



Issue: Introducing Cats to Children

Bringing a new pet home is an amazing experience, and the introduction process is an important part of it all, especially if there are kids living in the home.

The first day in your home may be stressful for your new pet. Since cats often don't like change, we recommend giving them a few days to adjust in a separate room with food, water, bed, toys and a litter box. It might be difficult for children to contain their excitement with the addition of a new feline in the home, so try limit the number of interactions between the children and the cat for the first day. Our goal is to limit stress for your cat as they're adjusting to their new home.

Please see "**Decompression Period**" and "**New Home Adjustment Period**" flyers for more information.

The best time to conduct introductions is after the cat has settled. We recommend discussing and preparing the children beforehand so that they understand the basics of having a cat, cat body language and the importance of letting the cat choose when and how to interact.

Supervise Interactions

Monitoring interactions will help to avoid unnecessary incidents between your children and the new cat. It'll also give you the opportunity to teach your children the meaning of different body postures and the appropriate ways to approach, pet and handle the cat.

Allow the cat to make the first move. Cats don't enjoy being forced to do things and it may cause them stress. You can give the children high value treats to encourage the cat to approach them. We want all child-cat interactions to be positive and rewarding for both human and pet, so give your cat lots of treats and toys when playing gently with the child, offering lots of breaks and time to be alone in between visits. This will build a positive association between them if it is done on a regular basis.

Teach the children how to gently pet the cat on the head and body. Start with the head, as many cats are more comfortable having their head (forehead, cheeks, under the chin, and corners of the lips) petted and scratched than having their body touched.

Lessons on Body Language

Look for signs of discomfort the cat may display and end the interaction whenever the cat doesn't appear to be enjoying the attention anymore. Some signs of distress include tail flicking, leaning away, retreating, ears tilting sideways, lip licking, puffy tail, hissing, growling, lifting paws in a non-playful way, etc. If your cat is showing signs of discomfort, you may still offer them treats so that the interaction ends on a positive note.

Please see our "***Feline Body Language***" flyer for more information.

Hiding Spots and Vertical Space

Introduce your children to your new cat in a large space and provide places for the cat to hide so that they have options to retreat if they feel overwhelmed. Make sure the cat has a safe place they can go when they want to be alone, and that the children understand that when the cat is in these special spots, that is their alone time and not play time. Everyone needs a space to call their own!

Since most kids enjoy running around and playing, it is imperative to provide your cat with high spaces around the house where they can go to decompress whenever they feel overwhelmed. Having vertical space will allow your cat to still be a part of the action, but at a higher vantage point where they feel more comfortable. This will help prevent defensive behaviors from the cat and will give them the option to retreat if your cat feels like they are in a threatening situation.

Play Therapy

Be sure to provide your cat with play time. Whenever a cat is able to capture their toy, it relieves stress and helps them feel more confident. This is a sure way to build a positive bond between children and your cat. We recommend using wand toys to prevent the cat from learning that it's okay to play with human-hands and being rough with skin.

With these recommendations, a patient approach, and a few guidelines in place, we hope your children and your cat(s) will have a long, playful, "zoomie" filled life together.

For more information:

International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants: m.iaabc.org

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists: corecaab.org