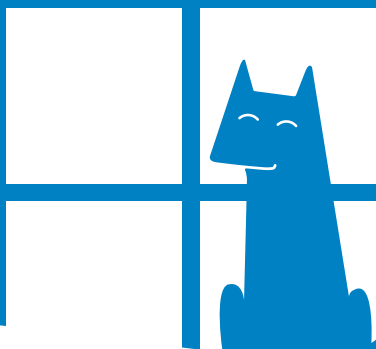


# Welcome home



**CATS PROTECTION**  
**ESSENTIAL GUIDE 2**



When you first adopt a cat or kitten, you will need to help them gently settle in to their new home. A change of environment is always stressful for a cat, so it will often take a few weeks for them to feel relaxed in their new abode. Following the advice here will help them to successfully adapt to their new surroundings.

## Bringing your new cat home

The first few hours after bringing your cat home can really affect how well they accept their new life. First and foremost, be prepared to be patient and never attempt to rush your cat into doing things they may not be ready for.

It is important to provide them with a quiet place with everything they need, so set aside a dedicated, secure room before you collect them. This room should include:

- an area for food and a separate area for water
- at least one litter tray placed as far away as possible from their food and water and in a private, accessible location
- somewhere to hide
- access to a high spot where they can view their surroundings
- a suitable place to sleep or, ideally, a choice of them
- a scratching post
- a few cat toys and space for them to play

### The significance of scent

Cats rely heavily on their sense of smell and will settle quicker if their new home smells familiar. To help your cat get used to your scent, take an item of clothing or a blanket from your home and leave it with the cat for a few days before you bring them home. When you pick your cat up, bring the same item back – ideally it will fit comfortably in their carrier with them and then it can be placed in their room.

You could also use a synthetic form of feline facial pheromones, available from your vet. These come as a plug-in diffuser or a spray. The scent helps to create a reassuring environment and may help to reduce stress.

## **Travelling home**

Being territorial and a creature of habit, a cat becomes very attached to their familiar environment and finds travelling very stressful. To help your cat stay calm during journeys, use a strong, secure and easily cleanable carrier, with a familiar smelling blanket inside and cover the carrier with another light blanket. You may wish to spray the inside of the carrier with a pheromone spray at least 15 minutes before putting your cat inside, to allow the alcohol to evaporate. The pheromone can help to create a feeling of familiarity and security.

## **The first steps**

The following is a guide to introducing your cat to their new home and family. Take one step at a time, be patient and always work at the cat's pace before moving onto the next stage.

When you arrive home, leave your cat alone to explore their room for an hour or so before introducing yourself, although some cats may need longer. When you go in to see them, get down to their level, put out your hand and call their name softly – let them come to you.

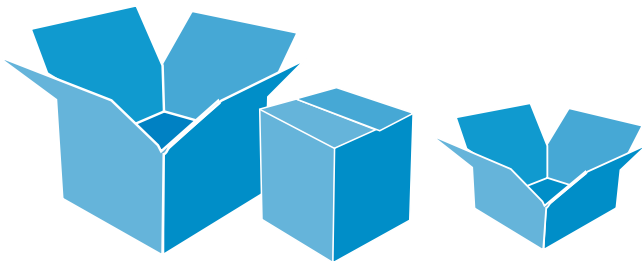
If your cat chooses to hide, just sit quietly in the same room and occasionally talk to them gently in low tones – do not force them to come out. Give them plenty of time to adjust and continue to visit them so they can get used to your presence. As long as they are eating and using the litter tray, there should be no cause for alarm. If your cat is very

timid, they may not want to come out to eat. In this case, try moving the food bowl closer to their hiding place and leaving the room.

You may want to try offering a small treat or using an interactive toy, such as a fishing rod toy with feathers on the end to tempt your cat from their hiding place. Play is a good bonding tool because it is less intimidating than physical contact, relieves stress, and provides mental stimulation and an outlet for pent-up energy. You may find it is easier to encourage play at dawn and dusk when cats are naturally more active.

### **The first steps – kittens**

With a kitten, the process is slightly different as it is best not to leave them alone until they have settled. Provide them with a warm, secure bed at ground level – a cardboard box will do. Once they've had a look around, show them where their litter tray, bowls and bed are by gently tapping these items. They may feel a little unsettled if they are used to living with their mother and siblings so when you are not there, a soft toy or low-volume radio might help them feel at ease. For more advice see Cats Protection's [\*Essential Guide: Caring for your kitten.\*](#)



## Meeting the family

Once your cat seems confident with you, introduce other (human) family members, one by one. Children are likely to be excited about the new arrival, but it is important to keep them calm. Let the cat come to them and when they do, show the children the correct way to gently stroke and interact with them. Children, particularly young children with little experience of cats, need to learn how to treat cats appropriately. Even the friendliest cat will defend themselves if they are pushed or pulled too much so sure they understand they are not a toy. Avoid picking your cat up in the early stages – wait until they have settled in and knows that you are not a threat.

For more information see Cats Protection's [Essential Guide: Cats and people](#).

### Meeting the family – kittens

Kittens are particularly delicate and, just like babies, they need lots of sleep so make sure your kitten is handled carefully and gets plenty of time to rest. Provide a room or area in the house that is out of bounds to children. For further information, see Cats Protection's [Essential Guide: Caring for your kitten](#).

Some cats may not have had much contact with people, or may have had bad experiences in the past, so be patient. Bear in mind that not all cats will become lap cats.

## Exploring the rest of the house

Once your cat is comfortable in their space and if you have no other pets in the house, you can gradually let them explore more rooms. It may help to gently wipe your cat's cheeks with a soft cloth – to pick up the facial pheromones – and rub it around points in the house at cat height to make the house smell more familiar. Let your cat come out of their room of their own accord and keep the door open so they can dash back to their refuge if they feel the need. Make sure all external doors and windows are shut so they can't escape outside.

## The big outdoors

Don't let your cat go outside until they have fully adjusted to their new home and knows where their food will be coming from – this usually takes between three and four weeks. If your cat has not been neutered, don't let them out unsupervised until the operation has been carried out by your vet. Kittens should always be supervised when outdoors. When you let your cat out, do it when they're hungry so that you can tempt them back inside with food, until they are used to coming back to the house freely. For more information see [\*Cats Protection's Essential Guide: Neutering – family planning for felines.\*](#)



## Introducing other pets

When introducing your new cat to other pets, it is much better to control the situation rather than leave the animals to sort it out for themselves. First impressions are all important and a negative start may lead to lifelong conflict.

### Introducing cats

Cats are not obligate social animals and most function happily on their own and have a drive to keep other cats out of their protected territory, so don't expect instant harmony. However, if there is no competition for food or sleeping places, cats will usually learn to tolerate each other and can become good friends.

Before introducing the cats physically, introduce them to each other's scent. Swap scents by:

- stroke each cat with a clean, soft cloth and dabbing it around your home and furniture or leaving the cloth in the cat's environment to sniff when the cat is ready to investigate
- swapping the cats' bedding or favourite blankets
- keep swapping the scents until the cats show no reaction to the smell. If the cats avoid the scent cloth then the scent swapping stage is going to take longer

You can progress to allowing them to see each other, but not able to touch or meet one another. If possible, place a glass or mesh door between the cats and allow each cat to approach or hide as they choose. Don't attempt a face-to-face introduction until the cats either ignore each other or show positive signs such as attempting to groom or rub heads through the divider.

When it is time to introduce your cats face-to-face, it helps to:

- ensure easy escape routes are available for both cats, as well as easy access to places higher up, such as furniture or shelves
- start in a fairly large room where they can stay at a distance from each other
- supervise the cats when they are together
- work at a pace that the cats are comfortable with and go back a step if necessary
- only introduce for short periods of time during feeding time to help form positive associations with each other, before returning the cats to separate rooms
- gradually start to fuss or play with the cats for a short time, so their attention is on you, before putting the food down

If this is tolerated, then gradually increase the time they spend together.

It can take anything from a day to many weeks for cats to tolerate each other so don't give up if there is some hissing and spitting initially, just go back a step. They are unlikely to fight, but have a blanket ready just in case so you can separate them. Take care to avoid being bitten or scratched as the cats may be quite excited. Don't chase or shout at them as this will only lead to them associating each other with bad things.

As the cats become more comfortable in each other's company, try giving them tit bits to encourage them to come closer. Finally, try feeding them in the same room with their bowls far apart. Choose somewhere where they can escape easily – placing an object such as a chair between the feeding bowls may help them feel less threatened. Over time you can move the bowls closer together but do not place them side by side.



Cats can feel vulnerable when they are eating, so place food and water bowls slightly away from the wall, so each cat has space to sit with its back to the wall and is able to survey the room while eating or drinking.

Remember that if your cats are apart for any reason, for example if one has to stay at a boarding cattery or the vets, this may affect their scent and they may not be recognised as part of the same social group when they return. The longer a cat is away, the harder it can be to reintegrate. On return, it's a good idea to keep the cats apart – so the absent cat can pick up the smells of home – and slowly reintroduce them. Consider where you place their resources such as food bowls and litter trays, bearing in mind the advice above.

By taking these simple steps you can often dramatically improve the quality of life for the cats living in your multi-cat household.

If you have problems, please seek help sooner rather than later as it may be easier to resolve a recently developed problem, than one which has occurred for some time. If cats have been introduced too quickly, you may need to give them separate rooms and start the integration procedure from scratch. Speak with your vet for further advice who may recommend referral to a suitably qualified behaviourist.

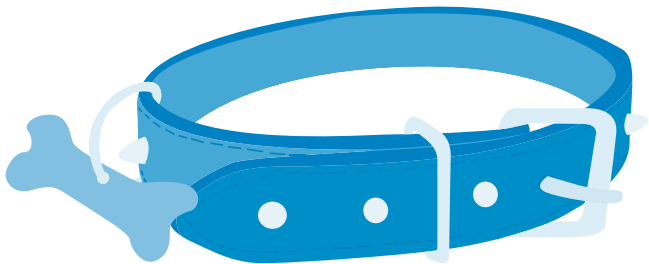
For more information, see Cats Protection's [Essential Guides: Cats living together](#) and [Managing your cat's behaviour](#).

## Introducing cats to dogs

While dogs and cats are often regarded as enemies, it is usually easier to introduce a new cat to a dog than to another cat. Often, the cat will take charge of the situation immediately! A gradual introduction can make all the difference when introducing a cat and a dog to each other. It can be easier if the cat had positive experiences with dogs when it was a young kitten and vice versa.

Provide a room or area of the house for your cat that is not accessible to your dog. Firstly exchange the dog's and cat's scent, in the exactly same way as detailed above when introducing two cats, over a period of several days. Then, when making face-to-face introductions:

- keep your dog on the lead and keep them calm – it may help to take your dog for a vigorous walk first
- train your dog to show relaxed, non-threatening behaviour around the cat, such as 'down' and 'stay' and ensure you are in control at all times. For more information on positive, reward-based dog-training, contact the Association of Pet Dog Trainers – see [www.apdt.co.uk](http://www.apdt.co.uk)
- ensure your cat doesn't feel cornered. They should be somewhere where they feel relaxed with a safe escape route – preferably a high ledge where the dog can't reach them. Ensure external doors and windows are kept closed to avoid the cat bolting
- ignore the cat – your dog will feel the cat is more important if you are focussed on it. Do some training tasks with your dog to keep their attention, using treats and praise to reward good behaviour
- never restrain the cat or force them to approach the dog. Let your cat leave the room whenever they wish



- don't allow your dog to give chase if the cat runs away. Praise and treat the dog if they remain calm and then return the cat back to their own room
- repeat short introductions until the dog shows little or no interest and the cat is not fearful of the dog. Progress to the dog being on a long line which can be picked up if necessary
- give your cat treats so they associate the dog with something positive

Once your cat and dog are unconcerned with each other's presence you can take your dog off the lead, but make sure your cat can escape onto high ledges or furniture. Never leave the dog and cat together unattended until you are absolutely sure they are happy and secure in each other's company. Remember that cat food and litter trays can be appealing for dogs, so ensure they are not accessible, to allow the cat to eat and toilet in peace.

### **Learn more about your cat online!**

Take a look at our free interactive tool to help you understand cats' origins and their behaviour within our homes. <http://learnonline.cats.org.uk/content/ufo>

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For more information about Cats Protection or to make a donation, please visit [www.cats.org.uk](http://www.cats.org.uk) or phone our Helpline on 03000 12 12 12.

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