



Thinking About Adding a Second Cat to the Family?

If you're thinking about adding to your cat family, you may be confused about whether that second kitty should be an adult or a kitten. Male? Female? How can you be sure you'll bring home a cat who will be a good match for your resident cat? Well, there's no way to guarantee the choice you make will result in a harmonious household, but I do have a few tips to help you hopefully increase your chances of a successful match.

For an elderly resident cat, don't try to match her up with a kitten. Kittens have very little respect for territory and boundaries. The revved-up kitten's attempts at playful curiosity may end up being too stressful to the senior cat. If your elderly cat is ill, has limited mobility or is impaired in any way then it's not a good idea to add a second cat at all. The last thing your elderly cat needs is more stress. If your older cat is happy, comfortable and content, carefully think about whether the stress of having to adjust to life with another cat will really be of benefit or not.

If your adult resident cat is playful, healthy, sociable and energetic, then a kitten might be a good choice. Just be sure the kitten you choose is old enough to go through the introduction and isn't put in a dangerous situation.

Complementary Personalities

Think about your resident cat's personality in general. Is she out-going? Assertive? Is she a take-no-prisoners type of cat? If so, then look for a second cat who won't compete with that personality. If you choose another take-no-prisoners type of cat then you'll probably end up with lots of nose-to-nose confrontations as each cat tries take charge. On the other hand, you also don't want to choose a cat from the opposite end of the scale. A very timid, shy cat would not do well with a very assertive cat. Choose a cat with a complementary personality. One who is out-going and friendly but not on either extremes of the personality chart.

Male or Female?

As for whether to get a male or female, many people have believed for years you should get a cat of the opposite sex. I have never followed that theory and in all my years of doing professional behavior consulting, making good personality and temperament matches have been far more important than whether the cat is male or female. It all comes down to whether the personalities will mesh or compete.

Don't Rush

Take your time when choosing a second cat. You'll be bringing in a companion who will hopefully become a lifelong buddy for your resident cat so don't rush the decision. I know situations come up, such as a cat who is rescued and brought into the family suddenly, but if you have the opportunity to do your homework when considering a feline companion for your kitty, use that time to make a good choice.

If your search involves going to a shelter, keep in mind there's a risk of making an impulsive decision that could not be the best for either cat. Rely on the wisdom of the shelter staff and what they may know about the cat you're considering, along with your own knowledge of your resident cat.

Pleased to Meet You

Once you've made the decision on which cat you want to bring home as a companion for your kitty, your next big step will be preparing the cat-to-cat introduction. This is where many cat parents drop the ball and the result can be a disaster. Take your time and do a gradual introduction. Give the cats a reason to like each other. Don't toss them in together and expect them to be friends. Provide the newcomer with a sanctuary room (usually a bedroom or some other room you can close off) and let him get his bearings. Then you can slowly begin to introduce him to your resident cat. A gradual, positive introduction is the only way to go.

Even with all the research and planning you've done, new cat introductions can take a wrong turn. If things start to go south, evaluate whether it's because you may have moved through the introduction steps too quickly. I find that's often the case, rather than the cats being a bad match. Since you

are working to help the cats develop a friendship that will last a lifetime, it's worth the time to go at the pace most comfortable for them. Some cats become friends in a matter of days but in most cases, it takes weeks or even longer. Stay positive and move at the pace of the most stressed-out cat. Even if your progress feels as if you're only taking baby steps, you're still going in the right direction.

After working on the introduction, if you feel the cats aren't a good match, talk to the behavior staff at the shelter for additional guidance. You may find you've missed a step in the intro process. In some cases, you may need some additional professional help by calling in a certified cat behavior consultant to develop a specific plan for your cats. Talk to your veterinarian about a referral to a certified behavior professional.

Here are some helpful articles on introducing a second cat.

What if You've Already Done the Introduction Incorrectly?

Relax, it's not too late. The easiest way to fix this is to simply start over again. Separate the cats and do the introduction all over again as if they've never met. Keeping them together if they're fighting will only increase the stress and aggression so the best solution is to give everyone a break and do it again the right way. It doesn't matter how long you've been trying to do the introduction.