

My Cat Is Unsettled by a Move

CatChannel expert Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, offers suggestions for helping cat adjust to change.

By Marilyn Krieger

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Q: I have a 9-year-old calico female cat who is exhibiting some troublesome behavior. She is normally a very social cat. I have noticed a change in her personality over the past two months since I moved. In my previous residence she had contact with other people. My boyfriend was a fixture in her daily life. Now he is no longer a constant in her life. When he does come to visit she ignores him and fixates on me. Since moving, whenever I leave the room, she starts to "cry." She sits at the door and meows until I am back to her. She even does this when other people are with her. She is also crying at an outside door (she is an indoor cat) when I am in the same room with her. I try to give her as much love and attention as I can when I am home with her and she is rarely left alone for any length of time. She's well-cared for and is probably spoiled! I am really at a loss as to what to do. The thought of adopting another cat to act as a playmate/friend has crossed my mind, but I am fearful of her reaction, though she is normally very friendly to other cats and tries to play with them. Any assistance you could provide me would be greatly appreciated!

A: Many cats find it difficult to adjust to abrupt changes such as a new home situation and or loss of a companion or human they are bonded to. Some cats are so sensitive to change, that even bringing in a new piece of furniture or a change in their favorite person's schedule can cause them to lose their feelings of security and safety. Sometimes cats respond to stressful changes by exhibiting disturbing behaviors. Your cat is reacting to the move through her vocalizations and separation behaviors. With work, patience and consistency you can help her adjust and feel safe and secure again.

Help your calico girl through this tough time by putting her on a consistent schedule and enhancing her environment. Start by feeding her at the same times every day and doing activities with her that she enjoys on a consistent and daily basis. If she enjoys being groomed, then groom her every day at the same time. If she normally likes to play, then play with her on a schedule. Some cats love to play fetch. If she's one of these, then have fetch marathons every day at the same time. Don't force her; the activities need to be fun and enjoyable for her. Treasure hunts are also a favorite activity for cats. Hide delicious treats or dry food in cat trees, boxes or on shelves she likes to climb. Clicker training on a daily basis will also help her feel more secure and will give her a focus.

Enrich her environment. Provide her with a tall, comfortable cat tree. Place it next to a window in a room you like to be in so that she can watch the world go by while her favorite person is nearby. Have interactive toys available for her. Turbo Scratchers and puzzle boxes are examples of toys that cats usually enjoy playing with.

Your cat needs time and consistency to help her adjust to the changes. Bringing home a new playmate for her right now would increase the anxiety since introducing new cats is usually a stressful experience. I recommend waiting until your calico has settled in and adjusted to the new routine and home before introducing her to a new cat friend.