HELPING CATS CO-EXIST
Suzanne Hetts, Ph.D. and Daniel Q. Estep, Ph.D.
Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists
Animal Behavior Associates, Inc.
Littleton, CO
Copyright 2003 All Rights Reserved
This article may be shared ONLY in its complete, unmodified form

The Basics Of Feline Social Behavior
Cats have been domesticated for only about 4,000 years. In many ways, the domestic cat has changed little from his wild ancestors. Cats have been described as solitary, a term that describes animals who form no lasting groups or pair bonds, but live most of their lives alone. Males and females only come together for mating. Many species of wild felids do indeed fit this description. However, more recent research on the social behavior of domestic cats seems to indicate that “flexible” is a more accurate way to describe their social system.

Cats Have Flexible Social Systems
Some cats do best in single cat homes, and while they may be affectionate to their owners, still have that stereotypical ‘aloof’ personality. Other cats are much more social and develop close social relationships with other family cats. These cats seem to be ‘best buddies’ – playing together, sleeping together, and spending much of their time in proximity to each other without conflict. However, within the same household, one cat may have a friendly relationship with a second cat, and an antagonistic one with a third. Unfortunately, it’s difficult to predict what will happen when a new cat brought into a family with resident cats.

Helpful Hint #1 – Is Another Cat a Good Idea?
Try to assess the social tendencies of your cat. Does she have a history of living peaceably with another cat? How social does your cat seem to be? Does she enjoy playing with you? Is she friendly toward human visitors? How does she react if she sees another cat through the window? Is she easy going about changes? If your cat is easily stressed, has no history of being socialized to other cats, and doesn’t seem to be very sociable, a second cat may not be a good idea. Your cat may be perfectly content to remain an only cat.

Introducing Cats to One Another
It is never, ever a good idea to just put cats together and “let them fight it out”. This presents serious risks for injury and sets the stage for prolonged, if not permanent social conflicts among the cats. First impressions are extremely important for cats, and an introduction gone wrong can sometimes require months to overcome.

Introductions cannot progress too slowly. Assume that your cats will require several months before they can freely be together. Some introductions are successfully accomplished much more quickly, but if you expect things to take longer, you’ll be less likely to rush things.
You must be prepared for a variety of outcomes. Your cats may become best of friends, they may exist with mutual tolerance, they may actively avoid one another with occasional skirmishes, or one or both may be so intolerant of the other that fights are frequent. In cases where cats can’t learn to get along, you may need to find one of them another home. Hopefully, appropriate introductions can help prevent this unfortunate outcome. A protocol for a cat-to-cat introduction follows.

**Helpful Hint # 2 – Cat Introductions**

- Allow the cats only to smell and hear each other, **not** see or touch each other. Alternate which cat is confined in a room and which is allowed free run of the house.
- Place towels with the scent of the other cat underneath each cat’s food dish, and on resting places. Rub the cat toys with the scent of the new cat. The goal is to have this scent be associated with ‘good things’.
- Feed, or offer both cats ‘to die for’ treats close to the door to this room (one on each side). Or slip a toy under the door to encourage play. This helps each to associate “good things” with the other’s presence.
- Repeat these procedures until there are no aggressive or fearful responses, and both cats begin to show some curiosity about each other.
- When the cats are first together, keep the session brief, and continue to offer enjoyable things – food, toys, petting.
- Do not allow the cats to be alone together until they are consistently demonstrating friendly behaviors with each other for at least a week.
- Punishment is rarely helpful with cat introductions as it is counter productive in creating the association of “good things” with each other’s presence.
- Keep the resident cat(s)’ routine as much the same as possible by keeping feeding, play, and sleeping times and locations the same as before the new cat arrived.


**Structuring the Environment For A Multiple Cat Household**

**Helpful Hint # 3 – Minimize Competition**

Create an environment that minimizes competition among your cats. No cat should have to face harassment and threats from another cat while attempting to meet his basic physical needs.

Have multiple locations for all the important things in life. This includes multiple feeding stations, litterboxes, escape routes, and objects for scratching. Provide multiple cat perches, which allow your cats to make use of vertical space. Create multiple resting places at different heights and in various locations.

Cats also need hiding places. Some are provided naturally, such as under the bed, but some rooms may lack them. Put an upside down cardboard box with one side cut away behind the couch, a small decorative cat screen across the corner of a room, or even an open paper bag on the floor to give your cats more hiding places.

If your cats can’t get along, contact us at info@AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com or 303-932-9095 to schedule an individual consultation.