**CAT TO CAT INTRODUCTIONS – A STEP BY STEP GUIDE**

FROM **COAPE International**

Cats are territorial and solitary by nature, so having two or more cats living together can sometimes become problematic, and this is especially evident when you bring home a new cat to introduce to the family.

It’s vital to take your time, introduce cats to each other slowly and correctly to ensure their relationship will be a peaceful and happy one. Happy wife cat happy life!

**1. Confinement:** A safe starter room or sanctuary for the new cat will provide the cat with the quiet and safety s/he needs while becoming familiar with the scents and sounds of your home. The starter room can be any size but must have a secure door and ceiling. Confine your new cat to this room. Have everything they need in there and keep the door closed at all times. When feeding your cats, feed them on each side of the closed door. This simple technique helps to familiarize them with each other’s smell, plus it helps to build an association between that smell (the other cat), and something they enjoy – food! Once they are both happily eating on either side of the door you can prop the door open a tiny bit at the next meal, allowing the cats to see a little bit of each other.

* **Give kitty a place to hide.** New cats are often nervous and like to hide. Cardboard boxes or sheets draped over chairs make ideal hiding spots when you first bring kitty home. If you’ve adopted a shy cat, we recommend removing large items of furniture from the room, such as beds and dressers. It is much easier to interact with a cat hiding in a box than a cat hiding under a bed.
* **Help your new cat get to know you.** Place a t-shirt or a piece of your clothing that contains your scent in the safe room.
* **Equip the safe room with cat food, water and litter.** Place food and water on one side of the room and an open (unenclosed) litter box on the other side. Shyer cats may not eat much during the first 24 to 48 hours and may experience temporary diarrhea from stress. If your cat has not eaten in 48 hours, try some cooked chicken.
* **Give your new cat a new post.** Put a new scratching post (at least one metre tall) inside the safe room. Scratching is a natural and comforting behaviour for cats. It’s also important that the scratching post is new and has not been used by other cats. Your new cat does not want to be stressed by the smells of other cats while s/he is first adapting to his or her new surroundings.
* **Cat destresser saves the day.** If your new cat is an adult, you can use a store-bought product to destress the cat. It imitates natural cat pheromones and helps a new cat feel more comfortable.
* Give your cat some **cat toys for entertainment.** Provide toys such as mice and balls in the safe room for when you are not around.
* **Spend time with your new cat.** In the beginning, visit frequently for short periods of time. Visiting can mean interacting directly with the new cat in the form of play or petting, or quietly reading a book or chatting on the telephone in the same space as your new companion. Keep in mind that a nervous cat may growl, hiss, twitch its tails or pull its ears back. The best response is to speak softly followed by giving the cat some time alone.

**2. Swap scents:** Switch sleeping blankets, toys or beds between your cats. This will give each cat the opportunity to get familiar with the other’s smell. Using a new (unused!) cloth to rub on one pet and then putting it under the food bowl of the other pet is also a very good idea – again building that association between food and “that smell”.

**3. Switch living areas:** Making sure the cats do not meet, let the new cat spend some time exploring the house while putting the resident cat in the “new” cat’s room. This will allow the pets to get used to each other’s smell in their general environment without a face to face encounter.

**4. Avoid fearful and aggressive meetings between the cats**, so negative association builds up. If either cat becomes fearful or aggressive, you need to separate them and start from the beginning and take it slower.

**5. Introducing the cats:** When the two are quite comfortable in each other’s living spaces, you can start introducing them under supervision. Have both cats in cat boxes on either side of the room. For the first while have the crates at an angle to each other and continually feed little bits of high value kitty treats. You are not going to allow them access to each other at this stage – you are simply allowing them to habituate to the presence of the other cat. You can do this while watching television at night or while relaxing and reading a book. Only continue on to the next step when both cats are comfortable in each other’s presence and you can have them relatively close to each other in their respective boxes.

##### 6. Letting the cats go:

* **Transition beyond the safe room.** (This should not be done before 2-3 weeks in the safe room)
When you and your new cat have established a trusting relationship, the cat is ready to begin exploring the house. Be sure to begin this process when you are home to supervise. Close most of the doors so the cat begins its orientation in stages. Too many new spaces at once can be stressful and frightening. Have a barrier in the room such as a glass door or a baby gate and have the new cat on the one side with the existing cat on the other side. This step should only be done under supervision! Make sure you have one handler per cat and allow them to come out when they feel comfortable. Allow them to explore and use food treats to keep up the association of “other cat = favourite food”.
* **Ready to explore the roost.** Remember, integration into the rest of the house is dependent on the personality of your new cat (as well as your existing pets). For the integration process sometimes it is best to wait a couple weeks. Shy cats in particular may need a longer integration period.

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