

Cat Introduction or Reintroduction Plan

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The goal of this plan is to gradually train the cats involved to associate each other with positive experiences. To accomplish this they must work through a number of introduction exercises, progressing from one to the next in sequence as the goals of each exercise are accomplished. This plan also requires specific environmental recommendations designed to reduce resource competition, thus eliminating stressors that could lead to aggression or anxiety. It is important to follow these recommendations as closely as possible for the greatest chance of a successful outcome. Also, remember that behavioral changes take time, and set backs are common. Persistence is necessary for introduction/reintroduction success.

Recommended Environmental Alterations

- Litter boxes
 - Litter boxes should be uncovered, high-sided, and at least 1.5 times the length of the largest cat.
 - Buying 30-gallon or larger storage tubs and cutting 1-2 doors in the sides are often the best options for obtaining appropriately sized litter boxes.
 - Litter boxes should be uncovered to allow ammonia smells out and to prevent one cat from trapping another in the box.
 - The number of litter boxes in the home should at least equal the number of cats in the home plus one extra.
 - Litter boxes should be available in a different areas of the home and on all levels where cats have access.
 - Litter boxes should be kept at least 6 feet from each other and from food, water, or resting areas.
 - Litter boxes should have at least two clear directions of approach so that a single cat cannot block litter box access or trap another cat inside of the box.
 - Unscented clumping litter kept at a depth of 2-4 inches should be used unless cats with arthritis or balance difficulties required different litters or litter depths. In these cases, consult your veterinarian.
 - Scoop all boxes twice daily and discard soiled litter in a trash can outside the home to reduce pheromones and territorial smells.
 - Empty, wash, and refill (with clean litter) at least one litter box per week.
 - Monitor all cats for frequent attempts to urinate or straining to urinate. This may be a sign of a life-threatening urinary blockage or other painful bladder condition that can result from stress. Contact a veterinarian immediately if these are noted.
- Food and water
 - The number of water bowls in the home should at least equal the number of cats in the home plus one extra.
 - Water bowls should be dumped and refilled daily.
 - Water bowls should be washed with soap and water at least weekly.
 - Cats should be meal-fed, i.e. given measured amounts of food in individual dishes at consistent times at least twice daily.
 - Cats should be fed in broad, low-sided bowls that allow them to see their surroundings while they eat.
 - Cats should be fed in such a way that they are not touching each other or in each other's direct eye line.

- Cats should be supervised while eating so that intimidation or food theft can be interrupted and stopped.
 - Feeding each cat in a separate room with the door closed will be best if cats are frequently trying to steal or bully food away from others.
- Animal Odor Eliminator, Biopower Plus or similar cleanser designed for pet smells
 - Use as directed to remove odors from fabrics or surfaces where urine, feces, blood or anal gland discharge are found.
 - A black light may be used to identify residual urine marks that previous cleaning has not resolved.
 - Repeat use until animals no longer react to the spot. Then clean with a general purpose cleaner appropriate for the fabric or surface.
- Feliway Multicat hormone diffusers
 - These diffusers may be helpful if plugged in any room with a coveted resource:
 - Resting place (Feliway Classic may also work in these locations)
 - Food
 - Water
 - Litter box
 - Toys
 - Regular affection from owners
 - The number of diffusers in operation may be able to be reduced over time

Behavior Modification Exercises

Prior to engaging in behavior modification exercise each day, play with each cat using an interactive toy, such as a feather wand or laser pointer, that encourages continuous aerobic activity for at least 15 minutes. Such activity releases pent up energy and endorphins while reducing anxiety.

The exercises described below are intended to expose the cats to each others' sight, sounds, and smells in controlled scenarios where positive reinforcement is supplied to reward appropriate behavior. For pets, the strongest positive reinforcement is often your attention in the form of petting or play, though this varies by cat. Petting may not be considered positive attention by all animals. Highly valued food rewards can also be used, but break treats into small pieces to feed smaller quantities overall and prevent over-feeding.

If an exercise elicits an undesirable response, refrain from sudden movements or loud noises such as scolding as these will increase the cats' agitation. Instead, interrupt the behavior by stopping the exercise and place** the aggressor cat in a "time out" in an area with light, water, soft materials to rest on, and a litter box. The "time out" area should prevent the confined cat from seeing or engaging with the other cat. It should NOT have food available.

Time outs should last at least 10 minutes. In the meantime, praise and reward any cat who did not become aggressive during the exercise. If after 10 minutes the aggressor cat has calmed down, the exercise can be tried again. No behavior modification exercise attempt nor any time out should last longer than ½ hour. Exercise attempts can be made 2-3 times daily.

**If a cat becomes aggressive toward you at any time, allow the cat to leave. If you need to confine the cat for your safety, use a baking sheet as a shield to attempt to herd it into its "time out" space.

If this is ineffective, use a thick blanket or towel to cover the cat, use pillows or pot holders to protect your hands, grab the cat while it is under the blanket, and move it where it needs to go. If you are bitten, seek immediate medical attention, as cat bites can lead to severe infections.

Remember to keep the cats confined away from each other whenever you are not home and not directly supervising them. This will prevent acts of intimidation or aggression from occurring when they cannot be corrected.

When you are at home but not actively engaging in behavior modification activities, alternate which cat is allowed to roam about the house with you so they can socialize with you under relaxed circumstances. Switch which cat has roaming privileges every 2-3 hours. Also, alternate who gets to be out first when you come home from work or wake up in the mornings. If you hear hissing or growling from the roaming cat toward another cat, place the roaming cat in "time out." Hissing or growling from a cat that is safely confined should be ignored.

Exercises

1. Isolation with scent exposure
 - a. For ½ hour each day put Cat A in the place where Cat B stays and put Cat B in the place where Cat A stays.
 - i. Spend time with the cats while they are in each others' space, providing positive reinforcement when they behave appropriately (see below.)
 - ii. Take care when you are moving the cats that they do not escape from your hands and directly interact. This is easiest to accomplish by enclosing one cat in a spare room while you move the other between Cat Room A and Cat Room B.
 - b. Goal: For each cat to become comfortable in the presence of the other cat's scent.
 - c. What to reinforce: Signs of relaxation
 - i. Showing signs of affection or purring while in the other cat's territory
 - ii. Laying down on its side with its belly exposed
 - iii. Willingness to eat or accept treats
 - iv. Exploring the environment without hissing, growling, or chuffing
 - d. What to ignore: Signs or sounds of aggression
 - i. Hissing, growling, chuffing, howling
 - ii. Laying down in a hunched position, ears back
 - iii. Dilated pupils
 - iv. Raised hackles or puffed tail
 - e. When to provide encouragement: Signs of anxiety
 - i. Attempts to escape
 - ii. Avoiding eye contact
 - iii. Trembling
 - f. When to issue a "time out": Territorial displays
 - i. Attempts to urinate or defecate outside the litter box
 1. If a cat uses the other cat's litter box during this exercise, clean it prior to returning the primary cat to its home space
 - ii. Inappropriate scratching of furniture, walls or rugs/carpet
 1. Scratching on appropriate surfaces is okay
 - g. When to move to the next step: When each cat reaches the point of being relaxed in the presence of the other's scent
 - i. When you reach this point, you can also begin switching the cats' rooms every morning and evening. This means that Cat A stays in Cat B's room during the day and vice versa, then they switch back to their regular rooms overnight.

- ii. Goal: For each cat to become comfortable in the consistent presence of the other cat's scent while disrupting their tendency to become territorial.
- iii. Continue the regiment of switching their environments daily from now until the behavior modification process is complete

2. Isolation with food as positive reinforcement

- a. Begin feeding the cats treats or meals simultaneously on opposite sides of a closed door.
 - i. Note: If you are on your own, you will need to sit at the opening of a mostly closed door to be able to interact with both cats at the same time. Do NOT let the cats see each other or reach for each other through this opening during this step.
 - ii. Goal: For the cats to safely hear and smell each other while engaged in a positive experience.
 - iii. What to reinforce: Signs of relaxation
 - 1. Eating
 - 2. Ignoring the other cat
 - 3. Check rubbing or purring
 - 4. Calmly investigating the sounds coming from the other side of the door
 - iv. When to issue a "time out": Signs or sounds of aggression
 - 1. Hissing, growling, howling, etc
 - 2. Laying down in a hunched position or having stiff posture
 - 3. Ears back
 - 4. Dilated pupils or staring
 - 5. Tail quivering or whipping
 - 6. Raised hackles
 - 7. Attempts to attack the door, the opening of the door, or under the door
 - v. When to provide encouragement: Signs of anxiety
 - 1. Unwillingness to eat
 - 2. Nervously swallowing with or without food in the mouth
 - 3. Avoiding eye contact
 - 4. Trembling
 - vi. When to move to the next step: When both cats are comfortable eating, without hesitation, on either side of the visual barrier

3. Limited visual interaction with food as positive reinforcement

- a. Same as for step 2, but with the door open 1 inch and firmly secured.
 - i. Do not use yourself as the means to secure the door- if aggression results you will need to be free to move to intervene and to keep yourself safe. Instead, tie the door in place or block it from opening further with a door stop.
 - ii. Do not place either food bowl directly in front of the opening- place the food at the hinge side of the door but allow the cats to explore opening in the door as desired.
- b. Goal: For each cat become comfortable seeing the other cat.
- c. What to reinforce:
 - i. Same as step 2
 - ii. Whenever the cats make eye contact without becoming upset
- d. When to issue a "time out": Same as step 2
- e. When to provide encouragement: Same as step 2
- f. When to move to the next step: When each cat can sniff/hear/see the other and eat without becoming upset
- g. What to do if severe agitation results: Return to step 2.

4. Unlimited visual interaction
 - a. Use two baby gates, one bottom and one top of the doorway, to secure one cat in their room while the other is having their free roaming time.
 - i. DO NOT feed the cats on either side of the barrier at this stage.
 1. Without a visual barrier between their food dishes, stress will result from being in proximity to each other while eating.
 2. Feed them facing away from each other and at least 6 feet apart.
 - b. Goal: To have the cats get used to seeing each other come and go as they please.
 - c. What to reinforce: Same as step 3
 - d. When to issue a “time out”: Same as step 3
 - e. When to provide encouragement: Same as step 3
 - f. When to move to the next step: When the cats learn to ignore each other or (less likely) interact in a positive way on opposite sides of the barrier
 - g. What to do if severe agitation results: Return to step 3.
5. Gradual physical introduction
 - a. Using cat harnesses or large wire dog crates to restrain the cats and 10 feet apart.
 - i. Provide treats, attention and play for both cats for 15 minutes during this exercise to ensure that proximity to the other cat is reinforced as a positive experience.
 - ii. If both cats remain calm, repeat once at this distance, then bring the cats closer by 1-2 feet the next day.
 - iii. Repeat until both cats are comfortable resting or playing within 3 feet of each other.
 - b. Goal: For the cats to enjoy positive experiences in each other’s company
 - c. What to reinforce: Same as step 2
 - d. When to issue a “time out”: Same as step 2
 - e. When to provide encouragement: Same as step 2
 - f. When to move to the next step: When the cats learn to ignore each other or interact in a neutral or positive way without a substantial barrier between them
 - g. What to do if severe agitation results: Return to the distance where the cats are comfortable again. If no distance is sufficient, repeat step 4.
6. Release
 - a. As with step 5, but allow the more timid cat to move freely in the room
 - i. If both cats remain calm for three sessions, conduct the next exercise with the more dominant cat free of restraints as well
 - ii. If all goes well for three additional sessions, begin leaving the cats out with less direct supervision for longer and longer periods of time
 - b. Goal: To test the new relationship dynamic.
 - c. This is the most crucial step! Lavish them with praise, treats and affection any time they are observed behaving well together.
 - d. Completion of this step is considered success. Depending on how well the cats bond, it may be prudent never to leave the cats out together when you are not home. However, you should have reasonably compatible cats if you reach this stage.

Change takes time—sometimes a long time—and it is normal to experience frustration during the treatment of behavioral issues. Cats require 30 days or more to adapt to change, and multiple changes to their lifestyle at one time makes adaptation even harder. Have patience with yourself and the cats, and contact a veterinary behaviorist if you need help.