

How To Introduce Your New Kitten To An Older Cat

Transitioning from only child to sibling can be tough. Learning to not only share your space, but your parent's love and attention can take some getting used to — and the same goes if you have whiskers and fur.

Pet parents wondering [how to introduce a new kitten to a cat](#) will find it's not a process that can be rushed. Portabella was not too keen on having a new furry playmate to contend with, so Fleck turned to her colleagues at the [American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals](#) (ASPCA) for advice.

“After five years of Portabella being the only pet in the home, I knew it wasn't going to be a quick and easy adjustment, but I was committed to making it work,” Fleck, media and communications manager at ASPCA, tells The Dodo. “Among many suggestions and recommendations, ‘patience’ was the most important. Successfully introducing two cats, in many cases, is not going to happen overnight.”

Introducing a new kitten to an older cat should be done slowly and with care, explains Christina Lee, animal behavior counselor for the [ASPCA's Anti-Cruelty Behavior Team](#).

Separate the cat and kitten, at least at first

Before bringing their new kitten home, pet owners should create a separate “territory” for each cat, complete with everything they need. “Owners should designate a separate room that can be closed off for the new cat — an unoccupied bedroom or a bathroom are good options,” Lee advises. “The new cat should have its own litter box, bedding, toys, and water and food bowls in its room.” This initial part of the process should last for at least a few days, but can sometimes continue for weeks or even months, notes Lee, “depending on how the introductions go.”

As the cats acclimate to the new situation, it's important to watch out for signs of stress and anxiety, notes [Dr. Sheila Segurson](#) in a release by the [Best Friends Animal Society](#). These signs can include “hiding, aggressive behavior, decreased appetite, and/or excessive vocalization” and if they continue for more than a week or so.

One way to help your cat through this transition is with consistency. “Try to keep as many aspects of the resident cat's routine in place so that the resident cat does not get too stressed out. Avoid making too many changes at once,” Lee adds.

Get your cat used to the kitten's scent (and vice versa)

Once both cats seem comfy and cozy in their new spaces, they can start getting to know each other in a passive manner. “This means the cats should be able to hear and smell each other, but not see or touch each other,” Lee explains. A few ways to get them used to each other's presence is by setting up a dinner date for the two of them, feeding them at the same time on either side of the closed door. This helps them associate tasty food with the presence of the other cat, Lee notes. Pet owners can also play with the cats on either side of the closed door, encouraging them to paw at the space underneath the door (which may evolve into positive play with each other down the road).

I suggest using socks or articles of clothing and rubbing each pet and then give it to the other and vice versa, so they can become accustomed to each other's scent. Cats gather an astounding amount of information about the world and each other with a single sniff. “Cats have glands in their [cheeks that produce pheromones](#),” or you can gently rub a towel on their resident cat's cheek and then bring it into the other room, and rub it on their kitten.

Introduce them visually

If passive introductions go smoothly, the two cats can finally get a look at what's behind the door — at a distance, that is.

Lee recommends setting up a baby gate in place of a closed door as a comforting barrier. “Play with or give yummy treats to each cat while on either side of the baby gate and recruit a family member or friend to help you so that both cats are occupied,” Lee says. “When the cats seem relaxed after these exercises, you can allow them to be near each other without a barrier.”

Allow for some supervised playtime

Start off with short sessions and gradually increase the amount of time they are together. However, if either of the cats seems stressed or displays aggressive behavior (hissing, growling, swatting), take a step back in the process. Under no circumstance should the owner let the cats “fight it out,” Lee says. “Keep in mind that the introduction can take anywhere from a few days to many months so go at your cats' pace!”

If the two cats are having positive experiences while within proximity to one another, they're learning to coexist and — hopefully — see the other cat as less of a threat.

Of course, positive reinforcements of good behavior always help. “After a few minutes of the two-spending time near one another like this, I’ll be sure to give them a treat to reward the good behavior!” Make sure the cats always have a place to escape to, like a shelf that’s too high for the kitten to get to, so she can observe what’s going on in peace.”

Know that it’s going to take time — and that’s OK

“The slower you go the better,” Lee notes. “However, there is a chance that cats will merely learn to live with each other and share the same house.” If you run into serious issues along the way and need extra help, reach out to your local vet or shelter.”