once.
- Play lots of games with both the newcomer and the resident pets and children. It's not possible to be stressed and play games, so it is a great way to reduce the overall stress level in the household.
- Make sure all dog toys and food are up and out of the way for a while when the newcomer is first out and about. Cats are curious, and dogs may be protective about their belongings.
- Give the newcomer their own new litter box. But remember the litter box rule – one for each cat \*plus\* one (2 cats = 3 litter boxes). This assures they will always have access to one. The litter boxes should ideally be in different locations to prevent any guarding of space.

### **Things not to do:**

- Don't push or force introductions, or place a cat in a carrier and allow resident cats or dogs to come over to investigate. This can be terrifying as the cat is completely trapped and has no way to escape or hide.
- Avoid using catnip initially. Some cats get sleepy while others may engage in aggressive play.
- Never leave dogs and cats unsupervised until you are very sure how they are getting along – especially when there are food or toys involved.
- Do not hold cats during an introduction.
- If a cat's mood score elevates and it is agitated it is best not to pick it up or handle it for up to 72 hours to allow the cat to calm down.

**The bottom line:** It is not cruel to leave a cat in a bedroom by itself and it never hurts to take things slower if they are unsure. Better to have a good first meeting, then to spend twice as long mending fences.

### **Introduction Stages**

**Stage 1- Kitty's first hotel room.** The newcomer is in its own room with access to food, water, a litter box, toys, and something warm and cozy to sleep on. This room should be a place that the owner will not mind spending time with the cat (so optimally a comfortable dry place rather than the furnace room). Adopters should spend a minimum of 20 to 30 minutes twice a day playing, petting, or just getting acquainted with their new cat. Obviously more time is better, but sometimes not feasible. This room separation will allow the newcomer to meet with the rest of the human family gradually, and allow only non-visual meeting with the other household pets. They are meeting through smell-observation. Feeding the newcomer and resident pets near the door that separates them is a good way to create positive associations right off the bat. If there is too much hissing and growling, move the treat dishes farther from the door. There should be no hissing or growling by the end of this stage when either the newcomer or resident pets are by the door. If there is, they are not ready to move on.

Swapping out towels or bedding between the newcomer and existing pets is one way to help them 'virtually' meet. But this is not suggested for a few days. Let them just be separate for the first couple of days.

**Stage 2- Kitty's first tour.** The newcomer gets to be escorted about the house and permitted to explore without the other pets or very young children (under 7) present. Older children are fine, as they can be asked to allow the cat to explore on its own. Young children are often too excited by the new kitty and easily forget and chase the cat because they just want to hold or cuddle it. The resident cat(s) and dog(s) should be confined to another room (or in the case of dogs, another room or in their backyard). Allow the newcomer to investigate for several hours if possible. Again, playing games is a good way to check the stress level. You can't play and be stressed at the same time; on the same note, a stressed cat will not play.

**Stage 3- The newcomer gets to meet the residents** but at a distance. Dogs should always be placed on a lead, resident cats should be distracted in some way (interactive play or given some treats), kids should be sitting on the floor and not allowed to race to the cat, and newcomer cat should be allowed to come out on his own. A baby gate works well to confine how close things can get at this point. Too much space is scary to a cat. Neither resident nor newcomer cats should be held or confined. They need to be able to feel like they can avoid contact if they wish. Also, one animal at a time please! Choose the animal you think will be the least upsetting. In some cases that is the dog and other cases it is the cat; it depends on the pet and the newcomer.

**Stage 4- The newcomer gets to meet the residents, but closer in contact.** Again, dogs should still be on a lead, and residents cats can be occupied with toys or treats, kids should be sitting on the floor. Catnip is probably not a good idea at this point, as some cats react with aggressive or boisterous play, but fishing pole toys are great for this.

**Stage 5. Supervised contact.** At this point, the adopter should be seeing enough low stress level interactivity that they can allow everyone to simply interact – but not unsupervised. This is especially true when there are multiple pets, significant differences in ages, temperaments, and size, and when there are very young children (under 7) or dogs with high prey drives or known chasers.

If a fight breaks out – **do not try to pick up the cats.** The safest way is to use a heavy blanket or large thick towel to cover and remove one of the cats.

Signs of a big problem include litter box lapses, severe fighting, lethargy, depression and lack of appetite.