

Helping a Shy Cat Adjust to a New Home



Thank you for adopting a shy kitty!

Please keep in mind that socializing a shy cat takes a great deal of patience. Cats don't understand that we are trying to help them. Make a point to work with them daily, preferably multiple times a day, for about 10-15 minutes each session. Each step will need at least 35 sessions before progressing to the next step, and make sure they are 100% comfortable before moving to the next level. If at any point in the process you need help, don't hesitate to email us with questions!

Step 1: Get your cat into a room that does not have hiding places. Get it all ready with a bed, food, water, litter box, and toys, and close them in the room as soon as they arrive home.

Step 2: Simply sit in the same room with them several times a day. Let them come to you when they are ready. NEVER pull a cat out of their hiding spot! Always talk softly and move slowly around them. For shy cats, soft talking is usually more soothing than petting. You can read a book to them or even sing softly. This will help them bond with you.

When they seem comfortable with you in the room, hold out your hand, palm down and relaxed, and let them smell you thoroughly. If they approach and seem interested, hold your position and softly encourage them to come closer. Let them stroke the top of their head and cheeks with your hand. This way they have made the choice to be petted, not you. This will give them confidence. Watch body language carefully! If at any point, they back away and/or hiss or swat, calmly move away. Give them the freedom to walk away when they want to, and never try to touch the cat before they are ready.

Step 3: Create positive food experiences for the cat while you are with them. Offer treats like tuna, baby food (meat flavors with no onion powder or garlic), or even deli meat. Be sure that you don't give them these items at any other time except when you are present, so they learn to associate you with the food (and a positive experience). Begin each socialization session with about 1 tablespoon of the treat and talk softly to them while they eat it. If they have not eaten the treat by the time you leave the room, take the treat with you. It may take a few sessions before a shy cat will eat the treat in your presence.

Step 4: Once a cat is eating comfortably with you in the room, move on to creating positive play experiences. We recommend using an interactive toy, such as a Cat Dancer, Da Bird, or Cat Charmer. Catnip can also be used to help the cat relax and feel more at ease. (Beware, though, as catnip can excite or agitate some cats.)

Set the toy gently near the cat to let them get used to it. Do not shove it towards them, or place it too close at first – you want them to approach the toy on their own. Once they seem comfortable with the object, slowly pick up the toy and use it to stroke the cat gently, beginning with the cheeks and head. The TOY is now petting the cat, not you. (This particular step is best done with a rainbow fleecy Cat Charmer, as you can wrap the fleece ribbon around the stick to create a soft petting tool.)

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From there, you can try several different techniques – you may need to experiment to see which works best. In the first approach, as the cat becomes more comfortable with being touched by the toy, move your hand closer to them, along the stick, until you are eventually touching the cat’s head with your hand instead of the toy. If they seem receptive to play, use the toy in a playful manner to slowly lure them near you. When they are comfortable coming near you while playing, give them a quick pet as you continue to play. The key is to keep playing, so they associate fun and positive feelings with human touch. As the cat continues to make progress while you are playing, you can pause the play for a few moments to pet, then continue to play. Keep lengthening these pauses gradually over time.

Regardless of the approach you use, always start petting on the cheeks and the top of the head, then progress very slowly to their back. Avoid the tummy and legs! Increase petting sessions gradually, depending on how much the cat will tolerate. Do not approach from directly above the head, since this may make them feel cornered, like prey.

Remember to be patient and calm around your cat. They feed off of our emotions. Once your cat has warmed up to you, that reward will far outweigh the hard work you have put in, and you and your cat will have a very special bond.