



Shy and Fearful Felines

Some cats are shy and fearful at the shelter because they are scared of the loud, stressful environment they are in and will become less shy or fearful once back in a home environment. Sometimes, though, cats or kittens may continue to act shy or fearful once in their new home.

Realistic Expectations When Adopting a Fearful or Shy Kitten/Cat

- Shy cats will likely stay somewhat shy and will take at least several months to feel comfortable with you and in your home.
- They will often initially regress and become temporarily shyer upon moving into a new home.
- They prefer small areas and hidey holes to feel safe.
- They don't like new people, fast movements, loud noises, door bells, etc.
- They may never feel comfortable with visitors to your home, preferring to retreat to familiar and safe spaces when strangers arrive, and may prefer a close relationship with only one or two family members at first.
- They love predictability in routine and calm environments, and sometimes enjoy living with other cats.

General Tips to Help a Shy Kitten/Cat Transition into Your Home

- Prepare a safe sanctuary room for your new cat. This will provide the cat with the quiet and safety they need while becoming familiar with the scents and sounds of your home. The starter room is best when it is small but regardless of size must have a secure door and ceiling. Equip the safe room with cat food, water and litter.
- Ensure that this sanctuary room does not have any small openings in the floor or walls where a cat could squeeze themselves - cats have gotten trapped inside of walls before and it is not easy to get them back out safely!
- Shy cats are nervous and like to hide. Avoid rooms with large furniture to make interaction easier. Cardboard boxes or sheets over chairs can make great hiding spots.
- Shy cats may not eat much for the first 24 to 48 hours and may have temporary diarrhea from stress. If your cat has not eaten in 24 hours, try extra tasty treats such as canned tuna or salmon. After 36 hours of not eating, offer even tastier options such as heated canned food, "broth" type wet foods and pieces of unseasoned (no salt) plain chicken. Try both hand feeding and leaving it unsupervised (in a bowl and also on the floor, some cats are unsure about bowls). If the cat still isn't eating after 48 hours please reach out as they may need to be seen by a veterinarian.

How to Begin Interacting with a Shy Kitten/Cat

Quality time with people is very important. Start out with:

- Very slow movements and quiet voices
- Eye contact with lots of [slow blinking](#)
- Establishing a predictable routine

Next, you'll want to help the cat get used to normal activities in your home, such as:

- Read a book or magazine out loud or talk on the phone to friends so the cat gets used to your voice.

- Play a radio quietly—soft classical music is often best—and only for an hour or two each day. Loud and/or constant radio noise can actually cause more stress.
- Sit or lay on the floor when talking to your new kitty. This posture is much less threatening than standing above them.
- Show the cat anything new you bring into the room, whether a book, telephone, or glass of water. Let them sniff the item; cats are very curious and want to know that the new object is not a threat.
- Upon each visit, offer the cat one small tasty treat. This way, they begin to associate your visit with something pleasant. You can use a long-handled spoon or stick to offer the treat. (Remember: You don't want to over indulge the cat with treats as this can lead to obesity or diarrhea. It is intended to be a small reward.)
- **Never attempt to pull the cat from their hiding place or force them to be held.** This will increase their fearfulness and may even result in bites or scratches. When they are ready, they will come to you. Until then, gently pet them in their hiding place. If they are resistant to touch in their hidey place and try to pull away, hiss, or otherwise tell you they are uncomfortable, back away! They must make the choice to interact with you and know that you can be trusted to read and respect their signals.
- Encourage play with interactive toys (like a cat dancer or wand toy). Some cats are very play-motivated and regular play sessions can help bring them out of their shell and out of hiding.

How to Pet a Shy Kitten/Cat

- Start by using a wand toy or petting stick.
- First, set your petting stick or wand on the floor so the cat can see and sniff it.
- Start to touch the cat ever so gently and lightly around the cheeks and chin for only a very short time such as 30-60 seconds in the early days. Then, set the petting stick down for several minutes and talk to the cat. Repeat a few times each day.
- As the cat gets used to the touch of the petting stick and begins to indicate this is a pleasurable experience you can begin to slowly introduce the touch of the petting stick to the top of the head, the back and other areas of the body.
- Go slowly and over time, you will slowly move your hand down the length of the petting stick until your fingers are helping the wand pet the cat. The goal is to be able to introduce your hand and fingers as the 'substitute' petting stick once the cat identifies petting as a very pleasant experience.

Integration from the Safe Room into the Rest of the Home

When you and your new cat have established a trusting relationship, and your cat is regularly approaching you and allowing touching, they are ready to begin exploring your home. Be sure to begin this process when you are home to supervise.

- Close most of the doors so the cat begins its orientation in stages. Too many new spaces at once will be stressful and frightening.
- Do not let a shy cat into the basement or attic for many weeks or they may hide in the rafters or other small, dark places where you'll be unable to work on socialization.
- Full house privileges may take 2-3 months depending on the personality of the cat.
- Don't force the cat to come out if they are not ready.