

Bringing Your New Family Member Home And How to Make the Adjustment Easier on Everyone!

Congratulations on your new furry family member! I know you are excited to start to get to know him or her and begin your lifetime journey together. It might seem to be an easy prospect, this homecoming, but it can be somewhat traumatic for your new adoptee, and for your current pets.

Think about it. Imagine this from the standpoint of your current cat, for example. All of a sudden, without warning, without asking, without so much as a hint, this total stranger is brought into the house and is living there! Where did he/she come from? Who is this? Where do I fit in? What happened???

Now consider things from your new kitty's perspective. Can you imagine them thinking, "Where am I going now? Am I going to a new place? Gosh, this is scary and unfamiliar. Things don't smell right. This place is so BIG! I don't know anyone. That big dog looks scary."

Kind of puts a new twist on things when you consider how they might feel. Cats are creatures of habit and routine. They love routine and feel secure when they know how things go. Constant change is stressful, so it's helpful to keep this in mind when helping your new kitty adjust to his/her new life.

There are things that you can do to make this a bit easier for everyone.

1. First, as much as is possible, **do not change your routine with your current pets.** They depend on these cherished routines, and gain a lot of safety and security from these routines. It is EXTREMELY important to keep these up, so your current pets feel like they are still important and are loved.
2. **Prepare a room that will be your new kitty's home for a couple of days.** It should be comfortable, have a litter box, food and water, and a place to sleep, and preferably, a place to hide. A box will do nicely in a pinch. Introduce your new kitty into this room and let them explore. Sit with them quietly for a while and just let them do their thing. You can leave the room for a while and visit again later. This space will help them become comfortable with the smells and sounds of their home.
3. **Continue to reassure your current pets, and keep their routines as constant and as normal as possible.** Shower them with attention! They will need this for reassurance that some things haven't changed. This is very important. Giving them their attention and keeping their routines will help reduce any jealousy that they might feel and will help their relationships with the new kid on the block. They will be able to smell the new kitty under the door.
4. **Visit your new kitty every so often. Let them adjust in their own time.** You can play with them a little bit, snuggle and hold them if they want. If they are not ready to be close, that is ok, and is normal. They have a lot to take in right now. Let them know they are safe and you are safe to be around. Just be with them.
5. Your new kitty and your current pets will be able to smell and "visit" under the door. This is an important step in getting them acquainted with each another.
6. **Keep your new kitty in his/her room for 2 days.** Let them get comfortable. On day 2, you can sit at the door, and open it a little to allow everybody to smell and see each other, but not

interact too much beyond that. Keep the visits short, but frequent. Be careful with dogs - it is helpful to have your dog on a leash, with someone holding the dog so that if any aggression or extreme fear arises, you can gently pull the dog back. Reward the dog when he/she acts appropriately towards the new kitty. Do not punish if they do not. Simply pull them back and try again later. You do not want your dog to associate the new kitty with punishment.

7. **Another trick is to get a washcloth and gently wipe it along the sides of your new kitty's cheek. This picks up their scent.** Then place the cloth someplace in the house where your current pets can smell it. Likewise, get another washcloth and gently wipe the sides of your current cats and bring it into the room with the new kitty. This allows them to get used to each other's smells before full blown interactions. (Hint: you can use this technique to "mark" new furniture or cat trees you bring into the house. It "tricks" cats into thinking they have marked it. If it smells familiar, they will be more likely to accept it!)
8. **Once you are ready to let your new arrival out of his/her room, you might want to do it when your other pets are not crowding around the door.** This reduces stress. If you are able, slowly expand your new kitty's space, room by room. This might not always be possible, but it's less overwhelming for them to explore. Make sure you will be present and watchful during this time, and watch the other pets in the household, especially dogs, to make sure no one gets too aggressive. It is normal for cats to hiss, growl and spit at one another for a while until they grow accustomed to each other. And there will be some tussles so that the hierarchy is worked out (who is top cat, who is submissive). This is all normal cat behavior, and can continue for months.
9. **This bears repeating...shower your current pets with affection** during this adjustment time. It helps them stay secure during this unsure time. You can even ignore the new kitty for a bit, and give them attention at a different time.
10. **Be patient.** This can be a lengthy process, or it can take no time at all. All animals are different, and the process takes different times. Feliway can be a helpful tool to use in helping cats feel calm in stressful situations. It is a copy of a pheromone, a natural scent produced by glands on the sides of a cat's face used to mark territory and helps make a cat feel at home. Check your local pet supply stores.

Thank you for adopting from the Madison-Greene Humane Society!



Our help is their hope.
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