

## **BEHAVIOUR SERIES No. 2:**

### **INTRODUCING A NEW CAT TO A HOUSE WITH A RESIDENT CAT OR CATS**

*Please remember that this advice sheet is for information only and should be used in conjunction with advice from your veterinary surgeon. A full feline behavioural service is available at Cat's Whiskers Veterinary Clinic - please contact the clinic to arrange a home visit.*

Before introducing a new cat, it is important to think about whether your existing cats will accept it:

- Is your cat sociable with other cats?
- If you have more than one cat, do they get on well with each other?

In a multicat household there can be tension between cats which doesn't escalate to fighting (stare offs or stand offs). Cats which belong to the same social group will greet each other, rub against each other, groom each other and sleep together. If you have more than one cat and they are not sociable with each other, adding another cat is very likely to increase the stress for all the cats and increase the risk of stress related behavioural problems developing. If they are under stress already they are not likely to accept a new cat. Their existing problems should take priority.

If you don't introduce your new cat in the right way there is a high chance of fighting and long term problems between the cats such as spraying and aggression. In most cases where aggression has developed there will be no going back and rehoming the aggressive cat will be the best option for all concerned.

It is essential that you DO NOT RUSH the introductions. The process will take weeks and can take up to 2 months to ensure long term harmony.

To ensure the best possible chance of compatibility, I recommend the following cat pairings or groups (from best to worst):

#### **BEST**

- Kittens from the same litter
- Unrelated kittens (under 7 weeks old)
- Queen with her own kittens
- Adult cat with unrelated kitten (must follow advice below)
- Adult cats of opposite sexes (must follow advice below even if introducing both cats to the household at the same time)
- 2 adult neutered male cats (must follow advice below even if introducing both cats to the household at the same time)

#### **WORST**

- 2 adult neutered female cats (must follow advice below even if introducing both cats to the household at the same time)

In fact if you are unable to follow the advice below (due to lack of time or layout of home does not allow it) I would recommend that you DO NOT introduce a new cat to your existing cats, wait until your existing cat has died and then get 2 kittens.

## **GENERAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE ARRIVAL OF A NEW CAT**

- Ensure that the home environment provides an abundance of the things the cats need (high resting places, hiding places, toys, scratch posts, food and water bowls in separate locations, 1 litter tray per cat + 1 spare). For further information see the handout on environmental enrichment.
- The resident cats should be provided with several extra places to get food, as well as places to drink and extra places to rest and hide. Provide them with a Feliway® diffuser to increase their sense of security.
- Start with the new cat in its own room, containing a litter tray, food, water and several comfortable places to rest and hide. If possible install a Feliway® diffuser in this room (available from your veterinary surgeon) a few days before arrival, to make it seem more familiar and secure for the new cat.
- Allow the new cat to become completely confident in this new room and with all members of the family before allowing it out of this place. This may take a week or more. The cat should be eating, resting, playing and approaching people normally and without signs of fear.
- The cats are then introduced to each other through series of gradual steps, which should start only once the new cat is fully settled into its own room.

### **Stage 1: Scent introduction**

- Prepare several disposable cloths, each labelled with one cat's name.
- Use each labelled cloth daily to collect the scent from the face and sides of the body of the cat with whose name it has been labelled. Do this each day. The cloths must not be mixed up and should be stored separately in plastic bags or wallets to prevent scent transferring between them.
- Whenever a person goes to greet, feed or play with the new cat it should be briefly presented with the cloth belonging to one of the resident cats to smell and investigate. The cloth should be wrapped around the person's hand. Initially the cat may seem unhappy (it may back away, hiss or freeze). At this stage, it is important not to force contact as the cat may become aggressive.
- If there are multiple cats in the household then the resident cats should be presented with the new cat's smell in the same way, and the new cat with odours from each of the cats in the home.
- With repeated presentation of the scent on the cloths each cat should come to ignore the smell and should start to react positively to it by rubbing against the hand wrapped in the cloth. When all cats are reacting in this way it is time to move on to Stage 2.

### **Stage 2: Scent swapping**

- After collecting the odour from the cats in the usual way (from face and flanks), the cloths should be put together in a single bag so that scent from them mixes.
- This combined scent is then used in the same way as in Stage 1.
- Once you can see that there is a positive reaction to this combined scent you can mark yourself with the mixed scent by rubbing the cloth on your clothes - especially your legs. This way, when the cats greet they will pick up the combined scent when they rub against you to say hello. The cloth should also be rubbed against objects that the cats usually rub against, such as furniture and doorways.
- As long as each cat accepts being rubbed with the scent from the others you can move to using a single cloth for rubbing the cats to collect their scent.
- Once all cats are accepting this new odour and are actively rubbing against the cloth and the other objects that have been marked with the cloth then it is time to move on to Stage 3.

### **Stage 3: Allowing the new cat to explore**

- The new cat should be allowed to explore the rest of the house while the resident cats are excluded or shut into a separate room. This allows the new cat to learn all of the hiding and escape places so that, as the cats start to meet each other, it does not feel vulnerable.
- Once the new cat is confidently using the feeding, resting and toilet places in the rest of the home then it is time to move on to the Stage 4.

### **Stage 4: Initial face to face introduction**

- Start by letting the cats interact through a partially open door. The door should be jammed so that it is impossible for either cat to get through, but open enough that they can see and sniff each other through the gap (5cm is about right for adult cats, less for a kitten depending on size). This is very important so that you can monitor for signs of aggression - swiping or hissing at the gap in the door and it will prevent either cat getting injured.
- You may place an extra food bowl on either side of the door to encourage cats to visit this location voluntarily, but don't place it too close to the gap, so that the cats will be confronted with each other whilst trying to eat.
- It is also useful to rub the door or screen with the scent from the cats so that there is maximum chance of recognition of the smell.
- Once the cats are showing no aggressive or fearful behaviour when they encounter each other at the door, they can be allowed to meet face-to-face after an initial meeting through the door or screen.
- It is important to continue mixing odours between the cats until the cats have begun to rub against each other or groom each other. At this point, Feliway® diffusers may be removed.

The total time for the introduction process may vary from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, but there is no shortcut if harmony is to be achieved.

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