

How to introduce cats

In the cat world, love at first sight is the exception, not the norm. You can maximize the chances for a harmonious relationship by introducing cats in a gradual, controlled way. Don't rush the process: Introductions can take days, weeks or months. Go at the pace of each cat, and back up a step if you see signs of stress or conflict.

1. Prepare your home

Place multiple litter boxes (at least one for every cat in your household plus one extra), food and water bowls, pet beds and other resources throughout your home. Use cat trees and perches to add vertical space, and place resources in a way that cats can't ambush each other.

2. Separate the cats

Confine your new cat to a spare bedroom or bathroom, which will serve as their safe room. Help create "group scent" by exchanging the cats' bedding every day or so.

3. Supervised exploration

Shut your resident cat in a separate room while letting the new cat investigate other rooms to become familiar with the rest of the house. Keep some doors closed so the cat isn't overwhelmed.

4. Visual introductions

Using a tall baby gate to keep the cats physically separated, crack open the door to your new cat's safe room to let the cats see each

other from a comfortable distance as you offer them a meal or treats. If all goes well, you can gradually decrease the distance between the feeding bowls and open the door a little more.

5. Supervised physical introductions

Once the cats appear comfortable with one another, you can remove the baby gate and let them meet. Use toys or treats to help each cat associate the other with something positive and to distract them. Keep the sessions short; acceptance requires many friendly interactions. If everything is going well, let them mingle with less supervision.

6. Solo physical interactions

If your cats are getting along when you're home, start leaving them alone for short periods of time that gradually increase. Keep the new cat's safe room open in case they need a break.

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