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### **How to Bring a New Cat into the Family**

So, you're ready to welcome a cuddly new kitten into your home with hugs and kisses, but your resident housecat greets her instead with growls and hisses. Adding a cat to the household isn't impossible, but doing it the right way does take time. It is better to proceed slowly than to go too fast and have to back up.

To minimize aggressive behavior such as hissing, growling, swatting, chasing, fighting, and biting, a multiple phase plan is best for making introductions. Each phase may take from several days to a week or more to get results, with young cats typically taking less time than older cats.

- Confine the new cat to one room with its litter box, food, water, and a bed. Allow the cats to become accustomed to the sounds and smells of the other cats, while safely separated. Switch sleeping blankets or beds between the new cat and resident cats so they have a chance to become accustomed to each other's scent. Once the new cat is using its box and eating regularly while confined, let it have free time in the house while confining the other cats. This switch provides another way for the cats to experience each other's scent without a face-to-face meeting. It also allows the newcomer to become familiar with its new surroundings without being frightened by other animals.
- Feed the present cats and the newcomer near either side of the door to this room. Don't put the food so close to the door that the cats are too upset by each other to eat. This will help start things out right by associating something enjoyable (eating) with each other's presence. Gradually move the bowls closer to the door until the cats are comfortably eating on either side of the door. Allow the cats to interact through the gap under the door and encourage play with a toy such as a string or feather slipped under the door (*NOTE: string can cause severe intestinal obstruction in cats, always remove string when you cannot directly supervise them*).
- Next provide visual contact between the cats by using two door stops to prop the door open slightly. In addition a screen door or stacked baby gates can be used to provide a see-through barrier. If the cats seem defensive or aggressive at any point, visual contact must be reduced. Only after the cats are social and playful if full view of each other are they allowed to interact together without the barrier.
- Finally give the cats limited controlled access to one another. During these visits treats and toys should be used so that their experience together is positive. Supervise their interaction for short periods of times daily, increasing their socialization time as long as they don't fight. If a fight breaks out, do **not** interfere directly. Instead, throw a blanket over each cat, wrapping the blanket around the cat before picking him/her up. You can leave cats alone when they are comfortable sleeping in the same room and eating next to each other.

**Successful introductions require time and patience. Don't expect things to be perfect overnight!**