

Help Socialize Your Feline Friend

Does your cat go into hiding whenever guests arrive? There are steps you can take to help boost their comfort with socialization. Remember: All socialization should be based on one principle: Reinforce social behavior; ignore asocial behavior. Here are some tips:

- Consider a cattery cage. Cats learn by watching, and they feel secure in a large cage in which they can view the world without people getting in their space.
- Keep it calm. Put the cattery in a room with moderate traffic. If the animal is super stressed, put it in a quiet room.
- Get the cattery set up. Place a covered cat bed or a cardboard box with a hole for a door in the cattery along with a small litter pan. No room for a bed? Drape half the cage with a towel so the cat can hide.
- Everything in its place. Put the cat's water opposite the litter pan. Feed regularly, at least three times a day. Leave the food in the cage for 15 minutes, and then remove leftovers. Don't interact with the cat during the feedings.
- Act natural. Go about your day like normal; if you live alone, talk to yourself so the cat gets used to your voice.
- Attract the cat. Do "cat-enticing behaviors" in front of the cattery such as folding laundry. Pique their interest, but keep the activities low key.
- Feeding, bonding. Once the cat is comfortable eating, try leaving your hand a few feet from the dish. Move it closer, slowly with each feeding, until the cat eats comfortably with your hand nearby. Or try putting a small amount of tasty food such as tuna oil or anchovy paste on your hand and place it near the cat nonchalantly. If the cat licks you, softly praise him or her; don't blurt out, "Good kitty!"
- Treat trade. When the cat consistently comes to your hand for a treat, try putting your hand in the cattery without a treat. If the cat comes, give them a treat with your other hand.
- Exploring the home. Once the cat is comfortable taking treats in the cattery, the door to the cattery can be opened. Make sure the door to the room is closed. The cat should explore one room at a time.
- Always remember patience. Socialization can take a while. Just remember to reinforce good behaviors - with a treat!

Source: Adapted from information by Elizabeth Teal, former ASPCA animal behavior counselor