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INTRODUCING NEW CATS INTO THE HOUSEHOLD

One of the hardest behavior problems to deal with is inter-cat aggression. In order to try to avoid trouble, you should introduce a new cat into your household with care. The biggest mistake that people make is forcing cats on one another right off the bat. If you push a strange cat at your resident cat you are likely to get some kind of anxiety or aggressive response. That's the way that they are made. They usually don't like to meet new cats and play. They approach each other cautiously, establishing their social position with lots of behavior signals. If they don't take to each other, you can see a long lasting behavior pattern of intercat aggression develop. Intercat aggression may result in fighting, stalking, inappropriate litter pan behavior, and in general just making one cat's life miserable. The following suggestions may help avoid adjustment problems when you bring home your new pet.

The objective of the introduction is to create an environment that will be most likely to integrate the new cat without causing anxiety in the household. The behaviorists say that cats move "through clouds of smells". Smells are powerful communicators to the cat and one way that you can set the stage is to use Feliway diffusers in several places in the home during the introduction. Feliway is a product that has synthetic pheromones based on those that come from the glands in the muzzle that say "this is mine, I'm comfortable." You want the new cat to lose the scent of where it has been and pick up the scent of its new home before the resident cats get a chance to get a whiff of it. It will also help for you to take your clothes that you have worn and rub them over the new cat and the resident. Leave items with the smell of the home in the isolation room too.

Regardless of the age of the cat being introduced, isolation is the first step to introduction. The isolation should be as complete as possible. No sticking paws at each other under the door or hissing through the cracks. Ideally you want to keep the isolation up for 5-7 days. After a few days of confinement you will want to start having the cats switch places. During this time take care that you don't let them interact. One bad experience can make the whole process more difficult. Let the new cat explore the house while the resident cat or cats are confined to the isolation room. This will also help your new kitty get some confidence in the new space and pick up the scent in the home.

Next we want you to gradually introduce the kitties to each other while doing positive behavior modification to help defuse potential grumpy behavior they might develop because you're bringing in a stranger. We want to desensitize them to the other's presence. Distract if you see negative behaviors and constantly reward them when they tolerate each other. Have treats, laser pointers, or other toys ready to distract and reward the kitties when they first start to interact. Reward them when they see each

other or have any other interaction with out an aggressive flare. Distract them when you see any hint of anxious or aggressive signals. Don't punish. That won't work. We want to shift their reactions from "Oh look, there's a new cat. I need to go into defense mode" to "Oh look, there's a new cat. Where's my laser pointer?" Be aware of the signals your cats are sending out. Don't let anxiety escalate to aggression. When you see a posture or facial expression that says, "I'm annoyed," distract that cat by tossing a toy by them or getting that laser pointer out. Break the concentration and engage in another activity. Be consistent and be patient. This process may take days, weeks or months. You can't rush it. The time that you take now will pay off in a happy household later.

There are several techniques that you should use to ease this transition period once you are ready to let the kitties meet. One way is to use a screen door on the isolation room. You can buy a pre-hung screen from a hardware store and put 2 loops of string at the top. Put 2 nails in the top of the door jam and hang the door over them. That way you can come and go and it doesn't feel so confined. Cover the bottom $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ of the screen with cardboard so the kitties can't see each other. When you're ready to introduce them, move the cardboard so that only a few inches are available for the kitties to see each other. Don't encourage close contact at first. Have them see that small slice of cat from across the room. Use your treats, toys and attention to engage the kitties so that they get used to the presence of the other cat without an anxious or aggressive flare. As the days pass with little conflict, gradually pull back the cardboard so they can see more of each other. Gradually decrease the distance between the 2 cats and increase the time that they are exposed to each other. When you think they are able to tolerate each other without conflict let them be together in the house. Continue to watch for the need to distract or reward during that time as well.

Another way is to start the introduction by letting the cats see each other across as big a distance as you've got. You really need 2 people for this. Have one person handle a cat at one end of your largest room and another person with a cat at the other. Again, use your treats or play to distract the cats while they are allowed to eye each other. We want them to see each other and not have any aggressive behavior or posturing. If they do well for a short time at a great distance, the next day decrease the distance by a foot or two and increase the time they have to check each other out. The first day start 10 feet apart for 5 minutes, the next day 8 feet apart for 10 minutes and so forth. If they start sending anxious or aggressive signals, back off and start again.

If several days go by and you feel like they are tolerating each other, let them explore the room and find each other at their own speed. There will be some degree of posturing between them in order to figure out who's who. We want them to be able to be in the same room or on the same piece of furniture without posturing or fighting. Our realistic expectations are for them to tolerate each other. If we're lucky, it may turn out that they really like each other.

Some cats are not going to accept new cats into the household. Sometimes we can use medication to make them less anxious and relieve some of the problems. Sometimes we can advise other behavior modification techniques to take the stress off. If you feel like there are problems, don't wait too long to talk to us about it. The longer it goes on, the harder it is to get straightened out. Let us know if we can be of help.