

Boroughbred Behavior Resources



Issue: Decompression Period (Bringing a New Cat Home)

What does this mean?

When you bring a new pet into your home, regardless of their behavior or personality, they will need some period of decompression before they are fully comfortable. During this time they may be particularly fearful, anxious, and may hide in your home. The most important thing to remember is that this is normal! Think about arriving into somebody's home to stay with them: you don't know where anything is, you might be uncomfortable, anxious, and depending on the type of person you are, perhaps want to be left alone. This is exactly how your new pet will be feeling, but they are not able to say it to you in words. Their behavior during the first hours, days, or even weeks in your home may not represent how they will be once they are settled in, meaning do not worry if you feel like your new pet is hiding or avoiding contact.

What do I do?

The most important thing to remember is to give your new pet time and space. If they are hiding, or avoiding you and your family, just ignore them and allow them to be by themselves. When they approach, offer praise, attention, treats or anything else that makes them feel good. Ideally create a quiet space where they can feel safe and still observe your daily routine. Cats often feel safer when they are high up, so consider providing vertical space like a shelf or windowsill. If you are passing by the quiet area, or walking by your pet, it can also be beneficial to toss treats towards them so they learn to associate your approach with positive things.

Remember, your pet does not know this brand new space or even you! If they are not yet behaving just as you'd hoped, do not punish them! As with everything else, offer praise for desirable behavior and either ignore undesirable behavior or calmly remove them from the area (for example if they are jumping on the counter) and offer praise and treats when they get to their own bed or area.

And while we know you will want to celebrate your new pet, perhaps with a homecoming party or by inviting all your friends over to meet them, we love the idea but suggest you wait a few weeks until your pet has fully acclimated to their new home and to their new family. Too much commotion can be overwhelming, and may push your new cat to behave in ways they normally would not. They want to meet your friends too – just not immediately.

We recommend putting out a few different litterboxes so your cat can determine what location(s) they prefer. You can then remove the ones they don't use. Please see our flyer on **"Inappropriate Elimination"** for more information.

If your new pet's behavior is completely different from the behavior described at the Care Center, or if it is highly concerning, you can always call the Care Center for advice.

As your new pet comes out of their shell you will get more of a feel for who they really are and your patience with them will be rewarded! Giving your pet space when they need it is always important but especially while you are still getting to know each other.

Related flyers: **"New Home Adjustment Period"**, **"Helping a Fearful Cat"**

For more information:

International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants: <https://m.iaabc.org/>

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists: <http://corecaab.org/>