

Cats need to adjust to living together

Cats don't always get along with each other. Some are buddies, some get along at certain times, some never want to interact, and others have all-out wars.



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This can be true whether or not the cats are siblings, or if they are strangers brought together by an owner. We humans have the luxury of choosing our friends. Our cats don't have that option; we expect them to get along with whomever we choose.

When relationships between cats don't go smoothly, this creates an unhappy environment for the owners and the cats.

Several readers have submitted questions asking about how to get their cats to get along. One reader wrote:

"I have two rescued cats. One is about 7 years old and the other is 1.5 years old. They were not found together. We've had the older one since she was a year old. The younger one has been with us 6 months. They don't like each other. The older one, Julia, doesn't give the younger kitty, Kiana, the time of day. Kiana tries to attack the older one nearly every day. They have both started peeing on our couches and carpet, and it's nearly impossible to control. Any idea why or what we can do?"

One of the most important aspects of getting two cats to get along is a proper introduction period. Often owners don't have a transition plan for introducing the cats, and put them together, hopeful they are going to get along. This is almost always a mistake.

Here are some suggestions on repairing the damage:

Start over with a new introduction.

The American Association of Feline Practitioners

recommends:

- When introducing a new cat, initially isolate it in a separate room with its own food, water, litter box and toys. This allows each cat to gradually adjust to the scent and sounds of the other cat.
- Once a veterinarian has deemed the cats healthy, limited interaction may occur under the door.
- Continue the gradual introduction by exchanging bedding between cats, and rubbing a cloth around one cat's mouth and leaving that cloth in the other cat's space, or rubbing a cloth alternatively on each cat.
- As cats start to exhibit curiosity about each other, reward friendly behavior with treats and praise.

When it's time to meet.

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- First time: Have one cat in a carrier and allow the other cat to approach.
- Feeding the cats at the same time can reduce stress as well.
- Gradually allow cats to walk around and sniff each other.
- Continue to reward friendly behavior.
- Increase supervised time together.
- Do not leave the cats together unsupervised until several supervised interactions without aggression have occurred.

The process of introducing a new cat may take several weeks. Older cats may need a quiet space away from kittens for an extended period of time. Friendly, well-socialized cats may adapt to each other rapidly. Pheromonal products may ease the introduction, but should be used in conjunc-

tion with gradual introduction, the AAFP says.

There are situations where owners have reintroduced cats, given them several weeks to adjust, and problems still exist. When this occurs, you need to consult with your veterinarian to see if there are other behavior modification techniques that might help your situation. Anti-anxiety medication or herbal calming remedies might help in these situations.

Julia and Kiana need to become reacquainted using the recommendations cited. Areas where house-soiling has occurred need to be thoroughly cleaned with an enzymatic cleaner such as Urine Off.

Tips for keeping "the spray" away.

- Temporarily cover couches and other furniture with plastic drop cloths to prevent more damage from urine.
- Areas of carpet where they have urinated need to become less attractive by using solid air fresheners or upside down pieces of carpet runner.
- Alternatively, these areas can be where extra food or toys are placed. The goal is to prevent elimination on the carpet and couches – either repel the cats from these areas or make them pleasant for another activity.

Julia needs some vertical escape space where she can go and be left alone. Kiana also needs to be engaged in active play for at least 5 minutes twice daily with her owners so she doesn't feel the need to pursue Julia for amusement.

The longer conflict goes on between cats, the harder the problem is to solve. If you are not making progress with peaceful cohabitation between your cats, seek advice from a veterinarian who is interested in feline behavior, or consult with an animal behaviorist.

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