

Boroughbred Behavior Resources



Issue: Introducing a Cat to another Cat

Having two or more cats can double the love, but it is important to remember that not all cats will show enthusiasm for a newcomer. Cats are territorial in nature, so they may feel threatened or anxious when a new cat enters their territory. A hurried introduction can lead to behavior issues and your cats may end up becoming rivals. By taking the time to introduce cats gradually, you can help them establish positive associations with each other and increase the likelihood of a successful relationship. There is no set time frame for how long each step is supposed to take, it really depends on the individual cats so patience is key! Rome wasn't built in a day, and a peaceful home is worth the effort.

Preparation

Before bringing your new cat home, prepare a “safe room” for the new cat. This room needs to have a solid door or partition that you cannot see through, to separate the new cat from the resident ones. Try to select a room that is not particularly desirable to the resident cat(s). This safe room should have all the main resources like food, water, litter box, toys, beds, and hiding spots to promote feelings of safety.

Prepare another room/area to separate the resident cats(s) when it is time to bring the new cat home. We'll call this room the “joy room”. This space will ideally be one that the resident cat(s) **enjoy** spending time in. Adding a synthetic calming pheromone diffuser, like Feliway or Comfort Zone, to the resident cats' areas can help reduce stress prior to introducing their new roommate. This is optional though, it's more important to attend to their needs and continue their routine as normal when the new cat arrives. Offer playtime, special treats, play cat music, and interact with them periodically to give them incentive to frequent this space in the days preceding the arrival of the new cat. You will be confining them in this room when the new cat arrives.

Move in Day

When the day has come to bring your new friend home, close the resident cat(s) in the joy room for the time being. Offer enrichment in this space as you have been leading up to this day. The goal is to limit the impact of the new cat's arrival for both parties, keeping clues of each other's presence to a minimum. If you notice any of the cats are sensitive to the scent of other cats, wash your hands and change your clothes before interacting with the other cat.

Bring the new cat into the safe room in a carrier, open the carrier, and wait for the new cat to exit on their own. Spend some time with the new cat in the safe room, just remember to avoid forcing interactions and let them adjust at their own pace. Please see our flyer on “New Home Adjustment Period” for more information.

When you exit the safe room, cover the bottom of the door with a towel to prevent physical contact between the new cat and resident cat(s). If you would like, you can spray calming pheromones on both sides of the safe room door to help reduce stress for both cats. Let the resident cat(s) out of the joy room and spend quality time with them too. They may sniff the door to the safe room and will likely have an idea of new cat's presence inside the room, but our goal for now is to keep exposure to a minimum.

Pawsitive Associations

The objective is to give both cats a reason to like one another. It's important to think about the cats' personalities; learn what they like and use it to your advantage. With each step, try to make the experience as positive as possible, while addressing the emotional and physical needs of both cats. If there are any things your cats absolutely love, use it to build a positive association with anything related to the other cat. Over time, they will learn to associate the smell, sight, and eventually presence of the other cat with something they love.

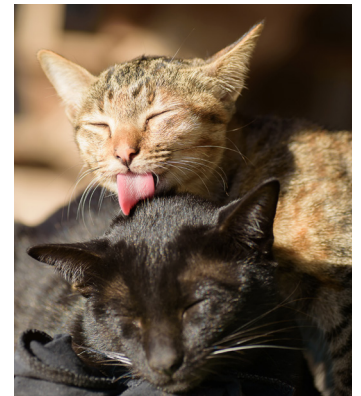
You've got a Scent in Me

Olfactory (smell) is the most important sense cats use to identify each other. They use it to distinguish members of their social group and others that are not. Cats can learn to recognize and accept one another by introducing them through scent. Cats produce “friendly” pheromones on their facial glands and use them to mark areas that are safe and comfortable. Brief exposure to other cat’s pheromones can allow the introduction process go much smoother. Remember to allow the cats to tell you when to move forward with each step. Both cats should be calm and relaxed before you start the scent exchange.

1. Once the new cat has settled nicely in their safe room, gently pet their cheeks with a clean sock. The sock should be unscented so their pheromones are not competing with other scents. If the new cat isn’t comfortable with face rubs, place the sock wherever they rest to pick up their scent.
2. Place the sock in the resident cat’s territory and try to avoid areas where they may feel territorial (litter box or feeding stations). Let them explore the new cat’s scent on their own. Place their favorite treats nearby to encourage them to sniff and build a positive association. Once they have finished investigating, put the sock away and repeat later in the day.
3. If the cat growls or hisses at the sock, you can reduce tension by leaving the sock out for a shorter time.
4. Do the same with the resident cat’s scent. Rub the resident cat’s head with a separate clean sock, put it in the safe room, away from resources, and offer treats. Put the sock away and repeat later in the day.
5. Refresh the scent-loaded socks daily by taking the socks back to each cat and rubbing their head and cheeks again. Take the sock with the refreshed scent and return it to the opposite cat’s area.

Group Scent

Cats groom each other (allogroom) as a way to bond with each other and show social support, but it can also be used to establish hierarchies within a group of cats to resolve conflicts. You can help facilitate a “group scent” if each cat tolerates brushing. Applying the same steps as above, use a soft brush to load it with each cat’s scent, focusing on their head, cheeks, and shoulders but avoiding their hindquarters. The brush is being shared to blend their scents together. Pause every few seconds to make sure both cats are receptive to the brushing and do your best to stop before they display signs of discomfort (tilted ears, swishing tail, tense body).



This process requires you to brush each cat twice a day to transfer and combine the scents of each cat. Brushing does not need to be extensive, it’s better to keep the brushing sessions brief to reduce stress. If you’re having trouble brushing both cats, try using a toothbrush or use a sock instead.

Room Swap

Once the scent exchanges have gone well, you can try allowing each cat to explore the other cat’s space in the home. Room swaps allows each cat to acclimate to the scent and presence of the other without directly interacting with them. It also provides a controlled environment to monitor each cat’s behavior so you can make adjustments as needed before they are ready to meet, which will help reduce territorial behavior and aggression. The cats should still not have visual access to one another during this phase.

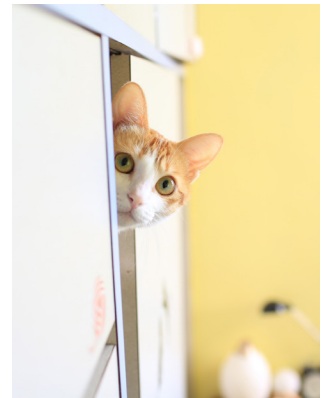
1. Confine the resident cats into their joy room with toys, treats, and other goodies.
2. Rub the new cat’s scent-loaded sock against door panels and objects outside their safe room. Load the scent at cat height (about 8 inches off the ground). Spreading their scent around the environment can help them feel more secure to explore new areas.
3. Now open the safe room door. Let the new cat explore at their own pace but you can try encouraging them to explore by offering treats or playtime.

4. Give them ample time and if they don't come out, just close the door and try again later or the next day.
5. The new cat must be willing to explore outside the safe room before the resident cat(s) can enter the safe room. Lure the new cat into a different room (like a bedroom) with the resources from the safe room, and then close the door.
6. If you have more than one resident cat, start with the calmest cat first. Open the joy room's door allow the resident cat to enter and explore the safe room.
7. Encourage the resident cat to walk towards the safe room by sitting inside the room, offering treats and soliciting play. Again, always allow them to walk around on their own. Offer positive things (treats, cuddles, and playtime) to the resident cat inside that room after they've had time to sniff around.

The room swap should take place 1-2 times a day until each cat explores the other's space without exhibiting signs of fear or stress. How long this step will take depends on the individual cats, but just remember to pay attention to their body language and reward them for positive behaviors. Scent exchanges with the sock/brush should continue during this phase. They will likely mix their scents on their own as they rub up on furnishings in the other cat's spaces, which is a good thing!

Long Distance Meeting

Begin this stage **ONLY** if both cats appear relatively calm with all the steps above. Ask for help from a cat-savvy person so there's one person present with each cat to watch their body language and movement, being mindful of their stress levels. In this phase, you'll be opening the safe door just a crack to let them to have visual contact with each other, and offering food at a distance. A physical barrier should be installed (temporary screen door, extra tall baby gate, or adjustable door latch) to prevent an altercation.



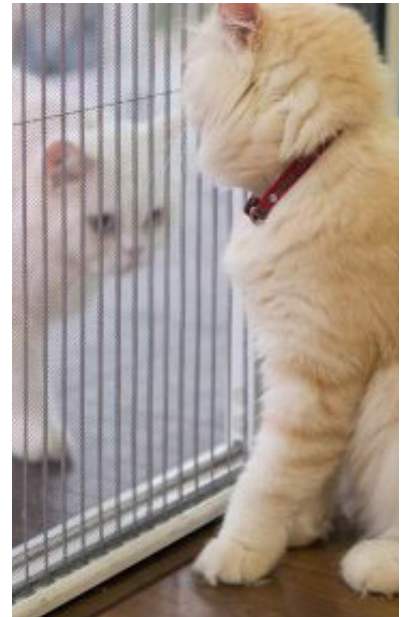
If you feed on a schedule, you can conduct this step during their normal mealtimes. If you normally free feed, you can either remove both cats' food or provide less food (if the cats get stressed from complete removal) about three hours before conducting the visual introduction so they're more willing to focus on the food.

1. Set the food bowls a good distance away from the safe room door. The bowls should be far enough so both cats can eat comfortably without incident, but have visual access to one another. If they aren't interested in food, try mixing in some of their favorite treats or offer special wet food.
2. Keep the sessions short to reduce stress. It is better to do several short sessions a day that end on a positive note rather than attempting one long session where their tolerance is tested and tension runs high. Offer a little bit of food and once it's finished, close the safe room door.
3. If either cat displays tense behavior (growl, hiss, stare, and/or swishing tail), close the safe room door and try again the next day. Increase the distance between both cats and offer higher value food they cannot resist (tuna, chicken, squeeze ups).
4. After they've finished eating and the safe room door is closed, spend quality time with both cats.
5. If the cats appear calm, you can gradually increase the exposure time and frequency until both cats appear curious or indifferent about the other.

Continue to exchange scents, swap rooms, and facilitate meal dates until both cats gain confidence in each other's presence. There is no set time frame for each phase, just take each stage slowly and watch each cat's reaction to determine if they're ready to move to the next step. It's okay if the cats need more time or distance to feel secure! If one cat is more outgoing, follow the pace of the more nervous cat to ensure they develop a good relationship.

Open Door Policy

When the cats are displaying confident behaviors and you think they're ready for the final step, you can gradually open the safe room door. Keep the screen door or baby gate up to act as a fail-safe if one cat decides to make a charge for it. Continue to monitor both cats and keep treats on hand to reward positive behaviors (sniffing, rubbing or soliciting play). Even behaviors like breaking a stare or walking by without growling is positive! If they look at each other and give no concerning reactions, give each cat a treat. If the cats stare at each other and appear tense, give them something to do to distract them. Offer play sessions using an interactive toy (fishing pole or wand toys) in each other's presence. Enlist in help so each cat has a toy to play with and don't have to compete. When you feel confident both cats will be fine without the barrier, remove it! Keep a towel or large piece of cardboard on hand to block their view of each other and help separate them if things go south (growling, hissing, charging, swiping/biting).



A Look at the Environment

As the cats spend more time together and start sharing spaces in the home, continue to monitor their behaviors and reward them for behaviors you'd like to see more. It's important to provide plenty of vertical territory to help them feel secure; cat trees, walkways, perches, tunnels, and hideaways will do wonders to increase space in your cats' eyes and help them feel safe in your home. We recommend spreading out their feeding stations, litter boxes, scratching posts, and toys in different areas in the home. This will give the cats more options to access precious resources thus, reducing conflicts to help them coexist peacefully in the home.

For information on how to introduce cats to dogs, please see our "Introducing Cat to Dog" flyer.

Other Resources:

The Science Behind Feline Pheromones: <https://www.fearfreehappyhomes.com/pheromone-science/>

How to Introduce Cats by Jackson Galaxy: <https://youtu.be/tsYT7yIOdqQ>