

Behavior FAQ: Cats That Don't Get Along with Other Cats

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You may have acquired a second cat with the best of intentions. Many loving cat owners feel guilty leaving their cats home alone all day and decide to obtain another cat to keep their resident cat company.

Cats can be very sensitive about whom they like to associate with. Some cats are not very social and are clearly happier as single cats. Cats also have personality clashes, just like people do. They may get along with certain cats but not others.

Initial introductions are vitally important in helping family pets develop good relationships. You must micromanage these introductions down to the last detail. The most important rule is to go slowly. You never want to put the cats together and see what happens. An introduction that goes badly can set the stage for a difficult relationship for months to come, sometimes permanently.

Confine the new cat in one room at first and encourage the new cat and the resident cat to approach the closed door from either side so they can smell and hear each other. As they do so, offer each special tidbits or bring out a favorite toy so the cats associate good things with one another. Next, put the resident cat in the bedroom and allow the new cat to explore the house for several hours. Continue to alternate which cat is where during the introduction process. The next step would be to allow the cats to get a glimpse of one another. Continue to use treats and toys, and do not allow any closer encounters until the cats are relaxed while looking at each other, without being afraid or threatening. With most cats, this technique of brief exposures works well. Gradually, the time together can be lengthened and the cats can be given more freedom together without supervision. If fearful and threatening behavior continues between the cats, you may need the help of an animal behaviorist.

A sudden onset of relationship problems between cats that have a history of getting along is often triggered by redirected aggression. One cat is provoked by an outside event—such as seeing a cat outside—and redirects her aggression onto the other family cat.

Because cats can be very territorial, if you allow yours to go outside your yard unsupervised, there's a good chance he'll get in a fight with another cat in the neighborhood. Although cat fights often sound worse than they really are, abscesses from bites can be very nasty. Cats can also transmit contagious diseases to one another, some of which are life threatening. The easiest way to prevent these fights is to not allow your cat outside unsupervised.

FIND A BEHAVIOR CONSULTANT TO HELP

Many problems are easily corrected through modification training, particularly if problems are addressed early. Find an animal behavior consultant in your area through one of the following Web sites: [American College of Veterinary Behaviorists](http://AmericanCollegeofVeterinaryBehaviorists.com), [International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants](http://InternationalAssociationofAnimalBehaviorConsultants.com) or [Animal Behavior Society](http://AnimalBehaviorSociety.com). Learn more by reading "Guidelines for Choosing a Trainer or Behavior Consultant."