

All About Pets

The national pet care information service



INTRODUCING YOUR CAT TO THE FAMILY



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

Bringing a new cat or kitten into your home and introducing it to your children, resident cat or dog can be nerve-racking.

You want them to get on together and welcome the new feline into the house, but this seldom happens easily. Even if your reason for getting another cat is to keep your resident cat company, it may not welcome the newcomer with open paws! Controlling the situation with careful introductions can help smooth the way.





Introducing your cat to other cats

Remember that cats do not need to be social creatures – unlike the pack-orientated dog they function happily on their own without a social structure around them. They are unlikely to feel the ‘need’ for a companion even though you might wish to have another cat around. You cannot force cats to like each other – some will live with a newcomer easily, others will never get on or they may just manage to live alongside each other in an uneasy truce.

A kitten is less of a threat to a resident cat than an adult is because it is still sexually immature. It can also be better to get a kitten (or adult cat) of the opposite sex to the resident cat to minimise competition. Neutering helps to remove most of such problems, but may not eliminate them altogether.

Choose a quiet time when the household is calm – avoid festivities, parties, visiting relatives or friends and find time to concentrate on calm reassurance for both cats.

Introducing your cat to dogs

While dogs and cats have often been portrayed as enemies, it is usually easier to introduce a new cat to a dog than to another cat. While both animals may be wary of each other initially, they do not see the other as direct competition and can get on very well. If your dog is used to cats it may be excited at having a new one in the house but it will soon settle down and begin to see the new cat as part of its pack. Many dogs will live happily with their own cats while chasing strange felines out of the garden, so you will need to take care until the new cat is seen as one of the household.

If your new cat or kitten has previously lived with a dog it will be much less likely to be frightened for long and will become confident around the dog more quickly.

However, safety must come first. You will need to keep everything under control until the dog and cat have got used to one another. Stroke the dog and cat separately but without washing your hands, to exchange their scents. The cat will then take on the smell profile of the house and becomes part of the dog's pack. A large pen is ideal for first meetings to keep the situation calm and the cat protected. Let the dog sniff the newcomer through the bars or mesh and get over its initial excitement. The cat may well hiss and spit but it is well protected. If you have a large pen then you can put the cat in this at night in the room where the dog sleeps and let them get used to one another for a few days or even a week.

Some dogs, especially those not used to cats or of an excitable or aggressive disposition, need extra care for introductions. They should be kept as calm as possible on the lead and made to sit quietly. The new cat should be given a safe position in the room and allowed to get used to the dog and approach it if it wants. This may take some time and requires patience and rewards for the dog if it behaves well.



Introducing your cat to children and babies

Excited children can easily injure a cat (especially a kitten) unintentionally, so supervise play and do not allow the cat to be picked up unnecessarily. Children should be encouraged to sit on the floor and wait for the cat to explore them. Make sure kittens are allowed to stop playing when they want to and are not treated like a toy. Kittens, like many young animals, need a lot of sleep and should be allowed time to rest.

Introducing a cat to your baby can be a fraught time for all concerned – how will the cat react? Once again, stay calm and don't create a tense atmosphere. Let the cat sniff the baby and find out just what this strange-smelling noisy little creature is. Let it investigate all the paraphernalia that goes with a baby so that it does not feel threatened. The wonderful thing about cats is that they usually adapt to almost any situation and go back to their bed next to the radiator, curl up and go to sleep! Occasionally, a very sensitive cat may become stressed and urinate in the house but this can be overcome by increasing its sense of security and maintaining a good hygiene regimen. You may want to keep the baby's room as a no-go zone for cats initially for your own peace of mind.

Everyone has heard the old wives' tale about cats sitting on babies and suffocating them. Certainly, cats love a warm spot and the crib in the nursery is usually very cosy, but most cats wait until the baby is taken out before they hop in. A little care will remove all the worry – make sure the cat is not in the nursery when you leave the baby to sleep. If you want to leave the door or window open put a cat net over the basket (or pram). This is only really a potential danger when the baby is very small and cannot turn over or move.

Follow these simple steps and all will be peace and harmony between your new cat, other pets and children.



Further information

For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit www.allaboutpets.org.uk, the national pet care information service. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is provided by The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity. We rely entirely on your support to enable us to continue our vital work. Any contribution would be most welcome. Thank you.



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