

All in the Family

Ease your new kitten into the household to avert dysfunction.

Susan Easterly

Bringing a kitten into our relatively peaceful kingdom was the last thing my family expected to do. Not unlike Noah's Ark, our two of everything children, cats, dogs and birds long ago figured out how to live together. All was calm and orderly. Then came Bucky, a rescued 6-week-old gray-and-white tabby, who soon upset the proverbial apple cart with his tiny presence. What began as a challenge with a new feline family member, however, evolved into the right choice. Now we can't imagine living without the joy Bucky brings to the mix. Adding a new kitten can be a wonderful experience for your family, too, if the transition is handled with patience, care and common sense. First, be sure to take your kitten to the veterinarian before beginning household introductions. A clean bill of health helps ensure peace of mind and the health of other family pets. The goal is to keep your kitten safe as it adjusts to its new environment and housemates human and animal while giving existing pets a sense of security.

The Right Kitten"I'm a big fan of prevention," said Myrna Milani, DVM, of Charlestown, N.H., author of "CatSmart" and a veterinary ethologist. "The family gets together and says, 'OK, what kind of cat do we want, what are our time limits and emotional and physical limits?'"If possible, choose a kitten raised in a home with qualities similar to your own, Milani said. "If you adopt a kitten from a litter that is raised with kids, dogs and parrots, you have a better chance [of success] than with a kitten housed in a cage." From the beginning, you know the kitten has been exposed to other pets and children, and the mother cat has proven she can handle an environment like yours.

"Leave your emotions at home when adding a kitten," Milani said. "Stay away from the extremes that fireball that runs up your leg and crawls all over you and the one that hangs back under the chair. Even though these qualities can tug at our heartstrings, if you're a busy parent with kids and other pets at home, you need to choose a stable pet that is going to fit as seamlessly as possible into your life."