**Introducing/Reintroducing Cats**

In this article we will look at how to introduce a new cat to a home with existing cats and/or reintroducing cats that needed to be separated.

**Step 1-Isolation**-Isolate the cats from each other for as long as needed. The longer they are isolated from each other, the more likely you will have success in the next steps. Ensure that all cats are getting plenty of attention and playtime. You can alternate the areas in which they are confined so that they get used to being in all areas of the home without the other cat(s) present. Switch their bedding so they get used to each other's smells. Do not move on to the next step until all the cats are showing calm, relaxed behaviour.

**Step 2-Positive Associations**-Try this when the cats are likely to be hungry (for most cats this is morning and evenings).

* Use a sturdy baby gate (three to four feet high) in the doorway of the room where one cat is separated. Cover the gate with a sheet so they cannot see each other. Have their favourite treats or food ready.
* Remove the sheet for a moment or two until the cats see each other. In a happy voice say "Good Cats!" and toss them all a treat, then cover the baby gate again with the sheet. This is easier to do with two people but one person can accomplish this.
* Repeat this activity 5-10 times in a row, a few times a day. If you see that the cats are not reacting to the presence of the other cat(s) and are eating the treats, you can gradually increase the amount of time that they see each other.
* Once this process is going well, start giving the cats their meals on opposite sides of the gate. You can give them more frequent but smaller meals each day so that you have more opportunities for this activity. Start by feeding them at a distance from each other, if this goes well, (if they focus on eating their food and not each other), reduce the space between their food dishes. Always monitor them during this time.
* The point of this stage is to get the cats to associate each other with good things (treats and food), so they don't go into attack or flight mode.

**Step 3-Play**-Once step two is going well, you can begin to play with the cats at the same time. The best type of toy for this is the fishing rod toy which has a three foot string and some feathers attached to the string. You don't want the cats to use the same toy, so have one toy in each hand or ask someone else to assist you.

* First, play with them while you stand next to the gate so the cats are near each other but still separated.
* Keep the play sessions short.
* Always stop the play on a good note (before there are any negative interactions) and reward the cats with a treat.
* Once things are going well, gradually increase the amount of time you play with them.
* After some time, if the cats enjoy the play and do not react negatively to each other, you can begin to play with the cats, still using two toys, but without the gate in the way.

**Step 4-Supervised Time**-By step four, the cats are able to eat and play near each other in peace. At his point, you can give them supervised time together without a barrier. During this time, you must be vigilant, at the slightest indication of potential bullying (stalking or hard-staring), you should distract and redirect the cats by showing them the fishing rod toy or some other toy or treats that you now will effectively distract them. This is crucial, you must be prepared to distract and redirect any potential aggression. continue the play with the cats and end their time together on a good note by giving treats. Gradually extend the amount of time that you allow the cats to be in the same area under close supervision. It will likely take some time to get to the point where the cats can be unsupervised, but it's well worth going slow with the introduction or reintroduction.

**When Do Cats Need to be Reintroduced to Each Other Slowly?**

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| Reintroduction Needed | Reintroduction Not Needed |
| If the cats don't relax around each other, one or more becomes agitated and hisses or growls when they see each other. | The cats might show signs of agitation, but they tolerate each other. They engage in their normal activities although they might keep their distance. |
| One or more cats routinely attacks the other; there's already been an injury or it's a major concern. You've ruled out play aggression (see article on aggression in cats). | One or more cats is being play aggressive.   * The aggressor sometimes shows relaxed, appropriate behaviour with the other cat, especially during midday when the cats tend to be less active. If the "attacking" happens primarily in the morning and evening, but not during midday, there is a good chance the behaviour is play aggression. * If the aggressor is under-stimulated, there's a good chance it's just play aggression |
| One or more cats has withdrawn, often hiding and showing other signs of stress (e.g. poor appetite, vomiting, avoidance of the litter box). | The cats show signs of affection occasionally (e.g. lying near each other, grooming each other, playing together). |

N.B. One helpful "trick" we have learned is that cats tend to be attracted to the scent of vanilla. When you are introducing or reintroducing cats you can try putting a small dab of vanilla extract at the back of the head and base of the tail of all cats in the home. This gives them a scent in common as well as it being a positive association.