

Take Introductions Slowly

A kitten needs to regain his sense of security before meeting the resident cats.

Pam Johnson-Bennett

Q: I recently adopted a 6-month-old male kitten, ClayClay, who is terrified of my 5-year-old female "queen" of the household. I've had to separate them constantly, keeping ClayClay in a bedroom and giving Miss Kitty the run of the house. When I let them out together, Miss Kitty doesn't appear to attack ClayClay, only sniffs him, but he immediately flattens his ears and growls, then hisses, and finally runs when she comes near him. ClayClay will eliminate on himself when he runs away from Miss Kitty. Is there any hope for harmony in this house?

Feline behaviorist Pam Johnson-Bennett, author of *Think Like a Cat*, says:

What you need to do is start over again. Clayclay is way too terrified right now and he needs to get a sense of safety again before you restart the introduction. When a cat eliminates all over himself during a fight or chase, he is over-the-top with fear.

Cat introductions are tricky because cats are territorial creatures and you have to respect the resident kitty's territory while at the same time creating a sense of security and safety for the newcomer. It boils down to doing a very gradual introduction where the cats see each other for mere seconds while they are getting a treat or food. This way, they start to develop a positive association with each other.

Here's the plan. Keep the cats totally separated for the next few days. Start working on building up Clayclay's confidence by conducting several interactive play sessions with him using a fishing pole-type toy. Conduct these games in his sanctuary room, then gradually start working your way out into the main part of the house. Make sure Miss Kitty has been put into another room so that Clayclay can venture out into the main part of the home without fear of being ambushed. This exercise is important for a couple of reasons. First, he needs to start gaining confidence so he won't become a victim every time he sets foot outside of the sanctuary room, and second, he needs to start spreading his scent around the house so Miss Kitty gets used to the fact that there's another cat in the home.

The next step is to have them see each other for a very brief period. They should be kept far apart from one another. If there is another family member in the home, have that person feed one cat while you feed the other cat. Just put a small amount of food in the dish or offer a treat. As soon as the cats are done eating then you separate them again. Never let them get to within swatting distance of each other and don't have the session go too long. You want to end on a positive note so it's better to do this for 30 seconds rather than try to keep them together for 10 minutes and then a fight occurs.