

Take Cat Introductions Easy

CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, explains why you should take it slow when introducing two cats.

By Marilyn Krieger

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Q: I recently adopted a 2-year-old male neutered cat named Linnus. I adopted him as a companion for my 2-year-old male neutered cat, Kazee. I knew that it would be a hard transition, but now I'm afraid that if I leave them alone in my apartment, one of them will kill the other. After the first hour of introductions, they got in an "alley cat" fight with all kinds of high pitched squeals, low groans, swatting and flying fur. For a normally mild-mannered cat, Kazee urinated and defecated while he was attempting to back down from the fight. They have been separated for two days, and I am really considering taking Linnus back to the shelter because Kazee now has a tendency to urinate on the carpet when he hears him through the door. What other measures can I try before taking Linnus back to the shelter?

A: Slow the introductions down! Kazee, your first cat, is having his home invaded by an unwelcome stranger without the benefit of proper introductions. Understandably, Kazee is not accepting Linnus into his house because you are trying to introduce them much too quickly. Properly introducing cats to each other can take a month or longer. During this introduction period, the cats need to be separated from each other at all times and gradually introduced in a way that encourages positive feelings between them.

Reintroduce the two cats by confining Linnus in his own room. He should have a comfortable place to sleep, food, water, litterbox and a secure window to look out of. This room will provide Linnus a sense of security and a feeling of safety while you slowly reintroduce the cats. Another added benefit is that confining Linnus will give you special time alone with him, strengthening the bonds between you.

While separated from each other, encourage Kazee and Linnus to have pleasant associations with each other. Start by exchanging scents by gently petting the cheeks of both cats with two clean socks. Exchange the socks, putting Kazee's sock in Linnus's room and Linnus's sock in a location where Kazee normally walks. Do this twice a day with fresh socks throughout the reintroduction period.

After they are accepting of each other's scent, simultaneously feed them on both sides of the closed door. Most animals find eating a pleasurable experience. Eating together, while safely separated from each other by the closed door, will promote positive feelings between the cats. They should be able to hear and smell each other enjoying delicious meals.

The next phase in the reintroduction involves having Kazee and Linnus play footsie under the closed door with each other. A double-ended toy that can be stuck under the door is perfect for this. The feeding and scent exchange activities should still continue throughout the introduction process.

Take it slow: When it is finally time for them to meet face-to-face, crack the door open just enough for formal nose greetings between the cats. After a week or so of friendly greetings, keep the door open for short, supervised visits.

Be patient and don't hurry the reintroduction process along. Cats have their own time tables, and they're usually different than ours.