

# Shy and timid cats



**CATS PROTECTION**  
**VETERINARY GUIDES**

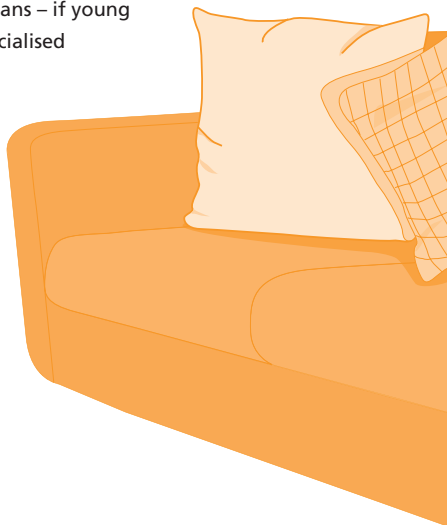


*While most cats settle into new homes quickly, some cats remain fearful despite a gentle welcome and time to get used to their new surroundings. Do not be too disappointed if your shy or timid cat tries to hide or run away from you. Showing patience and sensitivity will go a long way to ensure that you have a happy and extremely rewarding relationship with your cat.*

## Why is my cat so shy?

Shyness could be due to:

- an inherited tendency – like people, some cats are naturally more anxious than others
- a lack of contact with humans – if young kittens are not properly socialised with people they will not learn that people are a normal part of life and so may be stressed around them
- a previous frightening experience that has made the cat fearful



## What are the signs of shyness or timidity?

Cats communicate in a much more subtle way than humans and dogs. It is often difficult to recognise that your cat is attempting to tell you to move away. If your cat retreats to hiding places, cringes, cowers away or displays dilated pupils and/or flattened ears he is displaying signs of being frightened.

This fear can develop into aggression – where your cat adopts ‘fight’ as a tactic instead of ‘flight’. Aggression usually develops because the cat feels cornered or trapped, or because he has previously learned that flight is unsuccessful. Avoid putting your cat into this situation and ensure he can always get away if he wants to.



## Managing shy cats

There are a number of things you can do to make your cat feel more comfortable. With patience your cat will learn not to be afraid but you must take it step by step. It helps to:

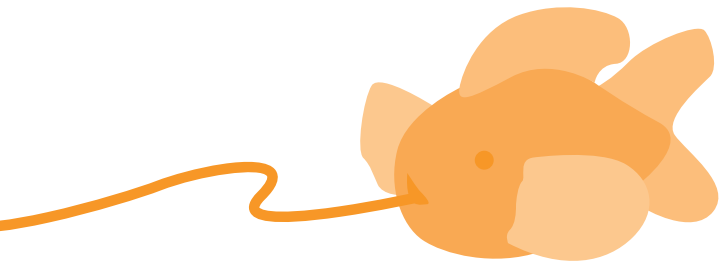
- provide plenty of refuges for your cat around the house. Cats de-stress quicker if they can hide, preferably in high and/or dark locations eg in cardboard boxes, on shelves, behind sofas or under a bed
- use synthetic scent pheromones. Available from your vet, these can create a reassuring environment for your cat and may help to reduce stress
- sit quietly in your cat's vicinity to allow him to get used to you in his own time. Ignore him while you read a book or take a nap so that he does not feel pressurised. Do this while he is eating so he associates your presence with something positive. The time you spend near him can be built up gradually as he adjusts
- let your cat make the first move – direct approaches are extremely threatening so don't force attention on your cat
- narrow your eyes and turn your face away to reassure your cat that you are not a threat

## As your cat becomes braver, try:

- talking to your cat quietly in a calming tone – this is an excellent way to bond
- rewarding your cat with a treat when he approaches you. At first, give the treat as soon as your cat approaches but gradually increase the time between the approach and the treat. Over a period of weeks, work up to being able to calmly stroke your cat once or twice before giving the treat
- using toys you can throw for him, or fishing rod toys that invite the cat to interact without him feeling threatened by close contact

Most importantly, never lose your temper or try to force your cat to socialise too quickly as this will just reinforce his fears. Build on your successes gradually so your cat has time to learn that everything is not a threat, and that it is worth overcoming his fear for the reward of being around you! In some cases, you may find guidance from your vet or a pet behaviourist useful.

Overcoming a cat's shyness through patient handling and care often leads to an extremely rewarding and close relationship between owner and cat and is well worth the extra time and effort.



This leaflet is one of a range provided by Cats Protection on issues surrounding cat care.

Cats Protection is the UK's leading feline welfare charity and helps more than 193,000 cats and kittens each year. We rely entirely on public generosity to finance this vital welfare work.

For more information on **adopting a cat**, **volunteering for us** or **making a donation**, visit **[www.cats.org.uk](http://www.cats.org.uk)**



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