



## Cat Introductions

In nature, cat colonies consist of related females, their offspring, and roaming tomcats. When we put cats into households together, we are forming a cat colony. These cats are typically unrelated cats. Most people think cats should get along immediately when meeting a new cat. This is not true for the cat world just like it isn't true for humans. I try to ask people to think of human social interactions and outcomes. If we are being kept in an enclosed space and introduced to new people, we will not all get along. We cannot expect all cats to become friends within the colonies we make.

With cats, there are 3 different types of social groupings in a house.

- "*Preferred associates*" are similar to best friends in our world. These cats sleep together and constantly have body contact. They love being around each other and often bump faces and bodies. These cats truly enjoy being together and often groom each other.
- "*Associates*" are similar to friendly acquaintances. They have positive interactions with each other but they rarely sleep touching each other. They get along but are not friends.
- "*Rivals or Foes*" are cats that simply do not get along with one another. They do not want to be in social groups or colonies with the each other. These cats often fight or have aggressive interactions and vocalizations. They often avoid each other.

My goal with cat introductions is always to aim for "associate" status. I simply want the cats to be able to peacefully coexist. I do not expect them to become "preferred associates." However, there are ways we can increase the odds of them becoming friends.

The first step is slow and methodical introductions. Scent swapping is essential and you should never rush the process. The introductions start with scents (scent swapping, smelling one

another through closed doors) and positive reinforcement. Encourage positive interactions with special treats given near closed doors. Once the cats can smell one another without aggression, visual introductions can occur. After visual introductions, short physical interactions can occur. Remember that this is a very slow process and can take 1-4 weeks. If you rush the introductions, you are setting the cats up for failure as friends.

Once the cats have been fully introduced, we want to help encourage positive and peaceful interactions. The most important step is providing excessive resources. When there are abundant resources, cats tend to get along better. If they do not feel like they have to fight for resources, there is less tension and friction.

So, what are the resources? Food, water, litter boxes, beds/sleeping spots, toys and human interactions are main resources. Some of the resources are easy. Some are a bit more difficult.

Here are some tips:

- Food
  - Make sure each cat has a food dish that is his or hers. Avoid sharing
  - Dishes should be spaced away from other cats
- Water
  - Provide multiple water dishes/fountains
- Litter boxes
  - Have multiple boxes in multiple locations
  - They should be easy to access and large enough for each cat
  - The rule in feline behavior is 1 more box than the number of cats and 1.5 times the length of the largest cat.
  - They should be scooped daily and fully cleaned regularly.
- Beds/Sleeping Spots - there should be multiple beds located throughout the house.
- Toys - make sure each cat has access to their favorite toy
- Human Interaction
  - Cats should have access to their humans and have positive interactions daily
  - Interactions should also involve structured play times
  - Environmental enrichment with new scents/toys is essential

If we provide excess resources, cats will feel less inclined to "fight" for the resources. If we don't leave them with valid reasons to fight, they tend to at least learn to live together peacefully. It is rare for unrelated cats to truly bond, but it can happen. Even bonded cats will occasionally "argue or fight" and have vocalizations or small physical interactions. This is okay as long as there is no true wounding or constant bullying.