

Congratulations! You are the proud new owner of a cat. No doubt you're looking forward to years of happy companionship. But what do you do now?

The first thing you should know about your new pet is that most cats hate to travel. After the ride home from the animal shelter, he will, most likely, not be in the mood for fun. For the trip home, confine your pet in a sturdy cat carrier. Don't leave him loose in your car where he might panic and cause an accident.

To make his transition to your household as comfortable as possible, select a quiet, closed-in area such as your bedroom or a small room away from the main foot traffic, and provide him with a litter box. Let your new pet become acquainted with that limited area for the first few days. Let him sniff all your belongings and investigate all the hiding places. Over a few days, slowly introduce him to the rest of your house, including the other pets and household members. It will take a little while, but he will eventually begin to feel at home.

Cats vary in terms of how demanding they are as pets, so let yours guide you to the level of attention he wants, whether it's your hand for petting or your lap for sitting. Provide him with the necessary creature comforts and give him the companionship he seeks, and he will be content.

The following is a mini-primer of cats' requirements for a happy life:

Litter Box

Your new cat will prize a clean environment and a clean body. Cats are naturally fastidious and most will instinctively use a litter box; for some, you may need to place the cat in the box and make little scratching motions with their front paws so they get the idea. Cats place such a premium on cleanliness that you should clean the box daily or several times a week. Cats also value privacy, so place the litter box in a convenient but secluded spot.

Kittens are typically accustomed to having a litter box close by and may not have the skills to locate a litter box in, for instance, a basement when they are spending most of their time upstairs. Until a cat is familiar enough with his/her surroundings to find a litter box in any out of the way area, keep one in the area where kitten spends most of his time. As a cat grows older and more modest, it will gravitate towards a litter box in a more secluded area and you may be able to eliminate the one in your living area.

Not using the litter box

First, have your cat checked by your vet to rule out a urinary tract infection. Next, try changing the type of litter, for many cats are very sensitive to particular litters. Try unscented litters, removing hoods from boxes, moving the box to a more private location, or cleaning the box more often. Provide multiple boxes in multiple cat households. Also, if you have a kitten, be sure it actually remembers where the litter box is! Sometimes in a big house a small kitten can get lost, in which case it will look for the nearest unobtrusive corner to go or anything that looks like a box, like an open briefcase or shoebox.

Security

Provide your cat with safety and security. Always use a cat carrier when transporting your pet. Protect him by making certain that all windows are securely screened, and that the washer and dryer are kept closed and are inspected before each use. Get into the habit of ensuring that drawers, closets, and cupboards are uninhabited before you close them. And for your own security, put a collar and tag on your feline—there's always the chance he may slip outside by mistake, and you want to make sure he can be identified as your pet.

Health Care

Watch your new pet for signs of illness, nasal discharge, excessive sneezing, vomiting or persistent diarrhea. Inevitably, despite our best efforts, viruses can be spread and may occasionally go home with adopted animals.

House Rules

Provide your cat with some "basic training" to help him get along in your home. It's true that cats usually have their own ideas about how to do things. Even so, most cats can be taught to obey simple rules like not scratching the couch, eating plants, or jumping up on the kitchen counter. With repeated, gentle, and consistent training, your cat will learn.

Cats love high places, so the kitchen counter strikes them as a great place to watch the world go by. If your cat also finds food up there, they've just had major reinforcement for this bad habit. Best solution: find another spot in the kitchen where it's ok for your cat to hang out from on high, like the top of the refrigerator. Then persistently move your kitty there every time she jumps on the counter. Repetition and consistency are key here, but eventually your cat will get the idea.

Discipline

At the time of bad behavior, spray your cat with a squirt gun or the canned air used to clean computer keyboards works very well (cats hate the sound). Water/air doesn't hurt them, it just annoys and they'll get the message. Once they discover they don't like the water or air, frequently all you'll need to do is pick up the bottle. The cat will know what's coming and no spray is necessary.

Cats will respond to the slightest change of tone in their owner's voice. Often, a discouraging, "No", delivered in a warning tone, will cause them to abort the offending behavior beforehand.

Use the Face Push, i.e. use your open palm to push the cat's face away firmly when it bites or engages in bad behavior.

Treats work wonders. Reward your cat when he/she conforms to good behavior.

What makes a cat friendly and social vs isolated and non social?

It's a well known fact that cats are wired differently from dogs and everyone has known non social cats that are not very good companion pets. Cats are not pack animals with a social system like dogs and in nature, adult cats live solitary lives with no need for companionship. While adult cats are very independent, kittens prefer companionship and being part of a group. What changes as a cat grows older? Kittens cling to their mother, siblings and humans to receive food, affection and protection. The key to keeping an adult cat social is to keep it in "kitten" mode. Below are some tips that are helpful in understanding cat motivation and useful to help you keep a cat social and friendly.

Food is a major motivator. A kitten knows that their mother or someone else needs to provide it food and it naturally gravitates towards that person and works hard to cultivate a close relationship to insure that the food keeps coming. In nature, as kittens mature they are expected to learn to take care of and feed themselves. As they mature, they lose their need to bond to their mother and siblings and become totally independent, finding their own food. Feral cats, for instance, totally provide for themselves and shun any interaction, especially with humans.

One way to maintain the "kitten" in you cat is to make sure your cat KNOWS it is dependent on you for food. Free feeding, where that cat has access to food at all times is not helpful because, besides contributing to obesity, in the cat's mind, it hunted, found its own food, (which is always in the bowl) and you are not necessary. It's important to maintain the impression with the cat that in order to

eat, it needs YOU to provide. Instead of free feeding, have specific times when the cat sees you put food in the bowl and give it to him or her. Let the bowl become empty, and let the cat come to you for a refill.

Affection is also important to a kitten and will keep your adult cat interested in human interaction in order to continue to receive affection. Ways of showing affection are:

- Play with the cat. It reminds the cat of how it played with its siblings.
- Allow the cat to sit/lay with you, like it gathered and slept with its siblings
- Use high pitched tones when talking to the cat, it reminds them of their mother's gentle meowing
- Pet and brush your cat. It reminds them of how their mother groomed them.
- Be gentle and respect the cat's space

Protection is important also. A kitten is protected by its mother; an adult cat has to fend for itself. If your cat sees you as its protector, it is more likely to behave towards and bond with you as it would his or her own mother. A cat views ANY unknown person or situation with some sense of caution. If you expose your cat to different people and circumstances, your cat may experience some fear, but once the cat sees that it's safe, it will conclude that it's safe because YOU provided protection. The bond between you and your cat is strengthened and you've allowed the cat to expand its experiences and become less fearful of the unknown.

Lastly, keep your cat indoors. Besides the multitude of dangers that cats face outdoors and a proven shortened life span, an outdoor existence conditions a cat towards independence, making you less necessary and contributes to anti social behavior.

Room for Fun

Finally, provide your cat with an interesting indoor environment. Cats love to play and will appreciate simple and inexpensive toys. Ping-Pong balls and paper bags can provide hours of fun. A comfortable perch by a window can become your cat's very own entertainment and relaxation center.

Toys are very important for cats. They not only fight boredom, they also give cats a chance to express their prey-chasing drives. If you're the one moving the toy while your cat chases after it, playtime can be a bonding experience for both of you.

Dogs and Cats

Dogs and cats can and do get along. When they first meet, the dog has a HIGH interest in the cat, whereas the cat has a very LOW interest in the dog and may be scared to death. Your challenge is to try and moderate the interest levels of both cat and dog more towards the middle, while making sure kitty is safe, to facilitate a peaceful co-existence.

When a new dog comes into kitty's home, or vice versa, there is always a period of adjustment. One helpful thing you can do to facilitate acceptance is to try and avoid situations where the cat runs from the dog. While it's instinctual for a cat to run to a safe place if it senses danger, the running triggers a chase reflex in a dog. Once a pattern is established that the cat runs and the dog chases, not only will they never get along, but the situation could become dangerous as the dog starts to see the cat as "prey".

- If the situation is really difficult and the cat is freaked out, you can allow them to sniff each other under a closed door. This may need to go on for several days. Once everyone realizes the other isn't leaving, they may calm down.
- Try to facilitate a situation where they can see each other, but not touch. Keep the dog on a leash and put the cat on a high spot where he will feel safe and be less likely to run.
- If kitty is manageable and you trust your dog not to harm the cat, hold kitty on your lap and allow some limited nose touching on kitty's terms. If that goes well, step 2 for dogs is to sniff the cats behind. The cat may or may not be receptive to that and it may take several sessions before that can happen. Once a dog gets his fill of kitty smell, his interest in the cat will diminish.
- A little aggressive behavior on the part of the cat towards the dog isn't all bad. It sends the message that kitty is no push over. Correct the dog forcefully with "NO!" whenever there is any rude or aggressive behavior towards the cat.
- The goal is to manage the situation where there is NO running/chasing, NO lunging at the cat, NO provocative nose poking or biting, and the dog minds his manners. Eventually as the cat feels safer around the dog and will stand his/her ground, not run away and feel free to express some tolerance or even interest towards the dog. The dog having figured out that the pack leader demands he/she respect the cat, there's not going to be a chase, and the kitty smell is yesterday's news, will lose interest in the

cat. There will be peace and maybe even a respectful friendship will eventually form.

Enjoy Your Rewards.

Now that you've made certain all the basic provisions are attended to, you can relax and enjoy your new pet. It may take a couple of weeks for him to adjust to life with you. But before you know it, you'll be curled up on the couch together, watching TV like old pals, and you won't remember what life was like without him.