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Bringing Home Your New Kitten

Kittens are full of energy, excitement, and fun! Transitioning to a new home is a big step for even the most playful and outgoing kitten. Setting your kitten up for success will help minimize stress for pets and people alike.

What can I do before I bring my new kitten home?

Before your kitten comes home, make sure you have considered what the kitten will need. Be sure to provide:

- feeding and watering station, including puzzle feeders if possible
- litter stations with low sides for easy entry (at least one per level of the home)
- resting and hiding areas away from people and other pets
- vertical spaces for your kitten to explore and observe from
- scratching areas – at least two different surfaces, and both vertical and horizontal options. Consider the use of pheromone products like Feliscratch® (by Feliway) to promote appropriate scratching.
- a safe area for confinement when left home alone
- a safe pet carrier for transport incorporated into the normal living space of the cat when not in use
- consider synthetic pheromone products (e.g., Feliway® by Feliway) in resting areas



If you are bringing home one kitten or a pair into a home without other pets, the transition should be simple. Many shelters and adoption agencies highly recommend adopting littermate kittens for the best rate of success.

If you have other pets, make sure to prepare your home in advance for the option of providing pets with their own private areas during the initial stages to prevent stress and promote peaceful gradual introductions.

If you have the option to visit and meet your kitten before bringing him or her home, ask if you can bring along a soft piece of fleece or hand towel when you visit. Stroke the new kitten with the fleece or hand towel, then bring this item home with you. Allow your existing pets to investigate the fabric which now carries the special scent of their soon-to-be family member. If your existing pets show no signs of fear or conflict when investigating, leave the fabric near their resting place to begin creating a community scent before the arrival of your new kitten.

How should I prepare for the ride home?

Kittens should be placed in a carrier for all car travel for safety and security. Line the inside of the carrier with a non-slip lining and soft bedding. If possible, place a small piece of bedding from your kitten's current home in the carrier as well. Carriers can be treated with synthetic pheromone products to help reduce stress.

Carry the carrier from the bottom rather than the handle to minimize swinging and give a feeling of comfort and security. Place the carrier on a seat and secure with a seat belt. Cover the carrier with a towel. Make sure the temperature of the vehicle is comfortable and consider playing calming music during the ride.

How should I introduce my kitten to my home?

When you arrive home, bring the carrier carefully into the home. If you have other pets, put them in a separate area at first. In a quiet part of the home where the kitten can easily find litter and food, put the carrier on the floor, fold back the towel covering, and open the door. Allow the kitten to exit and explore at his or her own pace. It is normal for your kitten to come and go from the carrier, cautiously explore, and begin to learn about the environment. If your kitten is reluctant to leave the carrier, be patient. You may need to leave the room, close the door, play calming music, and give it time. Allow kittens to take their time getting ready to explore.



How should we introduce everyone in the family to our new kitten?

Most kittens will be ready to explore and start settling in relatively quickly. Remember this is a big transition, so go at your individual kitten's pace to prevent them from feeling overwhelmed or becoming fearful in this new home environment.

Most kittens love food and will readily eat small amounts of soft food frequently. Canned food is healthful for cats, and kittens should become accustomed to eating different textures of food rather than only kibble from an early age if possible. Learning to take food from humans as treats is a valuable life skill for every kitten to make training easier as well!

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Give your kitten an opportunity to interact with each human member of the household in a safe way. Move calmly, allow the kitten to come to you, and protect the kitten from rough handling from children if necessary. Using toys to invite the kitten to chase or play, or delivering a small snack is a great way to help introduce family members to the new kitten.

Once your kitten is comfortable with the human members of the family, it might be time to begin introductions between your kitten and other pets.

When can I introduce my kitten to our other cats in the house?

Introducing a new kitten into a home with existing adult cats can be tricky. The natural social structure of cats is built around family units, so care is needed to incorporate the new family member successfully. Integration can take a few days, a few weeks, or a few months depending upon the individual characteristics of the cats involved.

What you will need before you begin:

- Two home-base areas including resting, feeding, water, and litter stations
- One adult per cat during interaction periods whenever possible
- Tasty treats or special toys the individual cats really enjoy

Start by allowing the cats to live separately, but rotating some bedding or other materials carrying each cat's scent into the other cat's space once a day. When you put down the rotated bedding, place a few delicious treats near the bedding or play with your cat's favorite toy near the bedding. Watch for the cats to calmly investigate the other cat's scent, and rub, knead, or ignore these items. If you notice the cats acting worried about the rotated items (e.g., hair standing up, arched back, batting, hissing, or attacking the item), it may help to have a professional coach you through the rest of this process.

Once the cats are comfortable with rotated items, consider rotating their home base areas for an hour or two each day. Offer each cat a few delicious treats in the new space and play with their favorite toy. After rotating home bases is successful and both cats appear relaxed, consider allowing the cats to meet through a baby gate, screen, or cracked door. Watch for signs of stress. It is normal for the cats to hesitate or approach with caution. If you see signs of fighting, seek assistance from an experienced professional.

"If the protected meetings go well, begin allowing the cats to share space under supervision."

If the protected meetings go well, begin allowing the cats to share space under supervision. When the cats see one another or encounter one another, provide each cat with wonderful special treats or their favorite toy. If this continues to go smoothly, the cats can most likely share space unsupervised. The cats will develop a relationship over time which can range from ignoring one another up to sleeping together, grooming one another, or playing together. These are normal and acceptable outcomes. If you see signs of stress or fighting, pause and consult a professional for more advice.

When can I introduce my kitten to my dog?

Some kittens are naturally more comfortable with dogs than others. Some dogs are naturally more welcoming of cats than others. If you know your dog has a history of chasing cats, take extra care during introductions.



What you will need before you begin:

- A home–base area for the kitten which the dog cannot access including food, water, litter, and hiding areas
- One adult per pet during interaction periods whenever possible
- A carrier for the kitten
- A leash and harness or well–fitted regular flat collar for the dog (no choke, prong, or electric collars, etc.)
- Tasty treats or special toys the individual pets really enjoy

Rotating bedding is a good place to start with dog–cat introductions much like with cat–cat introductions. Monitor the kitten’s response to the odor of the dog, and vice–versa. If both pets appear relaxed, protected introductions can come next.

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Begin by having the kitten in the home–base area behind a baby gate or similar see–through but secure barrier. The dog should be wearing a leash and harness. Allow the dog to approach and investigate the kitten at the doorway for 1–2 seconds. Provide both the kitten and the dog with tiny, delicious treats at this point, then move the dog further away. Repeat this process several times a day until both the dog and kitten appear relaxed or even happy and curious.

Another option is to place the kitten in his or her carrier with some delicious treats on a high surface such as a counter or shelf. Walk the dog on a leash nearer to the carrier, allow them to sniff the air, and provide treats. Never allow the dog to put his nose up to the carrier or stand over it, since the kitten has no way to escape if confined in this way.

If you see signs of fear or aggression from either the kitten or the dog, seek professional in–person guidance to complete the introduction process.

If the protected introductions go well, allow the kitten into the dog’s living area under supervision while the dog is wearing a leash and harness. Each time the kitten and dog notice the other, they should both be provided with tiny, delicious treats or a special toy. This helps create positive emotions of happiness associated with the other pet approaching.

If the supervised interactions are going smoothly, each pet can be allowed to have progressively more freedom in the presence of the other. Make sure kittens always have a safe way to quickly get out of reach of a dog. Also, interrupt any inappropriate play such as the kitten stalking, pouncing on, swatting, or biting at the dog as these interactions can become dangerous for one or both pets if uninterrupted.

Can I train my kitten?

Cats are very smart and are learning all the time. Training your kitten to come when called, walk on a harness and leash, go to a place like their bed or a mat, and even into their carrier are all possible! Cats respond best to positive reinforcement training without the use of scolding and by providing plenty of treats and play for desired behaviors.

Many cities offer Kitten Kindergarten classes where cats can learn to travel, be trained, allow grooming, and have appropriate social behavior.

What about grooming, nail care, and brushing my kitten's teeth? When should I start that?

Cats benefit from regular handling, grooming, nail care, toothbrushing, and more. As soon as your cat is comfortable with all members of the household, begin training for handling and husbandry. Pair gently picking up the kitten, brushing the kitten, learning how to take pills and medications, and other forms of handling with tiny, delicious treats and special favorite toys so they learn to love this kind of special attention. Go slowly at the kitten's pace and enjoy raising a kitten who becomes a cat that is easy to groom, care for, and take care of both at home and in the veterinary setting.

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