

# Setting Your New Cat Up for Success

Congratulations on the new addition to your family! Although bringing home a new cat is an exciting time for us humans, the big move can be stressful for your new companion. Transitions are generally stressful for cats, but taking a few extra steps will help the transition go as smoothly as possible. Although it was likely love at first sight for you when meeting your new cat, it may take them a little longer to adjust to the new humans in their life, while also acclimating to an entirely new environment.

## Preparing for your new cat

to allow a safer and stress-free transition, it is important to acquire and set up their supplies before you bring the cat home.

### Supplies:

- Cat food
- Food/water bowls
- Litter boxes (2), litter, and scoop
- Toys
- Scratching post or cat climber

## Setting up a dedicated room for your cat

Before bringing your cat home, it is important to set up a specific room where you can isolate your cat when they first arrive. Every cat handles change and transitions differently. Knowing that change is generally stressful for cats, it is important to set them up for success and allow them ample time to decompress and slowly adjust to their new environment. This is why you must set your cat up in a single room for their first several days after arriving home.



When selecting a room, choose a quiet, low-traffic area. This could be a spare bedroom, office, or bathroom. Your cat will spend their first week or two (depending on the cat) in this room, so there needs to be space for all their necessities. Ensure they have a litter box (ideally two boxes, if space allows), food, water, toys, and a hiding place. The hiding place could be the carrier you bring them home in, a cardboard box with a blanket inside and draped over the top, or a cat den purchased from a pet supply store. When cats are fearful, they will choose to hide. It is likely that with all the changes your cat has experienced, they will initially be fearful or shy at first. It is important to provide them a comfy place to hide while they scope out their new home and decompress from all the changes. If you have other animals in the home, use a towel or small blanket to block the crack under the door to your new cat's room. If not blocked, this small crack could allow premature interactions before your animals are ready to get to know each other.

## Cat proof your home

Similar to child-proofing, it is important to ensure that your home is safe for a cat. Cats, especially kittens, are curious creatures, capable of jumping onto high surfaces or squeezing into the smallest of spaces. Cat-proofing your house will protect your cat in their new environment and safeguard your belongings. Below are some tips to prevent injuries and accidents.

### General Recommendations:

- Place dangling wires from lamps, electronics, blinds, and phones out of reach or in cord protectors
- Don't leave knick-knacks or breakable items accessible on shelves/tables.
- Make sure all heating/air vents are covered and that all screens and windows are secure.
- Don't leave burning candles unattended
- Make sure they haven't jumped into the washer/dryer before you turn it on or close the lid
- Some houseplants can be poisonous, see the **Poisonous Plant Handout** for reference

### Kitchens/Bathrooms:

- Use childproof latches to keep your cat from prying open cabinets
- Keep trash cans covered or inside a latched cabinet
- Keep medications, cleaners, chemicals, and laundry supplies in a safe place
- Keep food out of reach (even if the food isn't harmful, the wrapper could be)

### Bedrooms:

- Keep laundry and shoes behind closed doors (drawstrings and buttons can cause major problems if chewed and ingested)
- Keep any medications, lotions, or cosmetics off bedside tables or dressers
- Be careful that you don't close your kitten in closets or dresser drawers

**Garage:** To a cat, any open door is another area to explore. The best way to protect the cats is to never let them into the garage at all.

## Bringing home your cat

Transport your cat home in a safe, secure carrier with some soft bedding inside. Drape a blanket or towel over the carrier to reduce your cat's stress during the ride. When you arrive home, take the carrier with your cat inside directly into the pre-set-up room. Place the carrier on the floor, open the door, and leave the room. Make sure the carrier door is unable to swing shut. You may need to place a small weighted object in front of it or remove the door completely. You don't want your cat trapped inside without access to food, water, or their litter box. Allow your cat to exit the carrier whenever they choose. The carrier will have their scent in it and will be the most familiar part of the room, so it's important to leave it for easy access when they need their "safe space." If you provided your cat another hiding place in the room besides the carrier, you can place the blanket or towel from the carrier in the hiding place you provided after the cat leaves the carrier on their own. This will encourage the cat to use the den you provided and make it smell familiar.

## Introducing your cat to the home

Keep your cat isolated in the single room until they are ready to explore the rest of the home. This could be a couple days to weeks or even months depending on the individual cat. If there are other animals in the



home, see **handouts on cat-cat and cat-dog introductions** to guide you through that process, which will impact how long your cat is isolated for. While your cat adjusts to their room, visit them regularly throughout the day and spend time with them in their room. Everything your cat experiences will be novel to them and could cause stress, so it is important to allow your cat to adjust at their own pace. To help your cat build a positive association with you and their new home, bring high value treats or small snacks of canned cat food whenever you go into their room so they start to associate you with yummy treats and begin to look forward to your visits. Your cat may also enjoy engaging with toys, and a play session is another great way to build a positive relationship with your cat. If your cat is especially fearful, we have lots of helpful tips in our **Caring for a Fearful Cat handout**.

If your cat is eating, drinking, and using the litterbox regularly, they are likely ready to begin exploring more of your home.

When you enter their room, they should show relaxed body language, move around the room comfortably, and choose to interact with you. **See cat body language handout**. Once you see these behaviors, you can begin to allow your cat access to more of your home. Take your time introducing your cat to the rest of your home by only allowing access to an additional room or two at a time. Close doors or set up baby gates to only allow access to small sections. Begin this process by simply leaving the door to your cat's room open and allow them to exit when they choose, exploring a new section of your home at their own speed. Once they



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are fully comfortable in that section, you can allow more access. This process could take several days to several weeks depending on the size of your home and your cat's comfort level.

Once your cat has access to more of the home, provide additional litter boxes so your cat has easy access to a box as they move around the house. Ideally, place a litter box on each level of the home and keep the litter box in their original room, as they will likely seek out that room and box as their safe space. After your cat is fully integrated into your home for several weeks, you can slowly move the original litter box to a new location if needed. To avoid litterbox issues, move the litter box slowly over time - literally a few feet at a time.

***If you have additional questions or would like support, please contact the Wisconsin Humane Society Behavior department at [asktheexpert@wihumane.org](mailto:asktheexpert@wihumane.org) or 414-431-6173***