

Helping Abused Cat Feel Welcome

A feline behavior expert offers tips to help integrate a rescued cat into a new loving home.

Pam Johnson-Bennett

Q: I recently adopted a Siamese cat rescued from an abusive home. Ricki has been with us for about a week, and I have created a sanctuary room where he can feel safe. I want to establish a bond with him before I introduce him to my two resident cats, Buster and Cyduck. Are there changes I can make now in anticipation of Ricki's introduction but done in advance so Buster and Cyduck don't associate these changes with a new cat? Also, where do I find that line between encouraging Ricki to take new, brave steps and not pushing him too fast? He doesn't do well with me when I'm standing; to interact I must be at eye level or lower. He also doesn't like being held or being scruffed. Are there ways for me to desensitize him to being held?

Feline behaviorist Pam Johnson-Bennett, author of *Think Like a Cat*, says: You have done an amazing job so far in preparing Ricki for the introduction. What a truly kind heart you have to give this precious cat a loving home. It's not surprising that Ricki adapted well to the cats in the foster home because if he was abused by humans, it's natural that he would find a more trusting bond in other cats. With cats, at least Ricki could read and understand their body language. It's also not surprising that he is frightened if you are standing. I assume his abuser stood over him, scruffed him and hit him with objects. The poor cat has lots of emotional healing to do in order to trust humans again. It will take time and you are doing everything right. Let Ricki continue to set the pace and you'll find the bond will slowly begin to build. In addition to his history of abuse, he has also gone from home to home and that adds to his confusion. It will be a slow process but if you take baby steps with him, you'll start to see him blossom. I also think that once you start the introduction to your other two cats, Ricki may do better since he appears to be a cat's cat. It sounds as if you have prepared the main part of the home very well in anticipation of the introduction. Best, Pam Johnson-Bennett, CABC IAABC-Certified Animal Behavior Consultant

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