



Taking Home your New Cat

Bringing a new cat into your home can be equal parts joyful and stressful – for both of you! Cats are creatures of habit and are much more sensitive to environment changes than their canine counterparts, so don't let the excitement of having a new companion overshadow the patience it will require to successfully settle your kitty into her new home.

Prior to bringing your new cat home, you should prepare a sanctuary room in which the kitty can reside during her transition to her new home. Use a spare bedroom or even the bathroom. The space should be small and should be fairly accessible for your visits. For instance, having a bed or couch in the room will give her a place to hide that will make it difficult for you to interact with her, so you want it to be a fairly open space.



The sanctuary room should include everything your cat will need – food, water, a litterbox, bedding, toys, a cat tree and/or scratching post. Since cats are fastidious, they do not like eating or sleeping near their elimination area, so be sure that the feeding and sleeping areas are as far away from the litterbox as space permits.

When you bring your new cat home, take her directly to the sanctuary room. She should not be free to explore the home or to meet any of other family pets. That will come with time, but don't overwhelm her in these early hours. Open the carrier in her room and let her come out in her own time. This might be a good time to give her some privacy to investigate things when she's ready. And leave the carrier in her sanctuary room so that she can use it as a hideaway should she want it.

Over the new few days, visit her room several times each day. Play with a pole toy or laser pointer or toss some toys around the floor for her to chase. If she's hiding, speak softly to her and try to coax her to you with treats or gentle pets. While she should have dry kibble available to her throughout the day, you may take the opportunity to bring some yummy canned food to feed her during your visits. We want her to look forward to your visits to her room.

If there are other pets in the household, get her acclimated to their presence as well. Use a towel to stroke each of the other pets in the home with it to get their scent on it; do

the same with her, using another towel. Then swap towels so that everyone can get a good sniff of their new family members. You can also place her food near the separating door so she can start associating their presence with positive feelings. (If she is not eating, place the food farther from the door and move it closer gradually.) Put toys with a connecting string under the door jamb so that she can enjoy a lively interactive game with another pet on the other side of the door.

Every cat reacts to transition and environmental changes differently. While some will be confident and ready to investigate the rest of the home in just a matter of days, others may need a month or more, so be sensitive to your new kitty's needs. When you feel she's ready for the next steps, you can begin giving her a more freedom. Open the door to her room while you're at home to supervise, though you should still give her the space to explore as she sees fit. If there are other animals in the household, make sure that they are contained in a room so that she has the freedom to investigate the new territory without having to worry about politics with the rest of the animal family. And remember that, during this transition period, she should not be left out of her room while you are not at home or while you're sleeping.

When you feel that she's comfortable moving throughout the entire home, allow her to come out of her sanctuary room with the rest of the family animals out and about. Make sure that she has perches and vertical space available to her should she need to seek a safe vantage point. If there are dogs in the home, they should be leashed until you feel comfortable with their interactions with each other. (Consult WoofGang's handout "*Cats and Dogs*" for more on this.) If at any point your kitty becomes overwhelmed by the expanse of the entire home or if she should have a negative interaction with another animal in the home, return her to the room and start afresh tomorrow. This will give her a chance to regroup and regain her confidence.



When you feel that the relationships between her and the other animals in the home are secure, you can restore the sanctuary room back to its normal use. Over the weeks that follow, slowly transition her food and water, bedding, litterbox and cat tree/scratching post to their permanent locations. But should you find that she's reverting back to her "new cat" ways (hiding, inappropriate elimination, or incidents with the other family pets), return her to her sanctuary room and make the reintroduction back into the household more gradually. In so doing, she will feel safe in your care and this will help forge a trusting relationship.