

How to Introduce a New Kitten to a Needy Kitten

Five simple tips to make the introduction go smoothly.

By Lindsey Getz

Stuart and Kayla are now best friends and, best of all, Stuart is no longer a needy kitten. (Courtesy of Monica Lindsay) Needy kittens are tricky enough with the extra attention they demand, so if you're trying to add another kitten to the family, it can seem near impossible. But some owners don't have a choice. They already have one kitten when they perhaps rescue a second or third.

Such is the case for cat owner Gayla Peterson of Louisburg, Mo., who has found many needy kittens in her barn. Training all these kittens to get along has been a challenge, she says. But according to Ilana Reisner, DVM, PhD, peace is achievable, and the needy kitten's attention demands can be fulfilled by the new kitten instead of the owner. All this is possible with just five simple tips.

"Allow the kittens to become aware of each other while safely separated," Reisner says. "This can be accomplished by separating them by a shut door and allowing them to sniff each other or even poke an arm safely into the other's space while they become acquainted through odor, sound and sight. With young kittens, separation should not be necessary for longer than one to two hours."

Reisner's recommendation is exactly what cat owner Monica Lindsay of Pennsylvania tried. "I kept them in separate rooms and introduced them under the door," she says. "There was enough room for them to see each other and touch paws."

When first introducing the kittens to each other, feed them using separate bowls at least six feet apart. This will help to defuse any tension, Reisner says.

"Allow the kittens to interact, even if there is some mild hissing or hair is puffed," Reisner says. "Worried or defensive reactions should be mild and brief. If there is any lunging or actual fighting, separate the kittens temporarily. It is not unusual to see a little bit of self-defensive behavior between two unfamiliar kittens. It is important to allow the kittens to move about the room and separate themselves at will. Chances are good that they will eventually revert to play behavior."

Lindsay, who let her first kitten Stuart have the run of the house, brought in new kitten Kayla and noticed that Stuart was a bit aggressive with her. "I ended up buying a leash for Stuart so that I could keep him from pouncing on her. This worked really well because it allowed them to get acquainted (without Kayla getting scared away)."

"If one of the kittens continues to show needy behavior, encourage play with toys and distance yourself from the kitten. Such activity is sure to attract the other kitten," Reisner says. "This will encourage the two kittens to play games separate from you."

In addition, it will help transfer the need for attention from you to the new kitten.

"Finally, provide plenty of perching, hiding and resting areas so that both kittens can explore the environment safely and

with their own preferences,” Reisner says.

Lindsey Getz is a freelance writer from Royersford, Pa. She lives at home with her husband Joe and tuxedo cat, Bailey.

In April 2007's CAT FANCY:

Check out Lindsey Getz's article on how to handle a needy kitten.