

How to Help Cats Get Along



If you've followed all of the rules on the "How to Introduce Cats" handout and it's still not going well, here are some additional tips. If you haven't exactly followed the rules, it's possible to start over and try again. Remember that when cats aren't getting along, it is because they are afraid of each other. Cats do not have the ability to "hate" or be "mad." The negative behaviors you see are all rooted in fear. The "meanest" cat is the one that is the most afraid. Please keep that in mind, and try to see things from their point of view. Help build their confidence by adhering to the rules of introduction and utilizing the following tips:

- Create fun activities every time the cats see each other. Never let the cats see each other with nothing to do. If a cat is scared of another cat, the worst thing you can do is let them stare at each other and think about how scared they are. Distraction is key! There should be a fun activity happening every time they see each other: wet food feeding, wand toy playtime, clicker training, whatever is pleasing to them.
- Use Feliway plug-in diffusers to calm cats down and help with adjustment. They work!
- Play with both cats! Interactive wand toy playtime solves most cat behavior issues. Playtime helps them lose defensiveness and realize they can share space. It also tires out the bully. And remember, the reason they're not getting along is because they're scared of each other. Hunting-type playtime with a wand toy builds their confidence because it helps them to feel like predators, catching their prey. Cats are one of the only animals that are both predator and prey. When you see negative behavior from cats, it's because they're feeling like prey. Helping your cats to feel like confident predators will help your cats get along.
- Use a "sight blocker" (towel, blanket, piece of cardboard) when you see things starting to go badly. Cats stare each other in the eyes before attacking, it's their way of challenging each other. So stop the staring before it escalates.
- Give them something to identify as their own - a big bed, a pod/cubby hideaway, a shelf up high. Cats without any item to call their own will act in undesirable ways. These items will give them more territory to own and therefore more territorial confidence.
- Feed them in a way so that nobody feels like they get less food or has to fight for their food. Not having to compete for food is vital. Many people think, "My cats get along when they eat, and can eat near each other without a problem." But what people don't realize is that cats are programmed to be hunters, and will do anything to ensure they get a meal. If you put the bowls of food next to each other, cats will eat together, but only because they think they may never get another meal. Make sure feeding time is not stressful, and feed in separate rooms until you know that the cats get along.

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- Open up a vertical world so they have escape routes. Put up shelving that they can jump up on and get away. When a cat feels stress, they immediately go into “fight or flight mode,” and cats always choose “flight” first. But, if they feel there’s nowhere they can escape to away from the other cat, they will resort to “fight.”
- Make sure there are at least as many litter boxes as cats. This will ensure that there is no competition for resources. Also make sure that litter boxes aren’t “traps” where the other cat could ambush them. Make sure to use open (not covered) litter boxes, and place them in spots that provide more than one exit option.
- Add some scent-soakers to your home. Cats live scent-based lives, and their own scent brings them comfort. Get them each a cardboard scratcher, and let them scratch & claw and mark them with their scent. Put one of each cat’s scent-soakers at the entrance to a room to make it a neutral territory.
- Reward confident behavior. Don’t treat the victim-cat like a victim, or they will keep acting the part. Be a source of positivity, play, and food, and do not reward fear.
- Keep yourself calm and the cats will be calm. Cats feed off of our emotions. If you think the situation will turn out ok, the cats will sense it, and it will eventually be ok.
- And, most importantly, give it time. Don’t give up after 24 hours. While an easy cat-to-cat introduction takes 2 weeks, it could take up to 3-6 months! Very few cats are truly unable to live with another cat. Most of the time, things work themselves out over time, and cats begin to coexist and even become friends!