



# FRANKLIN ANIMAL SHELTER

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## Adopting a Cat – Introducing a Cat to a New Home

Adopting a cat into a new home can be frightening and stressful for the cat. Find out how to prevent fear and stress when introducing an adopted cat to his new house.

Many cat lovers adopt an adult cat or kitten from the Franklin Animal Shelter and they expect it will be easy to introduce a cat to his/her new home.

Unfortunately, this is not always the case; many cats will get scared when they're introduced to a new home and the first few days in a new, unfamiliar house can be stressful for a cat.

### Why is My Cat Scared? Did I Make a Mistake Adopting this Cat?

Many new cat owners are dismayed when they arrive home with a new adopted cat to find that the friendly, affectionate cat they met at the animal shelter is now a terrified, stressed out mess that won't stop hissing and hiding under the couch or bed.

When a new cat acts scared as he arrives in his new home, the first thing many new cat owners wonder is "Was it a mistake to adopt this cat?" "Will this cat be unhappy in my home?" "Should I bring this cat back to the shelter?"

Hiding, hissing, and other fearful behaviors (i.e. the cat is refusing to eat) are normal when an adopted cat is introduced to his new home. This stress and fear in a new cat is more common in adult felines, as kittens tend to handle new environments very well since *everything* the kitten encounters in early life is new and unfamiliar.

The owner of a newly adopted cat must remember that the cat has been placed in an unfamiliar home, with unfamiliar people, new sights, new smells and unfamiliar routines. Pets tend to thrive on routine and consistency, therefore, it is upsetting and scary for a cat to be plucked from a familiar routine and dropped into a new home. For these reasons, it is normal to see stress and fear in a cat that's just been adopted.

### How Do I Introduce a Cat to My Home? How Can I Help My New Cat Adjust?

There are several methods that a cat owner can use to help a new cat overcome fear in his new home.

- *Create a safe room.* When the new cat is adopted and brought home for the first time, he should be brought directly to his "safe room." A spare bedroom or den is ideal, as long as the room has a door. When the cat first arrives home, bring the cat into this safe room (which should have a litter box, food, water and a bed), open the pet carrier door and leave the room. For the first few hours, the cat will need to explore on his own. Once the cat is completely secure and stress-free in his safe room - usually after a day or two - open the door and allow the cat to explore the house.

- *Let the cat explore at his own pace.* Many well-intentioned cat owners will try to "show" the cat different rooms in the house. But this only increases the amount of stress and fear that the cat is experiencing. Instead, allow the cat to explore at his own pace. Do not force him into a scary and stressful situation. He will leave his safe room when he is ready.
- *Allow the cat to explore the home on his own.* When the cat begins exploring, often at night, do not disturb him. Allow the new cat to explore his new home in his own way. It's also important to allow the cat to have time to explore the home without other pets present. So bring any other cats, dogs or other pets into a separate room in order to allow the new cat to explore.
- *Spend time with the cat in his safe room.* The cat must become acquainted with his new human family members. Once the cat is comfortable in his safe room, start spending time with the cat in this environment. Attempting to bond with an adopted cat in an unfamiliar, scary setting makes the cat-human bonding process much more difficult.
- *Wait to introduce the new cat to other pets.* Do not immediately introduce the cat to other cats or the pet dog. The cat must be comfortable in his safe room and familiar with the rest of the home before cat-cat or cat-dog introductions can be made.

## **How Long Will it Take for a New Cat to Stop Hiding?**

How long will it take for a new cat to adjust to a new home? The answer depends on the individual cat's temperament – outgoing cats tend to adjust fairly quickly, while shy cats tend to take much longer to adjust.

The cat's age also plays a role. Kittens and younger cats tend to adjust fairly quickly – within a matter of days. Generally speaking, some adult cats could take several weeks to get comfortable in a new home. The process may take even longer if the cat has a history of abuse or neglect; former stray cats may also be slow to adjust, as the experience of living indoors is foreign and the home is filled with unfamiliar, frightening objects like ceiling fans, toilets and televisions.

A cat who's getting adjusted to living in a home with other pets will also take longer since they must become accustomed to the house *and* they must become acquainted with other pets.

The key is to be patient and to allow the new cat to work at his own pace; forcing the cat out of a hiding place or failing to provide a "safe room" can hinder the adopted cat's adjustment process.