

Mr. Personality

With patience and gentle coaxing, you can help your kitten overcome a shy personality.

Pam Johnson-Bennett

Q: I have two new kittens. Seven-month old Angel came from a local pet store. He was outgoing and loved to be handled. About a week after we adopted him, we rescued 3-month-old Bailey, who also loves people. We go out of our way to give them equal attention. Over time Angel has become shy and now hides when people come over. These two kittens seem to be taking on opposite personalities. Is this common with cats?

Feline behaviorist Pam Johnson-Bennett, author of *Think Like a Cat*, says: The major influences of personalities have to do with:

1) Early socialization 2) The relationship between littermates 3) Current environmental factors 4) The pecking order between the companion cats

How kittens behave at a shelter or even how they behave during the "honeymoon" period when first brought home can change when they become more comfortable in the environment and start to blossom. Continue to work on helping Angel feel more comfortable. When you invite a guest over and Angel runs and hides, go to the room where he is at and conduct a very casual, low-key interactive play session. Use a soothing tone of voice and show Angel that having a guest in the other room is nothing to be concerned about. Even if Angel doesn't engage in a play session, using the toy will enable you to shift his mindset a bit from negative to positive. He's picked up much of his cues from you because cats are emotional sponges. Periodically during the guest's visit, excuse yourself to go into the other room and do another mini play session with Angel. He may even start to venture out at that point. If he does, conduct a low-key play session in the room where the guest is. Don't have the guest interact with the cat though because Angel needs to feel as if he is in control and won't be scooped up by a well-meaning guest to be cuddled or petted.