Behavioral Adoption Counseling - CATS

1. SETTLE IN TIME

Cats don't really like change so going to a new house can be very stressful for your new cat. The best thing to do to help him/her settle in is to set up a special room, complete with everything he/she needs (food, water, litter box, toys) making sure there is also a place to hide. Bring the carrier into the room and open the door. Do not force the cat to come out, let him/her take his/her time.

Your new cat needs time to adjust to his/her new surroundings. He/she will most likely hide for the first few days. Don't worry! Hiding is the coping strategy that cats use in a new environment. Do NOT try to pull him/her from the hiding place. Just be patient and as soon as he/she feels comfortable, he/she will start coming out.

Visit your new cat often but don't force any interaction. Simply sit in the room with him/her. Bringing in a dish of tuna fish or other yummy treat can also help lure the cat out and help to form a positive association with you. Once the cat stops hiding and comes out to you when you visit you can let him/her out into the whole house.

2. LITTER BOX

You don't need to teach a cat to use a litter box – just let him/her know where it is. Cats prefer unscented litter and the clumping varieties are preferred by most. Some cats do fine with covered boxes but they trap odor and some cats won't use them. Make sure the litter box is not too small for the cat to "do their business". And the most important thing is to keep the litter box clean – scoop daily and change completely once a week.

3. SCRATCHING

Cats need to scratch on things for claw maintenance and to mark their territory - this is very normal cat behavior. To safeguard against damage to your furniture, provide your cat with a few scratching posts. Make sure the posts are placed in a prominent area in the house. The post should be tall and stable (though some cats prefer horizontal marking posts instead of the vertical type). The posts covered in sisal rope are preferred but cats also like corrugated cardboard or even natural wood like a log (loop carpeting is not preferred by cats).

4. INTRODUCTION TO RESIDENT CATS

Your new cat and resident cat/s will be able to smell each other from under the door where the new cat is living. Putting treats near the door will help form a positive association between the cats. To help them get to know each other do some 'scent exchange' by petting each cat with a washcloth or a sock on your hand several times a day (without washing the cloth in between). If you can't pet the new cat for the first few days, just leave the cloth with your other cat/s scent in the room over night.

After a your new cat is comfortable in the room, start putting your resident cat/s in the new cat's room and let the new cat explore the house for an hour or so each day. This will allow the resident cat/s to get to know the new cat's scent and will allow the new cat to learn the lay of the land in the rest of the house.

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Next - set up a baby gate in the doorway (or hang a screen door) so the cats can see each other for a couple of days before you let them in the same room together (one baby gate on top of another will prevent them from jumping over). Putting treats on either side of the gate or screen door will add some positive association. Several short sessions each day of allowing them to see each other is best.

The next step is to set up some short controlled introductions. Bring the cats into the same room and provide them each with a dish of tuna fish. At first the dishes should be at opposite sides of the room. Do this daily, moving the dishes closer each day.

This process can take a few days, several weeks, or even a few months. Go at the cat's pace. A slow introduction will go a long way to improve the future relationship of the cats.

5. INTRODUCTION TO RESIDENT DOGS

Make sure to have that special room for your new cat. After he/she is coming out from hiding in that room, you can start to introduce him/her to the house with the dog outside. When you are ready for the dog and cat to meet, make sure the dog is behind a baby gate and can't get to the cat. Any time you are going to introduce them without the gate, the dog should be on leash so that he/she doesn't learn that chasing the cat is fun. Even after you think the dog and cat are okay together make sure the cat has an escape route should the dog ever trigger to chasing the cat. You can do this using a baby gate in a doorway that the cat can jump over or run under to escape to safety. You should also have a few cat trees or other high places for the cat to escape to when in the room with the dog.

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