



Adopting a Shy Cat

Fearful to Cheerful

If the cat you've fallen in love with is the shy, quiet type, it may be surprising and disappointing to discover behavior such as hiding, hissing, growling, or even striking out once you get her home. These are the tell-tale signs of a frightened cat.

Cats can be fearful or shy based on genetic tendencies, and/or because of limited socialization during their prime socialization period as kittens. Some cats who are fearful in a shelter setting, may not be



fearful once they settle in your home. Others, especially those who missed some crucial socialization as kittens, will likely bond to you and one or two other people, but be scared of strangers. They may always remain timid in new situations, but can become very loving, bonded companions given time and attention.

First Days Home

- Shy cats usually do better in quieter, low-traffic homes than bustling households with small children. Sudden movement and constant loud noise can quickly send a shy cat running for safety under the bed.
- Rather than letting your new cat have immediate run of the house, confine her to one room, a safe place where she can adjust to the new environment gradually.
- Create a cozy atmosphere in your cat's safe room with all her new belongings: bed, water, food, litter box, toys, cubbies, etc. This will help her become acclimated to your home.

As your cat begins to feel comfortable, slowly introduce her to the rest of the house. She should be:

- Eating well and using the litter box
- Allowing and enjoying petting from you
- Approaching you for attention, even if it is only when you are sitting down

If signs of fear or regression occur, simply return your cat to her safe, one-room sanctuary for a few days.

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Building a Beautiful Friendship

- Speak in a soft, gentle voice around your cat and move slowly, avoiding quick movements. Make an effort to be on her level by quietly sitting with her on the floor or chair and relaxing for a while, so she feels more comfortable with you.
- Never attempt to pull your cat from a hiding space, as this will only increase her fear and possibly result in a warning swat or bite. Be patient and wait for her to come to you when she is ready.
- Just like dogs, cats can be food motivated. Using treats or food while handling or interacting with your cat can help her see you in a more positive light.
- Interactive playtime with toys: Playtime can build confidence for fearful cats, and can be a good bonding tool for a cat who may not enjoy being petted yet. In addition, all cats need playtime, and it is a great form of exercise! You will want to start with a quiet interactive toy such as a cat dancer or shoelace (avoid toys with bells, or larger toys, at first) and start playing at a distance from your cat. A few feet away is a good start. If she shows interest, you can move closer. If she acts more scared, try again a few days later, or change your play style. Remember to never pet your cat with the toy! Toys should mimic prey! Subtle movements are best. Lots of shy cats like to play at night, alone, so make sure she has safe toys to play with, such as balls and toy mice.

Meeting Your Other Pets

Introductions with resident cats can be started a few days after your new cat arrives, as long as your resident cat and new cat are willing.

You can begin by “scent exchange”- swapping toys for instance. Then you can try wedging the door slightly open (don’t let the new kitty out!) and seeing how the cats react to each other.

As your new kitty gets comfortable in the home (according to above individual timeline), they can have short sessions together, always paired with yummy treats/canned food, and interactive cat wand toys.

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