

Remember, successful introductions need time and patience. If you find that this process is too fast for you and your cats, slow it down or start over. Don't be discouraged if your cats do not become fast friends or take to grooming each other or sleeping together. Like human relationships, cat friendships can take time to develop. They may co-exist for years and suddenly, one day decide to cuddle up on your couch!

SIGNS OF AGGRESSION

Sometimes it can be hard to tell if cats are play-fighting or actually fighting. Even bonded cats can engage in activity where one is interested in play-fighting and the other responds with actual aggression. If you're not sure whether your cats are playing rough or lashing out, look for these signs of fear-induced aggression:

- flattened ears
- hissing
- dilated pupils
- loud yowling

WHEN TO SEPARATE YOUR CATS AND START OVER

If your cats are fighting regularly and putting each other at risk, you may need to separate them and restart the introduction process, with a few minor adjustments.

- Try dividing your home into two large areas instead of keeping one cat to a single safe room. The larger living space will be less stressful and make for an easier reintroduction.
- Try moving to the territory swap phase sooner in the process. Look for ways to do the territory swap safely, without having your cats face each other too soon.
- Explore your home from the cat's perspective to determine what modifications you can make to ease their conflict. Make sure each cat has a high perch, like cat shelves or a cat tree, and clear paths to allow the cats to navigate around each other through different parts of the home.

KEEP YOUR CATS INDOORS

Many of our rescue cats were discovered outside after having been abandoned or living the rough street life. These cats are ready to enjoy the rest of their lives in indoor comfort. Keeping your cat inside protects them from further dangers and trauma. Outdoor cats are subjected to the dangers of traffic, poisonous substances, injuries from other animals and cruelty from humans, and diseases. By allowing your adopted rescue cat to go outside, chances increase of them getting ill, attacked, or lost.

Action Volunteers for Animals (AVA) is an all-volunteer-run charitable animal rescue dedicated to helping stray and feral animals live healthy and happy lives.

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Introducing the New Cat to the Resident Cat



The information provided here is designed to help you prepare and welcome your new feline companion into your home and life

Congratulations on adopting a rescue cat!

In many multi-cat households, the way a new cat gets introduced to the current household cat can determine how well all the kitties will get along.

Introducing new cats to each other can be a challenge, even if your cats are friendly and have been around other cats in the past. Cats have firmly established territories around your home, which will need to be redefined once a new cat moves in. Simply setting the new cat down in the living room can cause panic and aggression, triggering a fight-or-flight response in both cats. When cats feel threatened, they adopt a defensive body posture and growl or hiss at each other until one backs down and runs away or one of them gets close enough to start a fight.

Using a sense-by-sense introduction method — the procedure of introducing your cats to each other one sense at a time — can reduce such stressful situations.

Before attempting any introductions, give your new cat a minimum of a week to ten days in a safe room, separated from your family cat(s), to ease them into their new surroundings and give them the chance to adjust. During this time, take the new cat to your veterinarian for a thorough examination, and make sure the current cat(s) have had their yearly examination and are up-to-date on their vaccines.

When you're ready to start introductions between cats, ***don't rush!*** As humans, we're usually in a hurry to zip through things; however, taking your time will prove beneficial for the cats and your family. This method can take a few days or several months depending on the age and personality of each cat. Even after you have completed the process, your cats may never be "best buddies", but they can learn to tolerate each other and co-exist.

STEPS TO INTRODUCING YOUR CATS

Using this method, you'll be introducing your cats to each other one sense at a time — hearing, smell, sight, then touch. Follow these steps in sequence and repeat each step several times before moving on to the next one. Provide the cats with positive reinforcement using playtime and occasional treats. If one step does not go well, stop and go back to the beginning, start over and go slower. You may have to tweak each step to better suit you and your cats.

1. Establish the safe room. This process works best as long as the new cat has a safe room (also called sanctuary room) as recommended in AVA's **Preparing Your Home For a New Cat** guide. Keep the new cat isolated in the safe room for 7–10 days so your new cat can adjust to their new surroundings.

2. Give each cat quality play time, separately. Spend time with both cats, playing and doing what they like as often as possible. Your curious kitties will hear your interactions with the other one and may react vocally, depending on their mood.

3. Use food as a motivator. Feed both cats near the safe room door to help them develop a positive association with each other's scent. Each day, gradually move their food dishes from their original locations to the safe room door.

4. Start scent swapping with a Sock Exchange. Using a pair of clean socks, gently rub a clean sock along the sides of each cat's face and then leave the sock with the other cat to sniff. Reward the cat's sniffing by giving them a treat. Switch socks and repeat to increase the "group scent". The more they smell like each other, especially with those positive cheek pheromones, the less of a threat they will feel.

5. Switch rooms. Move the new cat to another room and allow the resident cat to come into the safe room. This allows the cats to experience each other's scent and gives the new cat a chance to explore more of the home.

6. Let them look, but not touch. Allow the cats to see each other — by bringing the new cat in their carrier into the living room or putting a temporary barrier up, such as a baby gate or screen door, in the safe room doorway. Repeat this step often, gradually extending their exposure time. If using a temporary barrier to the doorway, try feeding them a few feet apart so that they can continue to build a positive association.

7. Plan their first meeting. For this crucial step, make some preparations to ensure the meeting goes as smoothly as possible.

- Make sure both cats' nails are trimmed. Nail trimming can be a stressful event, so plan to do this well before their official introduction. Have a partner to help you with nail trimming, if possible.
- Use a neutral room in the house, keeping the safe room open for easy separation, if needed.
- Have treats and toys ready to play with each cat and to distract and redirect any unsuitable behaviour.
- Set aside time when you will not be distracted or disturbed.

Keep this initial meeting session short — 5–10 minutes. Repeat this step as often as possible, day after day, gradually extending their time together.

AFTER THE INTRODUCTIONS

- Keep the safe room available.
- After a few successful supervised interactions between the cats, try leaving them alone together for short amounts of time — 15–20 minutes to start. Go tackle some household chores and come back to check on your cats' progress. Repeat this process often, gradually extending the amount of time they're unsupervised.
- Go out for a 1–2 hours, leaving the cats free to roam the house unsupervised. Repeat this process and monitor their progress.
- Continue to separate the cats overnight and when you are absent all day. This way you get a good night's sleep and you keep the cats safe.
- Allow the cats to move freely when you are home for longer periods of time.
- Continue to build positive associations between cats through group play — using separate toys, but near each other — and group feeding to demonstrate that good things happen when this other cat is around!
- Continue building a group scent by alternately brushing one cat then the other in sequence to make them smell more like each other.
- Once you feel confident that the cats have adjusted to each other, you can then decide when to retire the safe room.
- Give your cats their own separate food dishes and litter boxes to minimize tension around meals and waste elimination. For your new cat, slowly move the safe room litter box to your designated litter box spot.