

CAT-CAT INTRODUCTIONS

Bringing home a new cat is likely going to be a very fun and exciting experience for all human family members. In all the excitement it is easy to forget that your resident cat may feel differently about the new addition. It is our job to facilitate positive and rewarding introductions between our cat family members.

While we would all like our new pet to become fast friends with the resident pet, it is more realistic to expect that it may take a while for them to become buddies. Be prepared for the acclimation period to last up to one (1) month before a face-to-face greeting.

CAT SAFE ZONE

First and foremost, establish a Cat Safe Zone in your house. This is an area in your home that can be completely closed off so that your resident cat cannot access it. The room needs to have adequate space for a litterbox, food & water dishes, toys and places to hide or get up high. Ideally, the room will have a window or other source for natural light. It is important that cats are able to express natural behaviors while in the room such as jumping and scratching – as this will eliminate some of the stress associated with being isolated in this room during the acclimation period.

PHEROMONES

Consider adding a Feliway Multi-Cat diffuser in the Cat Safe Zone and in other areas of your house where the resident cat frequents. Studies have shown that these particular pheromone diffusers may assist in reducing stress levels.

DESENSITIZATION

Begin the desensitization process with scent swapping. For this exercise, you will need two (2) used, but clean socks (i.e. one that has been washed and dried). Rub one sock on your new cat's cheeks and seal it in a plastic bag. Rub another sock on your resident cat's cheeks and seal it in a plastic bag. Open the bag and allow your resident cat to smell the scented sock from your new cat. Immediately follow the sniffing with a dime-sized amount of a yummy treat, like canned chicken or tuna fish. Repeat the same process with your new cat using the sock that has the scent of the resident cat on it. Complete the scent swapping activity a minimum of three (3) times a day for 1 week.

The second part of desensitization involves feeding both your resident cat and your new cat at the same time on either side of the Cat Safe Zone door. This helps both cats associate the presence of each other with good things – food. If your cats are allowed access to dry food all day, you can do this exercise with a bit of wet food. Remember to reserve the wet food for this exercise only. It is important to monitor the body language of both cats for signs of being uncomfortable during this exercise. If either of the cats are uncomfortable, move the food dishes farther away from the door or go back to scent swapping.

The third part of desensitization involves room swapping. After one (1) week of scent swapping, switch your resident cat and your new cat for a period of one (1) to two (2) hours per day. The resident cat will go into the Cat Safe Zone and the new cat will get to explore the rest of the house. During swapping, do not allow the two cats to see or come in contact with each other.



VISUAL CONTACT

Once your new cat and resident cat are comfortable eating on either side of the Cat Safe Zone door, you can proceed with supervised visual contact. Open the door of the Cat Safe Zone just a crack – so both cats can see each other. The open space should be just wide enough that the cats can, if they wish, bat at each other with their paws. Do not open the door enough such that either cat can fit their head through it. Reward both cats with yummy treats or play for calm body language.

FACE-TO-FACE GREETING

Once your new cat and resident cat are able to “hang out” calmly next to each other on either side of the cracked door, you can proceed with a supervised face-to-face greeting. Allow both cats to move freely about. **At no point should you have your cat(s) in your arms.** Reward both cats for calm behavior with treats or play. Repeat supervised face-to-face greetings until you are confident that your cats will not fight.

PAWSITIVELY HELPFUL HINTS



Ensure you have enough litterboxes for your cat(s). The general rule of thumb is one (1) box per cat + one (1). So, if you have two cats the ideal number of litterboxes to place throughout your home is three (3).



Offer lots of low to the ground hiding places (boxes, crates, shelves) and vertical spaces (shelves on the wall, cat towers) for your cats to go to feel safe. Ideally, your cats should be able to have enough vertical space that he/she can traverse a large portion of the house without ever having to touch the floor.



If your cats are chasing, lunging, growling, hissing or biting at each other – and the above steps did not help – it’s time to call a professional for assistance.



Several short sessions are better than a few long sessions.



Always stop a session on a positive note.



If you get frustrated during a session, stop and try again later.

**Need extra help? AHS offers cat behavior consultations.
Please contact catbehavior@azhumane.org for more information.**

