CAT & KITTEN ADOPTION

GMHS
Gloucester-Mathews Humane Society

GLOUCESTER-MATHEWS HUMANE SOCIETY

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Gloucester-Mathews Humane Society Contacts

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Jasmine Jutras, Shelter Manager 804-693-5520 ext. 116
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Shopping List (Kittens and Cats)

Food

- Feed your cat a dry, high quality, brand-name kitten or cat food (avoid generic brands).

- Cats are carnivores so their diet must consist of meat for them to remain healthy. Choose a brand that has real meat (not by-products) as its #1 ingredient.

- Purina One, Purina Pro-Plan are great options, which are two foods we feed our cats at the shelter. Other great options are Science Diet, Eukanuba, Nutro. It is best to avoid, for dry food, 9 Lives, Friskies, Special Kitty, Meow Mix.

- Wet food is great, too! This helps their hydration levels.

Food/Water Bowls

- Stainless steel bowls are recommended as plastic bowls can gather bacteria.
- Cat water fountains are great options, too.

Litter Box and Scooper

- Litter box and litter choice are all personal choices. Some people like stainless steel litter boxes, plastic ones, even automatic ones! Use what is best for you and your cat.
- For litter, we recommend non-scented litter as scented litter can cause urinary tract infections. If the odor is an issue, pour in a little baking powder into the little box.

Scratching Posts and Boards

- Any scratching post that is wrapped using rope is best as this does not mimic carpet like on your couch or actual carpet. A post should also be taller enough to let the cat scratch.
- Scratching boards are also great, and you can get creative and fun ones! Having multiple does help.

Cat Bed

- While cats are known to sleep where they please, having at least a cat bed available is best for them. Get a pet appropriate for their size.

Cat Carrier

- A cat should be able to stand and turn around in the carrier. Carriers are important for veterinarian visits, as well as emergency situations.

Toys/Treats

- It is very important to have toys, especially for kittens or active cats. Sometimes it may be trial and error to see what toys your cat likes. Interactive ones are also super helpful to keep up exercise! You can also go online like YouTube or search for DIY interactive toys, which is a great way to be creative and save money.

- Avoid toys that might become a choking hazard such as string, yarn, or plastic pieces. Cats swallowing this can be very harmful and costly if surgery is required to remove.

Cat Toys and How to Use Them

Toys are extremely beneficial for cats as they help cats natural prey-drive and instinct. Every cat is different meaning not all toys your cat will like. Experimenting with toys as well as changing toys around will not only help you understand what your cat likes but avoid boredom as changing toys around helps them!

"Safe" Toys

As mentioned in the cat supply list at the beginning of this packet, be mindful of string, yarn and plastic pieces. Cats sometimes like to chew on things, leading to them swallowing these objects, which can be very harmful and costly if surgery is needed to be removed. The best thing is to be cautious, and always "cat-proof" your home to be free of string, ribbon, yarn, rubber bands, or anything small enough that your cat may swallow. Even toys with feathers can be harmful if swallowed and not monitored.

Recommended Toys

Interactive Toys

Plastic balls, with or without bells inside.

Ping-Pong balls and plastic practice golf balls with holes to help cats carry them. Try putting one in a dry bathtub, as the captive ball is much more fun than one that escapes under the sofa.

Paper bags with any handles removed. Paper bags are fun for cats to pounce in, and you can make it more fun by adding a little bit of cat nip or treats inside!

Empty cardboard tubes from toilet paper and paper towels can be made for cats to "hunt" the treats inside.

Puzzle toys can be bought or made by yourself. This helps the cat stay focused and use their natural instincts to hunt. There are plenty of DIY videos and step by step instructions online to even make your own.

Electronic toys with sound or movement are always beneficial to keep cats active as well.

Comfort Toys

Soft stuffed toys are good for several purposes. For some cats, the stuffed animal should be small enough to carry around. For cats who want to wrestle with the toy, the stuffed animal should be about the same size as the cat. Toys with legs and tails seem to be especially enticing to cats.

Cardboard boxes, especially those a little too small for your cat to fit into. Cats love to hide in these but also play in them! It is proven cats simply love boxes of all sizes.

Catnip

Catnip-filled soft toys, which cats like to kick, carry, and rub. Catnip is not addictive and is perfectly safe for cats to roll in, rub in, or eat.

Plain catnip can be crushed and sprinkled on the carpet or, for easier cleanup, on a towel placed on the floor. They can be added to toilet paper rolls, boxes, and more!

Not all cats are affected by catnip. Some cats may become overstimulated to the point of aggressive play and others may become relaxed.

Introducing Your New Cat to the Litter Box

Cats can be picky when it comes to litter box types, types of litter, and more. One of the first rules is if your cat is urinating or defecating outside the litter box, it may be a health reason! One of the first things is to contact your veterinarian to rule out urinary tract infections, bladder stones, and more. If those have been ruled out, you can consider the below options to help your cat with litterbox problems, and more.

Location, Location, Location

The best area for a litter box is going to be an area that is quiet as well as offering privacy. Unexpected loud noises like a dryer, as an example, can startle the cat making the cat not want to use their little box as they have memory of the loud noise. Any area that is quiet enough as well as private enough is always recommended!

Pick of the Litter

The type of litter you use is going to be what your cat has a preference of, and you. Cats can be picky with litter, so if you notice your cat not using the litter box, and you have checked with a veterinarian to make sure it is not a health problem, it could be the type of litter. Non-scented litter is a great first choice as scented litter can cause urinary tract infections, so we recommend typical non-scented clay litter.

Other choices include silica gel litter, pine pellet litter, wheat litter, grass seed litter, paper litter. Again, this preference is for your cat and you!

How Many Litter Boxes?

You should have at least as many litter boxes as you have cats. That way, none of them will ever be prevented from eliminating in the litter box because it's already occupied. You might also consider placing litter boxes in several locations around the house, so that no one cat can prevent the other cats from getting access. We also recommend that you place at least one litter box on each level of your house.

Keeping It Clean

Feces should be scooped out of the litter box daily. How often you change (replace) the litter depends on the number of cats you have, the number of litter boxes, and

the type of litter you use. We recommend at least once every two weeks for one cat, once a week for multiple cats.

Positive Reinforcement

What is it?

Positive reinforcement for cats involves rewarding desired behaviors immediately with something they find pleasant, like treats, praise, petting, or a favorite toy, to encourage repetition of those actions. It's a training method where you add something positive to a situation to increase the likelihood of a specific behavior occurring again.

Examples of Positive Reinforcement:

- **Food treats:** Small, high-value treats can be used as rewards for specific behaviors.
- **Praise and petting:** Verbal praise and gentle petting can be very effective rewards.
- **Interactive play:** Engaging in a short play session with a favorite toy can be a great reward.
- **Catnip:** If your cat enjoys catnip, it can be used as a reward for certain behaviors.

How to Implement Positive Reinforcement:

- **Identify Desired Behaviors:** Determine what behaviors you want to encourage in your cat.
- **Choose Rewards:** Select rewards that your cat finds motivating.
- **Timing is Crucial:** Reward the cat immediately after the desired behavior is performed.
- **Consistency is Key:** Be consistent with your rewards to help your cat understand what behaviors are desired.
- **Start with Frequent Rewards:** When first training a new behavior, reward your cat every time they perform it.

- **Gradually Reduce Frequency:** As your cat learns the behavior, you can gradually reduce the frequency of rewards.

Benefits of Positive Reinforcement:

- **Stronger Bond:** Positive reinforcement strengthens the bond between you and your cat.
- **Reduced Stress:** It helps create a positive and stress-free training environment.
- **Effective Training:** It's a more effective and humane way to train your cat.
- **Mental and Physical Stimulation:** Training can provide mental and physical stimulation for your cat, preventing boredom.

Why Do Cats Scratch?

The fact is that cats scratch objects in their environment for many perfectly normal reasons, for instance:

- To remove the dead outer layer of their claws.
- To mark their territory by leaving a visual mark and a scent – they have scent glands on their paws.
- To stretch their bodies and flex their feet and claws.
- To work off energy.

Because scratching is normal behavior, and one that cats are highly motivated to display, it's unrealistic to try to prevent them from scratching. Instead, the goal in resolving scratching problems is to redirect the scratching onto acceptable objects.

Training Your Cat to Scratch Acceptable Objects

To encourage your cat to scratch acceptable objects, provide a variety of scratching surfaces, make them appealing with catnip or toys, and deter scratching on unwanted surfaces by covering them with unappealing materials.

Here's a more detailed breakdown of how to train your cat to scratch appropriately:

- Provide Multiple Options, variety is key
- Offer a mix of scratching posts, pads, and mats in different textures (cardboard, sisal rope, carpet) and orientations (vertical, horizontal, slanted).
- Consider Your Cat's Preferences:
- Observe where your cat currently scratches and try to replicate those surfaces with acceptable alternatives.

Placement Matters:

Place scratching posts near areas where your cat likes to scratch, such as near their sleeping areas or favorite windows.

Make Scratching Posts Appealing:

- Catnip and Treats: Rub catnip on the scratching posts or sprinkle them with treats to encourage use.
- Interactive Play: Incorporate the scratching post into playtime by using a wand toy or dangling toys from the post.
- Model the Behavior: Gently scratch the post yourself to demonstrate how it's used.

Deter Unwanted Scratching:

- Cover furniture or walls where your cat is scratching inappropriately with things they dislike, such as double-sided tape, aluminum foil, sandpaper, or plastic carpet runners (pointy side up).

- There are sprays you can buy, Feliway is a great brand that attracts cats where you want them to scratch. There are also sprays that will deter cats away from objects where you do not want them to scratch.

- Nail trimming regularly to reduce the damage from scratching.

Positive Reinforcement

- (Refer to the positive reinforcement section of the packet)

Consistency is Crucial

- Be consistent with your training methods and positive reinforcement to establish the desired behavior.

How to Trim Your Cat's Claws

If you have a kitten, it is important to start de-sensitizing them right away to trim them nails properly in the future. When you're playing or cuddling with your kitten, touch their paws gently. Touching your cats' paws also, for adults, helps de-sensitize them. Do this until you notice them allowing you to touch their paws without them trying to pull their paw back.

Preparation:

- Choose the right clippers! Use cat-specific nail clippers, not human nail clippers or scissors, as they can crush or split the nail.

- Find a quiet and calm environment, too much noise or surprises can be stressful for your cat. You can also try anti-stress pheromones like Feliway to help calm their nerves a little more. You want to always make sure your cat is relaxed, if your cat seems stressed or is actively fighting against you, let them go and try again later.

Trimming the Nails:

- **Gently Hold the Paw:** Hold the paw in a way that's comfortable for both you and your cat, either in the crook of your arm or on your lap.

- **Expose the Claws:** Gently press down on the top of the paw pad to extend the claws.

- **Identify the Quick:** Look for the pink part of the nail, which contains blood vessels and nerves. This is the "quick".

- **Trim the Tip:** Clip only the very tip of the nail, avoiding the quick. It's better to leave a little extra than to cut too short.

- **Repeat with Each Nail:** Trim all the claws, one at a time.

- **Reward Your Cat:** After the nail trim, give your cat a treat or praise to associate the experience with something positive.

There are also TONS of useful videos online to show you step-by-step guidelines to follow!

Why You Should Not Declaw

Declawing is currently **BANNED** in the state of Virgina, meaning it is an illegal practice for veterinarians to do. However, only Maryland and New York have it banned. While de-clawing is banned in the state of Virginia, it is still important to understand why de-clawing is controversial, and inhumane.

What is Declawing?

It is a mistake to think that declawing a cat is a minor procedure similar to trimming fingernails. Declawing is literally disfiguring a cat, a mistake that can lead to physical, emotional and behavioral complications. Declawing is an irreversible surgical procedure that involves amputating the last joint of the cat's "toes." It is a very painful procedure with strong potential for secondary complications. Imagine having the last joint of your own fingers amputated, not a pleasant idea.

On some occasions, declawing may lead to secondary contracture of the tendons. This makes it uncomfortable for the cat to walk. Since the last joints of their front paws are missing, they compensate by placing more of their weight to the hind quarters, causing them to be out of balance. This shift of weight to the hind quarters may lead to atrophy of the muscles of their front quarters.

Being out of balance is extremely distressing to a cat, whose very life is about balance. You've observed cats climbing trees, teetering perilously on a single branch, leaping incredible heights to land on a pre-selected spot, or threading in and out of complex arrangements of knickknacks without disturbing a single ornament (unless, of course, they choose to do so). These are acts of balance and part of a cat's basic heritage.

In addition to being an intrinsic part of a cat's normal conformation, its front claws are a cat's primary defense. Once declawed, there is no replacement or growth of the claws. You may think, "My cat never goes outside", but what if your cat accidentally gets outside and you can't find them? They are now defenseless in a potentially hostile environment.

Deprived of its front claws, a cat may become insecure and distressed. Declawed cats are known to bite more.

Some cats develop an aversion to their litter box because of the pain associated with scratching in the litter after a declawing procedure. If the cat doesn't go in the box, they

will find a more comfortable place to do her business. Often, these habits are hard to break.

Alternatives to Declawing

Preventing access to where your cat wants to scratch:

- By making the surface your cat likes to scratch unattractive, your cat should stop scratching that surface. Double-sided tape is a popular choice that can be purchased online, as well as pheromone sprays that can either attract the cat to where you want them to scratch or push them away from where you don't want them to scratch. You must make sure you have alternatives to where your cat can scratch, however.

Use an attractant like Feliscratch or Catnip:

- Many cats go nuts for catnip, so use that to your advantage! Sprinkle dried catnip or spray catnip oil on your cat's scratching posts and pads. Another great option is Feliscratch, a synthetic derivative of the pheromone that cats release naturally from between their toes when they scratch. It can be applied to surfaces you want your cat to scratch and has been scientifically shown to increase the chances of them doing so.

Provide appropriate training through positive reinforcement:

- Give your cat praise, pets, and treats when you see them scratching their posts and pads. Cats learn best from positive reinforcement. What if you catch your cat scratching surfaces they shouldn't be? Don't yell, scream, swat, or squirt them with water – that may only scare, scar, and ruin your relationship with your cat. Instead, calmly move them from an undesirable location and put them by or on the surface you want them scratching. Once they start scratching there, praise and reward them.

Regular nail trims or nail caps:

Regularly trimming your cat's nails can prevent injury and damage to household items or family members. How often you trim your cat's nails depends on your cat's lifestyle. Indoor cats, kittens, and older cats will need more regular nail trims, whereas outdoor cats may naturally wear down their nails requiring less frequent trimming. If possible, start trimming as kittens so they become comfortable with the process early on.

If you or your cat are new to nail trims, start slow and offer breaks. Trim nails in a calm environment and provide positive reinforcement. You should use trimmers specifically made for felines to prevent splintering the claws. If you'd rather not tackle the task yourself, our team would be happy to help or give Furr: Pet Spa's cat groomer a call!

Nail caps or claw covers, such as Soft Paws, can be a great and immediate way to protect your surfaces while you're working with your cat to redirect any undesirable scratching behavior. The nail caps can be applied by you, your veterinarian, or a cat groomer, just place adhesive inside the nail cap and slide it on. The caps and glue are nontoxic to cats and come off naturally as your cat's nails grow. Once your cat is exhibiting normal scratching behavior on the proper surfaces, you can stop using nail caps.

Letting the Cat Out – Indoors or Outdoors?

There is a huge debate for cat owners and cat lovers about letting your cat go outside, or not. Some cats that were born outside and grew up outside, such as barn cats, are used to being outside and have adapted safely to protect themselves. Unless the cat has a background history of being an outdoor cat or an indoor/outdoor cat, it is recommended to keep your cat indoors only. There are reasons why below.

Health Concerns

Disease:

- When your cat ventures outside it will likely encounter other cats. These cats may be your neighbor's kitty, a feral or community cat from the area. These cats can be a source of diseases that can be passed on to your cat if he or she encounters them. A number of these diseases can be serious or potentially fatal. Common examples include:

- feline leukemia (FeLV)
- feline AIDS (FIV)
- FIP (feline infectious peritonitis)
- feline distemper (panleukopenia)
- upper respiratory infections (or URI).

It should be noted that GMHS sees cats **REGUARLY** come in with FIV and FeLV, so these diseases are very active within the community!

Parasites:

- While usually not life-threatening for cats, several common parasites can be picked up by your kitty when venturing outdoors, including:

- fleas
- ticks
- ear mites
- gastrointestinal worms
- ringworm (a fungal infection of the skin)

These parasites can cause a variety of moderate to severe symptoms, such as scratching, skin infections, vomiting and diarrhea. In addition, these creepy crawlies can hitch a ride into your home and infect your family. Parasites can be very difficult to eradicate from your pet, from humans and from your home. Ringworm is also a zoonotic disease which can be passed on to people who come into direct contact with the cat.

Safety Concerns

A major consideration for cat lovers thinking about letting their cat venture outdoors is safety. In addition to the risks posed by fellow cats, other potential hazards that can seriously threaten your cat's well-being — and even her life – include:

Cars

Contrary to popular belief, cats do not have the innate instinct to avoid busy streets, and they frequently get hit by cars.

Loose dogs and wild animals

We may think of our feisty felines as good hunters who can take care of themselves with sharp teeth and claws. Unfortunately, cats may be good hunters, but they also often wind up being hunted. Cats are commonly attacked by loose dogs and wild animals, such as coyotes, raccoons, foxes and even alligators (depending on where they live). Injuries from wild animals and stray dog attacks are very serious and often fatal.

Toxins and poisons

Outside cats also face danger from encountering toxins, such as antifreeze, that are often ingested because they have a pleasant taste. Cats may also end up accidentally exposed to rodent poisons when they hunt and eat rodents that have recently ingested poison bait.

Trees

Trees can be a source of some danger for cats who climb to a place where they are afraid or unable to climb down. In some cases, they may be up in a tree for days until they become so severely dehydrated and weak that they fall and suffer severe or fatal injuries.

Animal cruelty

Although rare, roaming cats may be at risk for animal cruelty. Sadly, some people have been known to shoot cats with BB guns or arrows, while some cats end up being trapped, abused and killed in the name of "sport" or "for fun."

Can you keep your indoor cat happy? Yes!

A Companion for Your Cat

Many cats enjoy the company of other cats or in some cases, dogs! Playing, chasing and mutual grooming and snuggling can fulfill your indoor cat's need for exercise, companionship and affection while you are at work or away from home.

Interactive Toys

Provide your indoor cat with a variety of different interactive toys to keep them physically and mentally stimulated.

While cats have individual preferences for favorite types of toys, most enjoy the thrill of getting any new toy. However, just like children, they may get bored with it after a few days. This does not mean you have to buy your cat new toys constantly. Try putting some of the toys away while you leave others out and then rotate them every few days to give your kitty the "new toy" excitement without the expense.

A great way to stimulate a cat's hunting instinct is to provide your cat with a prey-like toy, such as a laser toy or kitty fishing pole. Enjoying these types of toys with your cat for several minutes each day is an ideal way to interact with your cat and provide much-needed exercise and playtime, while allowing an appropriate outlet for her natural prey drive.

Scratching Posts

Indoor cats should be provided with appropriate surfaces on which to exercise their instinct to scratch. Cats have individual preferences, and many prefer to have a variety of scratching posts and surfaces, so be sure to offer your cat several types in multiple locations around your house.

Creating a Purr-fect Indoor Environment

Climbing places: Your house may already provide climbing opportunities on furniture, shelves or cabinets, but you may also want to have climbing areas specifically for your cat, such as a cat tree. You can buy cat trees at most pet supply stores, or research online how to make your own.

Cat perches: Cats are natural-born sun worshippers. Giving your cat access to several windows will give her the opportunity to both sunbathe and watch the world from the safety of your home. If you have narrow windowsills, consider installing a cat perch on several windows so your kitty has a place to stretch out and enjoy the view. Shelves made especially for this purpose can be purchased at most pet supply stores, or you can research online how to build your own.

“Cat TV”: Provide entertainment for your cat by placing a bird feeder or birdbath in your yard within view of the windows. If you decide to provide feeders and baths, please keep our winged friends safe by always keeping your cats inside. A screened-in porch can also be a safe, enjoyable place for your cat to enjoy the sun and a view of nature; just be sure that the screens are secure to prevent escape.

Hiding places: Most cats love to hide. Providing your feline friend with fun hiding places is easy and does not have to cost a dime! Most cats will be thrilled to have a cardboard box or paper grocery bag to hide in. If you prefer, you can purchase a kitty tent, condo or tunnel at a pet supply store, or figure out how to make one at home.

Cat to Cat Introductions

If your cat did not have much experience with other cats as a kitten, or if your cat's experiences with other cats as a kitten were not positive, you may need to extend the time spent on each step of the introduction process. This will give your resident cat the best chance of accepting the new cat. These processes need to be taken **SLOWLY.**

Prep Before the Adoption

There are a few things you can do before the new cat comes home to help increase the chances of the resident cat accepting the new kitty.

A few days before bringing home your new family member, select a room the resident cat does not often use and set it up with the new cat's things: bedding, cat trees and perches with a view outdoors, toys, food and water bowls, and a litter box.

Ideally, these items will be new, as introducing the resident cat's scent into the new cat's environment too early can cause stress. Once the new cat's room is set up, close the door so the resident cat gets used to the room being inaccessible.

Keep the Cats Separated

The day the new cat comes home, take her directly into her new room without allowing any contact with the resident cat. Even visual contact between cats can cause stress and start the relationship off negatively. Allow the new cat time to decompress in her new environment before progressing further in the process.

Scent Swap

During the scent-swapping phase, calm, relaxed behavior can be reinforced with treats and praise. Start by allowing the cats to sniff each other from under the closed door. Pay close attention to any **negative body language**, such as:

Ears flattened against the head

Rigid body posture

Fur standing on end

Bared teeth

Dilated pupils

Positive body language includes:

Ears pointed forward

Loose body posture

Tail straight up in the air or up and slightly curled with the fur flat

When the cats seem relaxed around each other's scent from under the door, take an item from each of the cats' environments and place it in the other cat's environment. This can be a toy, a piece of bedding, or a soft cloth that has been wiped around each cat's mouth to give each cat a sample of the other's pheromones.

Once the cats can spend time around each other's scent items, let them spend about 15 minutes alone in each other's space. They will still be separated by the door during this time. This exercise allows each cat to grow used to the other's area in a non-threatening manner and deposit some of their own scent there.

If your cats remain relaxed, gradually increase the amount of time they spend in each other's area.

Let Them Meet Through a Barrier

Allow the cats to see each other through a barrier, such as a mesh screen between rooms or a baby gate. As before, you can increase the amount of time the cats are able to see each other as long as they both remain calm and relaxed.

Remove the Barrier

After the cats seem comfortable with the barrier in place, remove the barrier and allow them brief physical contact. At first, this may be just a few minutes to sniff each other. If there are any signs of aggression, put the barrier back in place and try again another day.

Conduct Supervised Playtime

To promote a positive relationship between your cats, engage them in play sessions together, praising and rewarding them for friendly interactions.

Behaviors to reward include gentle mouthing and rubbing against each other, taking turns with dominant and submissive postures, or grooming behaviors that demonstrate that the cats view each other as non-threatening equals. Take small breaks from playing and grooming behaviors before resuming the interaction.

Allowing the Cats to Interact Unsupervised

Once the cats have had several supervised play sessions with no signs of aggression, they can begin to spend time together unsupervised.

The best way to ensure success during unsupervised interactions is to provide sufficient resources for each cat. This means:

Multiple cat trees

Plenty of toys and individual attention for each cat

Distinct food and water sources for each cat

One litter box per cat, spaced far enough away to avoid squabbles, plus one extra

It may be helpful to install a camera to observe interactions for the first few days or weeks the cats are allowed to spend unsupervised time together to ensure no fights occur in your absence.

Tips for Introducing Cats

Progress slowly and provide ample time for the cats to adjust to each other. This could be days or weeks for any step of the process, so move at their pace. If you notice any signs of stress or aggression, return to the previous step and give the cats more time.

Make use of calming supplements and products to encourage the cats to develop positive feelings toward each other. This can include pheromone diffusers, such as

Feliway Classic, which contains a synthetic version of the feline facial pheromone that promotes positive associations between cats. Another option is Purina's Calming Care probiotic powder, which uses a particular strain of gut bacteria to reduce feelings of anxiety.

Closely monitor your cats' body language when they are interacting. If an issue arises, intervene quickly to prevent injury and reduce the chance of the cats developing hostile feelings toward each other.

It's important to be realistic when introducing cats. With some, peaceful co-existence may be the goal rather than them becoming friends. However, if you follow these steps and consult with a veterinarian during the process, your cats stand a good chance of developing a harmonious dynamic.

Resources:

https://www.americanhumane.org/public-education/introducing-cats-to-cats/

Cat to Dog Introduction

How to introduce a dog to a cat depends largely on the individual animals. Some dogs do fine living with cats; others simply cannot live safely with felines. And sometimes, a dog can live with certain cats — depending on their age, temperament, and activity level — but not others. Even if your dog has successfully lived with cats in the past, or vice versa, it is important to remember that each dog and each cat is an individual, environments are different, and each introduction is different.

Have safe zones

Safe zones for cats are very important, which may include a room that the cat can be in by itself and high places that the dog cannot access. It is important that the cat can retreat to regroup and relax away from the dog and then venture back into dog territory at their own pace. The cat should have access to food, water and litter in this area so no interactions with the dog are forced.

Slow Process

Never force either animal into proximity by holding them, caging them or otherwise restricting their desire to escape. This is stressful and does not help. Aside from it being inhumane, stress is a common reason for cats to break litter box training. Never put a cat in a carrier and let the dog sniff the career, this is extremely stressful and inhumane for cats!

Keep Separated

We recommend keeping the cat and the dog separate, we recommend at least a week, but sometimes you might need more. Have the cat set up in a bedroom or bathroom where the cat has their items such as a litter box, food bowl and water bowl. Allowing the cat and dog smell from under the door gets them used to each other's scent and acknowledges there is a new scent and new animal in the house.

Give this a few days, once that is done, we recommend using a baby gate where the cat and dog can see each other. Place a tall baby gate across the doorway in a room the dog does not need to access. Make sure your cat is not able to get past the gate, either, since this is intended to be a barrier where your dog and cat can see each other but not have no contact.

Let the dog view the cat briefly. Try to get your dog to focus on something else, such as a toy. If necessary, keep your dog on a leash so you can move your dog away if they get riled up. When your dog focuses elsewhere, praise and reward your dog generously. Repeat this thought the day.

If the above steps are too much for the dog, close the door and feed each animal on their side of the door. Swap out blankets or rub a towel over each and exchange, so the cat can get used to the dog's scent and vice-versa.

First Few Weeks

In the first few weeks, observe the trend: ***Are things getting better or worse?***

Monitor interactions until there is a pattern or plateau in their relationship. If the dog is the newcomer, be sure to give plenty of extra attention to the cat so they do not associate this change with reduced attention and affection. Similarly, if the cat is the

newcomer, it's a good idea to make sure the dog associates the new guest with good things for them. Always shoot for positive associations.

Resources:

https://bestfriends.org/pet-care-resources/how-introduce-cats-dogs

Kids and Cats – How to Be Respectful!

Teach Your Kids How to Handle the Cat

Kids can be particularly rough and impatient. Their first instinct when they see a cat is to chase it, grab it, and give it a coerced bear hug. If you are getting a new cat or kitten for a child, you must set the ground rules before bringing it home.

The first rule is to understand that cats are creatures, not toys. Pulling, hitting, poking, or grabbing them is a big no-no.

Proper Introductions

Once you bring the new cat home, request your child to give it time to adjust to the new environment. Let it sniff and explore the space and its occupants at its own pace. The surest way to encourage a trusting bond is to allow the initial interactions to be on your cat's terms.

Edible incentives can be helpful if your cat is keen to avoid your child. Use a treat to lure it closer and let the two enjoy contact-free interaction. As the cat warms up, bait it to pick a treat from your kid's palm. You can then graduate to gentle patting and supervise play sessions.

Start Slowly

Children live purely in the moment. They barely understand the concept of patience and why they must practice self-control even when they badly want something.

Fortunately, your cat is bound to teach your child the virtue of patience for as long as it takes until the point is home.

Cats are fiercely independent and prone to retaliating if forced to do anything. Although they love interacting with their owners, they don't depend on them for reassurance.

The only way for your child to have amicable interactions with your cat is to let it engage at its own pace. Once it is comfortable, the duo can have a mutually enjoyable bonding session.

Establish a Routine

Another practical tip for helping your pet and child bond is creating a routine that works for both. The idea is to make the two a regular part of each other's life.

A proper routine will leave plenty of time for your pet to feed, groom, nap, and have some alone time. It will also designate time for play and cuddle sessions.

If your child is old enough, give them the responsibility of serving the cat at least one meal. The feeding ritual can make bonding easier during play or cuddling sessions. This is because the pet will, over time, learn to associate them with the positive experience of lunch or dinner breaks.

Of course, the time needed for the two to bond depends on your feline's breed and personality.

Provide a Safe Space for Your Cat

Cats experience a range of emotions just like humans. Sometimes, they are relaxed and comfortable, while other times, they are distressed, frightened, or anxious. Because a child may not understand the tell-tale signs of these emotions, it is better to ensure your furry friend has a safe space to retreat to if it's moody.

The ideal safe space should be secure and high enough to make it easier for your furry friend to survey its territory. This spot must remain private, and it's important to ensure that your cat is never disturbed while using it. Encourage your child to resist the urge to drag it out of hiding because it could use its protective reflexes for self-defense. Bonding sessions can resume once the pet has cooled off and is ready to mingle.

Resources:

https://www.catster.com/cat-health-care/how-to-help-children-and-cats-bond/

CAT BODY LANGUAGE

While your cat cannot speak as you do, they do relay her feelings and emotions through a series of body postures, gestures and vocalizations. This body language can be subtle and wide-ranging, but with a little practice you can learn and understand it. Your cat will

use her ears, eyes, tail, legs and general body movement/postures to communicate with you. She may also use vocalizations.

Learning to read your cat's body language will help keep you, your cat and other people safe. It will also allow you to recognize when she is stressed so you can act accordingly to do what you can to make her feel better. Being able to communicate with your cat will strengthen your relationship and bond with her as well.

Fearful and Anxious:

Ears are low and turned sideways or back.

Pupils are large and dilated.

Whiskers will be facing backwards.

Their tail will be curled tightly into themselves or lowered.

An anxious cat may stand in a lower body position, with their head tucked in.

A frightened cat may make little movement, or they may be fast and trying to get away with a low walking or running posture.

Happy

Ears are forward.

Their tail is neutral, down, and relaxed, or possibly wrapped loosely around their body.

Cats may flop over on their side or put their belly up in a relaxed position. Careful – this doesn't mean an invitation for belly rubs!

A comfortable cat may give you slow blinks, purr, or bunt with their head.

Defensive and Angry

Constricted pupils can be a sign a cat is angry.

A tail thrashing or flicking back and forth could signal anger.

A cat's hackles may be up, with their body in a stretched-up position (back is arched and head is down).

Angry cats will make hissing or snarling vocalizations.

Angry cats may also bat at you if you approach them.

Playful

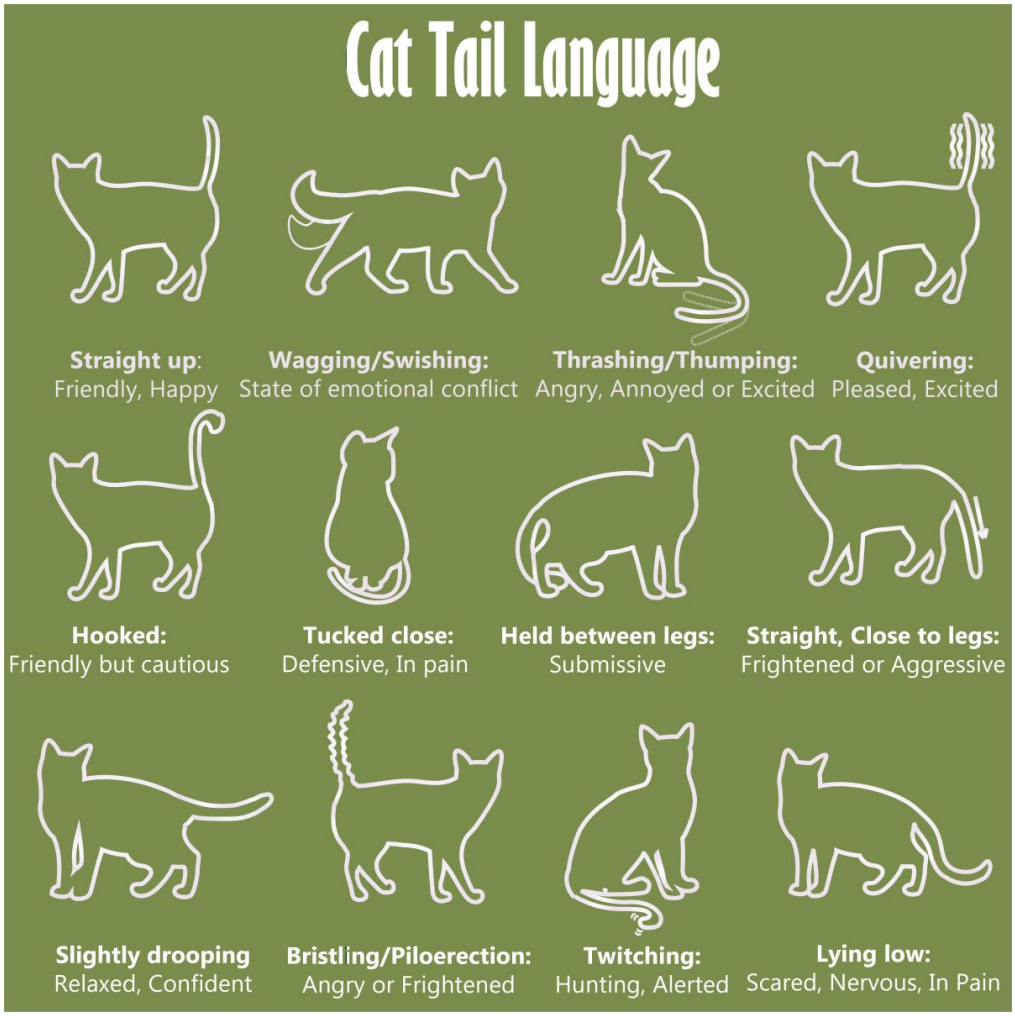
Pupils may be dilated.

Ears are forward and up.

Playful cats may also make chatter vocalizations.

Cats who are playing may crouch down into a “play bow” stance.

A cat standing up on its back legs, batting or scratching at something, may also be a sign of play.



Cat Health Care

Veterinary Examinations

Healthy cats should be taken in for a checkup once per year; cats who have a medical problem may require more frequent visits.

Vaccinations

A kitten should receive a three-in-one distemper shot at 2, 3, and 4 months of age. These vaccinations will protect him or her from calicivirus, thinotracheitis and panleukopenia, which also is known as distemper. Unvaccinated cats who are older than 4 months should receive two shots given three to four weeks apart. All cats should receive annual booster shots.

The Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) both affect a cat's immune system. They can be transmitted through biting or from a mother to her kittens at birth and are always fatal. A cat can interact with cats who have not been tested. There is a vaccine available for FeLV, but it does not provide protection for every cat who receives it. There is no vaccine for FIV.

Some counties require cats to be vaccinated against rabies.

Upper Respiratory Infections

Cats commonly contract upper respiratory infections (URI). The symptoms of these viral diseases include sneezing, runny eyes, and drooling. A cat that has a URI should be brought to a veterinarian.

Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease

Cats may develop Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease. Its signs are frequent trips to the litter box, difficulty urinating and blood in the urine. Certain foods may help prevent the condition. If a male cat seems constipated, he may have a urethral obstruction. This can be fatal if left untreated. Urethral blockages are rare in females.

Fleas and Ear Mites

Fleas are parasites that can transmit tapeworms and irritate the skin. There are many products available to prevent them, so consult with your veterinarian. Excessive scratching of the ears and head shaking can be signs of ear mites. If a cat has the parasite, his or her ears should be cleaned by a veterinarian and then treated with a topical medication.

Dental Health

Cats can get cavities and develop periodontal disease, so their teeth should be cleaned with pet toothpaste at least twice per week. It is best to use a small toothbrush that has soft bristles. Cleanings performed by a veterinarian may also be required.

Vomiting and Diarrhea

Vomiting and diarrhea can be caused by intestinal parasites, foreign bodies, hair balls, stress or a change in diet. Kittens will dehydrate very quickly, so they must be taken to a veterinarian immediately. Older cats should be taken in if there is blood in their vomit or diarrhea, or their condition persists for more than 24 hours

FIV Information

What is it?

FIV stands for feline immunodeficiency virus FIV is a retrovirus that typically causes a weakening of the cat's immune system.

How is it spread?

FIV is mainly passed from cat to cat through a deep bite wound from an FIV positive cat to another cat. Although rare, it can also be transmitted via blood from the milk of an infected mother. In fact, many FIV positive cats and FIV negative cats live together in the same home for years without spreading the virus to non-infected cats!

What cats are at risk?

Outdoor cats, mostly. Intact male cats are known to transmit it due to fighting other male cats over territory. Male cats are known to also transmit it during mating as male cats will bite on a female cat's neck during mating. Another reason why spay and neuter is so important!

What are the signs?

It depends on the stage of the cat as there are three stages: acute, latent and progressive. Acute phase is usually 1 to 3 months after infection. Fever, depression, and lack of appetite are common symptoms. The latent stage is usually months to years after being infected and may never show any real signs besides signs in bloodwork such as low white blood cell levels or increased blood proteins. Lastly, the progressive phase can include signs such as increased upper respiratory infections, weight loss, inflammation of the gums or dental disease.

How is it diagnosed and treated?

Cats can be diagnosed with a blood test sometimes known as a “SNAP test.” Unfortunately, there is no cure but cats with FIV are known to live long and normal lives. Routine veterinary visits are recommended, keeping your cat indoors and managing any symptoms that might arise.

How is it preventable?

Keeping your cat indoors is the biggest way to prevent your cat from FIV.

FeLV

What is it?

Feline leukemia (or FeLV) is the leading viral killer of cats. It weakens the immune system, increases susceptibility to other diseases, causes blood disorders and is the most common cause of cancer in cats.

How is it spread?

The virus occurs in saliva, nasal secretions, urine, feces and milk from infected cats. It is spread cat-to-cat through bite wounds, infected mother cat to her kittens, mutual grooming, shared litter boxes.

What cats are at risk?

Outdoor cats, mostly.

What are the signs?

Cats may have no signs during early stages, and then over weeks, months or even years, health may progressively deteriorate. Or an FeLV-positive cat may have recurrent illness interspersed with periods of relative health. Symptoms include weight loss, lethargy, fever, diarrhea, breathing problems, and pale gums to name a few.

How is it diagnosed and treated?

A blood test can determine if your cat is positive, however, there is no cure. Routine veterinary visits are recommended, especially to manage any symptoms, and keeping your cat indoors.

How is it preventable?

Keeping your cat indoors is the safest measure. However, there is a vaccination that can help with FeLV.

Feline Distemper

What is it?

Panleukopenia, which is sometimes mistakenly referred to as "feline distemper," is a parvovirus very similar in structure to canine parvovirus. It is highly contagious and extremely resistant to disinfectants and temperature extremes

How is it spread?

Transmission of the panleukopenia virus occurs either through direct contact between cats or through contact with "fomites," common surfaces where the bug can survive for a year or more. Litter boxes, food bowls, cages, and hands are all fomites, and infected cats can shed the virus through vomit, feces, and other bodily secretions

What cats are at risk?

Kittens and un-vaccinated cats are the most at risk.

What are the signs?

While some cats die suddenly without showing any signs of the disease, others suffer severe symptoms, including fever, fluctuating temperatures, depression, lack of appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, and dehydration. Lethargy is a big warning sign, and infected cats often droop their heads over their water bowls, thirsty but unable to drink

How is it diagnosed and treated?

In diagnosing panleukopenia, veterinarians look for symptoms of the disease and a low white blood cell count. It's also possible to detect the virus in a cat's feces; kits are available for fecal testing. Treatment is restricted to supportive therapy in the form of antibiotics, fluids, and sometimes even blood transfusions. Isolation of infected animals during treatment is critical; otherwise, they could contaminate the general environment, putting other animals at risk of contracting the disease.

How is it preventable?

Vaccination and meticulous disinfection are the best ways to prevent the spread of the panleukopenia virus.

Resources:

Cornell Feline Health Center Online

Bringing Your New Cat Home – the 3, 3, 3, rule

Set Realistic Expectations!

You can expect that it will take your cat some time to get used to the new routines and environment. The ‘Rule of Three’ means that you can gauge the time it might take for your cat to fully acclimate to his home in threes: three days, three weeks, and three months.

Three Days: Be Patient!

The first 3 days are the initial “detox period” as the cat transitions from the shelter to your home. Your home is new and exciting, with more stimulating activity, space, and freedom than a shelter can ever provide. It can be overwhelming for many cats, especially those who have been in the shelter for weeks.

To help keep from overwhelming your new cat and help make his transition as low-stress as possible, we recommend confining your cat to one room for the first few days to weeks, depending on how quickly your cat acclimates. Having only one room, such as a bathroom or bedroom, to get used to at first minimizes stress for your cat and allows you to monitor how well he is eating, drinking, and using his litter box. It also allows you access him for important bonding and socializing time.

These first few days require an immense amount of patience on your part. Your cat may be very nervous and hiding for the first couple of days. Be patient and allow your cat to adjust at his own pace. If your cat is outgoing and seems well settled, remember that keeping him confined for a few days will help him learn his surroundings and get used to his litter box and scratching post, making him more likely to use them!

Three Weeks: Expanding Horizons!

After 3 weeks, your cat is probably getting used to your comings and goings, learning the daily routine, and starting to figure out when the next meal is coming. He may have acclimated enough to have full run of the house, or he may just be starting to venture out of his room.

Providing him with scratching posts, litter boxes, and blankets/beds in his own room at first allows you to then place these objects in other areas of the home, giving him familiar scents and sights to help him get used to a new place.

Three Months: Likely Settled In!

At 3 months, most cats know they are “home.” It’s a process to get there, but with patience and a sense of humor, the two of you can scale the mountain together and enjoy the journey toward a great relationship. Keep in mind that settling into a new environment can be a lengthy endeavor, but well worth the effort for you and your new family

IT DOESN’T HAPPEN OVERNIGHT

3 DAYS
TO DECOMPRESS

- Feeling overwhelmed
- May feel scared on unsure of what’s going on
- Not yet comfortable to be “himself”
- May not want to eat or drink
- Shuts down and/or hides under furniture
- Tests the boundaries

3 WEEKS
TO LEARN YOUR ROUTINE

- Starts settling in
- Feels more comfortable
- Realizes this could be his forever home
- Figures out his environment
- Gets into a routine
- Lets his guard down; beginning to show his true personality
- Behavior issues may appear

3 MONTHS
TO START TO FEEL AT HOME

- Finally feels completely comfortable in his home
- Begins to build trust and a true bond
- Gains a complete sense of security with his new family
- Settles into a routine

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