



Issue: Putting Best Paws Forward (Re-introducing Cats)

Having two cats that aren't getting along can be frustrating for cat owners. You may have tried everything to help them make peace, but all your attempts have been unsuccessful so far and you're at your wits end. If they can't seem to co-exist in the home and have gotten into altercations, it may be time to separate and re-introduce them. Although this may seem daunting, re-introducing cats with the correct techniques, patience and mindset will help ease your cats back into co-existing with one another and possibly even becoming buddies!

What is re-introduction?

Separating and re-introducing cats will help your cats "reset", as if it's their first time meeting each other. It's difficult to help cats get along if they've already had multiple negative experiences with each other, so separating them will allow them to readjust on their own without the stressor (the other cat) and get back to normal. Without separation, attempts to help them make peace can feel counterproductive since both cats may feel on edge. If they both continue to clash with each other, both cats may also risk severe injuries.

The time it takes to re-introduce your cats varies by the level of aggression that was displayed, how much time is dedicated to help them adjust and how receptive both cats are. Make sure to not rush your cats, instead going at the cats' pace to ensure an ideal outcome.

Getting Started on Re-introduction

First, separate both cats by creating a sanctuary room for one of them. This room will have all of the cat's necessities like food, water, litter box, some toys, a scratching post and a place to nap. It'll also work if your home allows them to be separated so each cat has their own territory without confining one to a room. During the separation period, it's important that the cat in the sanctuary room doesn't feel like they're being punished. Continue to play and interact with the cat in the sanctuary room to make the experience as comfortable and pleasant as possible.

Our goal is to give both cats a reason to like each other, so the behavior modification steps you take once they are exposed to each other again is what will make a difference. They need to see that good things happen whenever the other cat is around, creating a positive association. Food is a great tool to bribe your way into a cat's heart, so we'll use it to help both cats accept each other too!

Feed both cats by placing their food bowls on both sides of the closed sanctuary door. Place the bowls at a distance where they're able to eat at ease without becoming reactive. They're most likely aware that there's a cat behind the door. Once they start to become more comfortable, you can gradually move the food bowls closer to the door.

Scent Swapping

Before we start to open the door for meal time, be sure to give them both time to explore each other's space. Cats use scent as a communication tool, so while your cats are separated it is important that both their scents are dispersed around the home. To make sure their scents are fresh, you can swap rooms for both cats periodically. To do this, temporarily place the cat that had free roam of the home in a separate room, and then allow the cat in the sanctuary room out to distribute their scent around the home. Then you can bring the other cat into the sanctuary room to do the same thing.

Try to make this experience as positive as possible, and reward them with treats if you see positive reactions you want to see more of. If they seem to be sniffing the other cat's bed, for instance, give them a treat so they build a positive association to the other cat's scent. It'll help to have a family member assist you with the other cat.

Fine Feline Dining for Two

If your cats seem to be doing well with feeding with the door closed and scent swapping, you can start cracking the door open and try feeding them on opposite sides. Your cats should be able to see one another, but at a distance so neither of them feels threatened. Use high value food both cats enjoy a lot and keep these feeding sessions brief to ensure these feeding sessions end on a positive note and avoid pushing them past their tolerance threshold.

Once both cats appear to be doing well eating in the presence of the other, you can try opening the door all the way. If you're unsure about moving to this step, it's okay to stay in the previous step a bit longer. You don't want to rush the process because our end goal is to make sure the cats' relationship is positive (or neutral in the least). You can put up a temporary screen door or a baby gate if you're worried about one of the cats charging. This will allow the cats to see each other, but they won't be able to get into a physical altercation. Remember to close the door after each feeding session is completed. If your cats start to become more relaxed, you can gradually give them both

more food so the sessions last a bit longer, and then you can allow them to wander around a little.

As you're increasing the time the cats are able to be around one another without a barrier, be sure to have treats handy to reward behavior you want to see more of, even if it's something small like making eye contact with the other cat. You can also reward for absence of unwanted behavior, like walking by the other cat without hissing or swatting. These sessions should continue until both cats appear unphased by the other.

Play Therapy

Playtime helps cats feel more confident in their surroundings. Playing using wand-type toys (also called fishing pole toys) will allow them to have positive experiences while also being around one another. Ask for help from a family member so both cats have the chance to play and they don't feel the need to compete for the toy or cause them to feel intimidated by each other. A cat that has been played with and then fed is a cat that has gone through their natural predatory "hunt, kill, and eat" cycle and will most likely have less energy to direct onto the other cat.

Environmental Enrichment

Look around your home to see if you can do anything to improve both cats' sense of security. Be sure to provide them with low, medium, and high hideaways. Supply cat tents or other boxes and beds that a cat can retreat to if they need it. Adding additional cat trees or shelving will give your cats the option to survey their surroundings from above, giving them peace of mind and confidence. It's much harder to ambush a cat from up high since they have a higher vantage point. These spaces will also give the cats the option of avoid crossing paths with another cat.

Check out our "***Environmental Enrichment***" flyer for more information on how to enrich your cats' lives at home.

Keeping the Peace

Meal time should always be provided in separate bowls. People may assume cats are getting along because they're willing to eat close together, but this may actually cause them stress if they're forced to eat in close proximity because there's only one food location. If one of the cats eat too quickly and is pushing the other cat out of their bowl, it may be best to feed both cats in separate locations in the home.

Reduce the competition and instinct towards territorial behaviors between the cats by creating easy access to resources. They should each have separate litterboxes, beds, perches, and scratching posts too. This will help all cats feel more comfortable and prevent potential bullying or fighting since they won't need to compete for them

anymore. Make sure these resources are placed in various places around the home so they're easily accessible.

You can also use a pheromone spray or diffuser like Feliway or Feliway Multi Cat to help calm and reduce stress! Find more information at <https://www.feliway.com/us>

Related flyers: *"Introducing Cat to Cat"*

Resources:

<https://www.catbehaviorassociates.com/8-tips-for-easing-tension-between-cats>

For more information:

International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants: <https://m.iaabc.org>

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists: <http://corecaab.org>