

## How Can I Integrate Deaf Kitten Into Household?

**CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger gives guidelines to make kitten comfortable and gain acceptance from resident cats.**

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**Q:** We just adopted a deaf 8-month-old kitten. The breeder kept him in a cage most of the time, only occasionally letting him out. We are trying to integrate him into the household with two nonaggressive adult cats. The kitten only wants to hide. Given his deafness, is there anything special we can do to help calm him and let him know there is nothing to be afraid of?

**A:** In addition to introducing your deaf kitten gradually to the resident cats, you will need to slowly acclimate him to living in an area that is larger than a cage. Since this is a new and scary world for your little kitten he will need patience and gentle handling to help build a feeling of security and self-confidence.

Start by confining him in one small room, separated from the other resident cats. The room should have everything a cat needs; food, water, litterboxes, a comfortable place to sleep, toys and a secure window to look out. Also provide him with a couple of paper bags with the handles cut off. In this early stage, orient the bags with the openings at an angle to the wall so that the kitten is not exposed to the open room. This will help the kitten feel safe while being able to look out at his new world. This special room will become his safe haven and is the perfect location where you can get to know each other without interference from other resident animals.

Help him get to know you and his environment through delicious treats and spending quality time with him. Whenever you enter his room, give him a small treat. Food and gentleness will help him feel safe and increase the bonds between you. He will need time to get accustomed and feel comfortable in the larger living quarters, it may take a few days or a few weeks until your new kitten feels secure in the new environment. You will know when he's made the adjustment and is ready for the next step when he no longer hides and is easily interacting with you. As he becomes more secure, gradually change the angles of the boxes and the bags so they face more into the open room.

After he adjusts to his new room and to you, start the gradual introductions to the resident cats by using scent to help him accept your two other cats. Start with pheromone exchanges, taking clean socks or small towels and gently petting each of the cats on their cheeks. Cats have scent glands on their cheeks that produce pheromones which send out friendly messages to other cats. Exchange socks, putting the new kitten's sock in an area your two resident cats hang out and place the socks with your resident cat's pheromones in the deaf kitten's room. Repeat this twice a day, each time with a clean sock. After your kitten responds favorably to the socks, encourage other mutually enjoyable experiences by feeding the cats on each side of the closed door. The kitten should still be confined in his room. Gradually introduce other pleasant experiences, such as encouraging the cats to play under the door with each other. Proceed very slowly with the introductions, adding positive experiences only after the kitten is responding positively, without any signs of anxiety.

In addition to slowly introducing the new kitten to the resident cats, gradually introduce him to other rooms in the house after he has adjusted to his first room. Your other resident cats should not be allowed into these new rooms while your new little kitten is learning all about them. Help him feel a little more secure in the new locations by bringing a couple of items in the room which contains his scent. His bed; or a towel he likes to sleep in are good choices. If he wants to hide, provide him with his favorite paper bag from the safe-haven room.

Be patient and gentle. It will take time for your new little kitten to adjust to both your resident cats as well as his new home.