

# KITTENS-THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIALIZATION

**The decision to welcome a cat or kitten into your home is both something to celebrate and something that requires patience.**

This guide gives an overview of the situations most encountered when you're introducing a new cat to your home. Use these tips to make the transition easier for everyone involved.

## ***Understanding Your Cat's History***

One clear-cut benefit to working with a shelter or rescue is that they may know a cat's history, like if it has cohabited with another pet. Their staff has also likely been working toward developing healthy associations with people, no matter the cat's age.

If not much is known about your cat's past, it's better to err on the side of caution and proceed slowly during this period of adjustment to a new family and home.

## ***The Basics***

What is the best way to socialize a cat or kitten to other pets in the home?

1. **Take it slow.** Do not force interactions. When bringing home a new cat or kitten it is best to let them slowly build relationships with other pets in the house.
2. **Find comfort zones.** Give the new member of the family a space of their own. Let them smell the other pet's bedding and toys and vice versa. When the new addition is comfortable in their space, let them venture out and meet the other family members.
3. **Set the stage.** Make sure there are plenty of toys, food/water bowls and litter boxes for everyone. In general, there should be one litter box per cat, plus an extra. Cats are most comfortable when they can see what's happening around them as they eat, so place feeding bowls out in the open instead of in corners. If you sense there's tension at feeding time, you can also try feeding your cats in different rooms. Or use a distraction, such as toys.
4. **Be patient.** It may take a day or several weeks for friendships to form. Make sure the new and old housemates get plenty of love and support from their human family during this time.

## ***Introducing a Cat to Another Cat***

Cats can be territorial, and it's impossible to tell how a cat is going to react until it's in the presence of another. Here are some tips for introducing a new cat to your home.

1. **Keep the cats separated for a period of time.** By keeping cats in separate quarters, it allows the new cat to get comfortable with her surroundings. You can swap things like bedding or toys to introduce the cats' scents to one another.
2. **Make a controlled introduction.** The first time the cats meet, it's best to make it as simple as cracking a door, or using a baby gate - or two, stacked, if they are leaping over just one - to allow them to see each other but not physically interact.
3. **Give it time.** If the cats are getting along for short periods of time, gradually extend the length of their interactions. Just be sure not to leave them home alone together until you're confident there won't be any trouble.

## ***Introducing a Cat to Children or Baby***

It's ideal to introduce a new cat to the home when children are old enough to follow instructions.

A new baby will take a considerable amount of time and attention, so it may be better to wait until you're confident there's enough time to devote to a new cat, and children are better prepared.

## ***Introducing a Cat to a Dog***

Follow these pointers to guide the introduction.

1. **Consult your shelter.** Describe your current pet situation to your shelter worker. They can tell you if your house is a good place for a cat, and what kind of cat might thrive there.
2. **Clear out.** Give the cat plenty of room to retreat in case the interaction triggers a flight response.
3. **Use a leash.** Keep the dog leashed so you can maintain control over his movement, especially if your dog tries to chase.
4. **Don't leave them unattended.** Keep the pets in separate quarters (be it different rooms or kenneled) while you're away until you're positive they're on good terms. It's important to understand that some dogs may not make good companions for cats due to tendencies of certain breeds, temperament, training or socialization.

## ***Introducing a Cat to Other People***

Here are some themes for socializing your cat to new people.

- **Scent:** Leaving out an item with the scent of the person who is going to be introduced, may ease the process when they meet.
- **Touch:** Cuddling, petting, and massaging may also be an effective method to increase positive affect in cats.
- **Purposeful Play:** Trust and bonding are encouraged through purposeful play, and this can be especially effective after meals when cats have been observed to be social.
- **Grooming:** When living in a colony, cats can be seen rubbing, sniffing, treading (the massage-like kneading movements) and often sharing grooming responsibilities. Grooming cats is not only required to maintain good health, but it's been shown to improve their wellbeing and strengthen the bond with their caretakers.
- **Speech:** Ever notice how people speak differently to babies? It's possible the higher pitch and contours of inflection have a similar calming affect in cats. You'll often see your veterinarian and behaviorists use this technique to manage interactions.
- **Walks:** Leash training, with specific steps on how to get started, can help cat owners introduce their cats to walking. Besides the physical activity, it also allows your cat to interact with people in neutral settings where territorial instincts are minimized.

## ***In Closing***

Remember, each cat is different and patience is important. Cats like to handle things on their terms, and some can find big, sudden movements to be frightening. If there's any indication of resistance or if your cat gets upset, call a time out. Let the situation settle down and try it again later.