

Hello, Kitty!

Introducing a new cat to current pets can cause tension. Learn how to ease the transition and help your pets become friends.

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We did it all wrong. Our introduction of Toby and Sammi consisted of plunking them down together and towering above them, giddily expecting adorable kitten play. Instead, they greeted each other with growls and swats. These, along with frequent bolts for safety, occurred for days. Gradually, both kittens became friends and forgave us for nearly botching their relationship from the very beginning.

We failed to take into consideration two key aspects of feline personality: Cats are territorial and resistant to change. We did it all wrong, but got very lucky.

Picky, Picky

First, you must select the right candidate. "When choosing a second cat, it's really important to match the personality and lifestyle of the first cat," says Nancy Peterson, issues specialist of The Humane Society of the United States. "If you have an older, laidback cat, he is probably not going to welcome an energetic young kitty. You might do much better with a calm cat."

Opinions vary about the roles that age and gender play, though most experts agree that temperament and energy levels are the primary considerations. Still, there's no guarantee that even the perfect candidate will bond with your existing cat.

Mikel Delgado, cat behavior specialist with the San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, emphasizes that owners should get a second cat as a companion for themselves first and for their existing cat second, in case the cats never become pals.

Its Own Room

Upon adoption, take your newcomer directly to a safe room a room dedicated solely to the new cat. Provide his litterbox, food and water dishes, bedding and toys. Open the carrier and leave the room, closing the door behind you. This gives the new cat time to explore his small territory without the added stress of encountering strangers. Over the next few days, give him lots of love and attention during brief visits, but don't force yourself on the cat.

Decrease both cats' sensory anxiety by employing products that mimic feline facial pheromones. Facial pheromones, secreted when a cat rubs his head on an object, act as markers of safe territory. "If you have that pheromone already in the environment when a new cat comes into your home, it sends a signal to his brain that it's a safe and familiar place to be," says Tammy Senter, marketing manager of Farnam Companies Inc. in Phoenix.