

# HOW TO ACCLIMATE YOUR CAT TO ITS NEW HOME

It's very exciting to adopt a new cat! The whole family wants to get to know kitty and make a new friend. But for kitty, the process of moving into a new home can be very stressful and it can take your cat several weeks, sometimes longer, to feel comfortable. You may feel like you know your new cat very well before you leave the adoption center, but to the cat you are still a stranger and your home is completely new territory. Slowly introducing your cat into their new home can make things much less stressful for them and help you to develop a trusting relationship and a strong bond with your new cat.

## **BEFORE YOU GET HOME**

Car rides can be very scary for cats. Make sure to keep your cat safe by keeping them in a carrier all the way home. Try to avoid making any stops on the way home to keep the ride as short as possible.

## **EXPECTATIONS**

Every cat is different when adjusting to a new home. Most cats take a few weeks to fully become comfortable in a new space. When they arrive to a home, it is common for cats to spend a lot of time hiding. This may take a few hours or a few days to resolve. Many cats also try to get to high places. These cats may feel safer up high where they can survey their territory and watch for threats. It is not unusual for a new cat not to eat right away because they want to feel safe in their new environment first. If your new cat has not eaten anything at all by the end of the second day home, be sure to contact your veterinarian. You can help your cat feel comfortable eating by feeding them the same thing they were eating at the shelter and weaning them onto a new food gradually.

If you intend for your new kitty to go outside at all, be sure to keep them solely indoors for at least the first few months. This is important to give them time to bond with you and become familiar with their environment. If you adopt a kitten, they should be kept entirely indoors at least until they are fully grown, which is normally between one and two years of age.

## **SET UP A SAFE ROOM**

You will want to keep your new cat confined to a single room for at least the first day in your home so that they can gradually get used to the smells and sounds around them. During this time you will also want to keep your cat isolated from other pets (See *Introducing Your Adopted Cat to Other Pets* handouts for more details). Furnish this room with all of your cat's supplies — food and water bowls, a litter box, toys, things to scratch, and hiding places (a big cardboard box tends to work well). Make sure to place the litter box in an area where it is unlikely to be disturbed by sudden noises or movements like the washing machine.

Bring your kitty from the car, in its carrier, into its safe room and then open the door to the carrier so that they may come out on their own time. It's no big deal if you don't already have this room set up — just wait to open the carrier door until you are ready. Let your cat come to you instead of reaching for them right away, which can

be frightening. It may even be helpful to leave them alone for a while so that they can become accustomed to their new space.

Some cats will take longer than a single day to become comfortable in their safe room. If your cat is still nervous, wait until they seem more at ease before introducing them to the rest of the house. You want your cat to be openly soliciting petting, eating and drinking well, and not hiding before allowing them access to the rest of the house. How long this takes will depend on your individual cat.

Once your cat is comfortable, open the door to their safe room and allow them to explore the rest of the house at their own pace. Be sure to leave this door open so that the cat can come back to their safe place.

## **INTRODUCTIONS**

The first day, encourage family members to go into the cat's safe room one at a time and spend quiet time with kitty. This will help your cat to get used to everyone without overwhelming him or her. You may want to consider waiting to have large groups of people over to your house so that you do not scare the cat.

During the time your new cat is confined to a single room, they will have already begun to get to know any other pets by smelling and hearing them under the door. Make sure the first face to face introductions to other pets are well supervised. New cats will often hiss and swat at unfamiliar animals. This is a normal part of establishing limits and showing that they are scared. Do not leave new animals alone together for the first several days and until you have seen them interact many times and you are sure that their behavior toward one another is friendly. If you have other pets like birds, fish, or rodents, make sure these animals are well protected from your new cat, since these sorts of animals are natural prey to cats. (See Introducing Your Adopted Cat to Other Pets handouts for more details.)

Make sure that your new cat's interactions with other members of the family are as positive as possible. Do not let other pets or children chase or corner the cat. The more positive interactions your cat has with its new family, the faster they will bond with you and become comfortable in their new home.

Finally, it is always a good idea to take your new kitty to the vet for a checkup during the first week or two in their new home. This helps the cat to get familiar with the vet so that it is not such a scary place when they go back and it gives the family a great opportunity to ask any questions they may have.

Take your time getting your cat used to their new home and family members and you will be rewarded with a best friend for life.