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TIPS FOR A SMOOTH ADOPTION

Congratulations on adopting your newest furry family member! At Dandy Cat Rescue, we hope to make the transition as smooth as possible so we have created these tips for a smooth adoption process. Please take the time to read it and if you have any questions or concerns with your new family member, please contact your foster carer or the rescue as we are here to help. Enjoy this time getting to know each other!

BEFORE BRINGING HOME YOUR NEW CAT

- Make sure screens and windows are secure and your cat won't be able to escape.
- Block off small spaces so your cat can't get trapped in them. Cats like to hide in small, dark spaces when they're scared.
- *Take it slowly*: gradually introduce the cat to your home, starting with just one small room. Make sure the toilet lid is down so there is no accidental swimming.
- Set up a litter tray, a small amount of food, water and a cat bed in a spare room such as your laundry. Keep the litter box away from the food and bedding (would you eat next to the toilet? Neither will kitty!)
- As soon as you get your new kitty home go to that room and put him/her in the kitty litter tray. Gently move kitty's feet in the kitty litter. When the kitty jumps out, repeat this process. The kitty will now know that is the litter box he/she is to use.
- Spend some time with your new kitty – pat them, play with them, talk to them (grab a book and read to your kitty; they get to know your voice and you can catch up on some reading at the same time).
- Cats love to get away from it all in small places, and you can provide one for your new cat as his own little safe haven. Try taking the door off your cat carrier – instant retreat and bed! You can also make one by cutting a doorway for kitty in the end of a box. If you prefer, you can buy a covered cat bed at a pet supply store. In either case, make sure the space is big enough for the cat to stand up and turn around in. Cat "feng shui" probably requires that he or she be able to see the door to the room from his hidey hole, so they won't be startled.
- Letting the cat hide: initially, a cat will look for the nearest hiding place and stay there until they feel comfortable with the situation. You can beg and plead and stand on your head, but they will not come out until they feel safe. Don't take this personally - just let kitty hide for a while. If there are no obvious

hiding places in the room, you can make one using a good size cardboard box with some soft bedding in, and a large t-shirt stretched round it and secured at the back is fun.

- Your new kitty needs to become familiar with the smells and sounds of their new house. They must get used to your voices, the doors opening, the toilet flushing and all the normal sounds you take for granted.
- Kitty must also get used to the smells of your carpeting, furniture, cooking, and even of you. This can take time, depending on the cat's ability to process information and feel safe. Now would NOT be a good time to invite the whole family over to see your new cat.
- A cat's claws need to be worn down, and they do this by scratching on things. Since you prefer that it not be your chairs and sofa, provide your cat with a socially acceptable scratching place. Some types are made of corrugated cardboard and lie on the floor; others are posts which have to be tall enough so that the cat can extend himself upward to scratch. You can encourage your kitty to use the post by sprinkling it with catnip or dangling a toy at the top. They'll get the idea. You'll probably want a scratching post in each room where there is soft furniture, perhaps blocking access to it. You can also install sticky tape (available at pet supply stores) to corners of upholstered furniture to dissuade scratching.
- Look at your house with a curious cat's eye view for its climbing and exploring potential. When your cat is used to your home, you may be surprised to find him/her on top of the upper kitchen cabinets, so make sure there's nothing on display there or on other high shelves that can be damaged or knocked off (smashed vases, anyone?).
- If possible, buy a cat tower for your new family member. Cats like to survey their territory, so a high perch is often a favored resting place.
- If there are other human family members, go over the ground rules about your new pet. Remind them not to startle kitty and to keep the door to the room shut, at least for the first night.

INTRODUCING A NEW KITTY TO OTHER CATS

Separate new cats from other family pets initially. Keep the door closed and don't let your other pet race in unexpectedly.

Slow introductions over time will help pets coexist.

- Leave some bedding / a blanket / cat bed / soft chair or whatever for the cat to sleep on, and a toy or two. A catnip toy is good as 85% of cats enjoy catnip, and it can help to calm him, or a jingly ball, cotton reel or similar. Better still is to allow the cat to bring with him any bedding or toys that he/she is already used to, as that will already have his smell on, and will act as a comforter.
- When they're confident, relaxed and ready to explore the house, take it slowly and let them gradually explore their new surroundings.
- If you have other pets, make introductions slowly. Scent swapping is a great way to do this. Pat your cat/dog, then go into the room and pat the new cat. Repeat this process. Let them sniff at each other under the door too. Let the new kitty and existing pets see each other. Cats will hiss, do not try to stop this. Once new and existing kitties touch noses and sniff each other's butts they should be fine to be together supervised for the first few days. Time will get them used to each other. The better you make this process, the better the friendly outcome!

- Always keep your new cat completely indoors for at least one month. We recommend all cats are kept indoors always from dusk until dawn, and when outside, confined to your own property either by cat-proof fencing and enclosures or close supervision. This will keep your cat – and wildlife – safe and happy, and ensures you are a good neighbour.
- Have patience and give love – all lasting relationships take time to form, and the more you invest in the early days, the happier your future together.

Things NOT to do

- DON'T change kitten/cat food too quickly. Feed them the same food as the foster carer and change food slowly over time if you have to. Consistency, however, is always best. Kitties love routine, so try to feed at the same time of day and night.
- DON'T change kitty litter too quickly. Use same brand/type of litter as foster carer and transition them to a different type/brand slowly if need be. We recommend Breeder's Choice recycled paper kitty litter – it's cheap and great at absorbing smells.
- Don't leave windows open. Cats can pull off fly-wires or tear through them if they are really scared.

Things to DO

- Read the paperwork given to you by your foster carer. It's important to write in your calendar or diary when your cat's next flea and worming treatments are due as well as their next vaccination.
- Get your vet to scan your cat's microchip and check that the number is the same as it is listed on your pet's records. Paperwork can get mixed up by the vet or microchipping database, so please check you have the correct microchip paperwork.
- Update your pet's microchip information. Fill in the appropriate change of ownership form soon after you adopt our cat so that if they ever go missing, you can be contacted. In some instances, we will ask you to do so at the time of adoption and submit on your behalf.
- Provide toys for your cat. This keeps them from getting bored and stealing your hair ties, socks etc. They need not be expensive. Scrunched up paper, string or bits of old material work fine. A cardboard box is practically a wonderland for cats.
- Provide a scratch pole for your cat. This will stop them using your furniture to wear down their nails. You can buy cheap scratch poles, cardboard scratchers or make one out of carpet squares.
- If you ever move house, you will also need to contact the microchip database and update your change of address/phone number. If your correct contact details are not listed, you cannot be contacted if your pet goes missing.

BONDING WITH YOUR NEW KITTEN

- Sit on the floor and let kitten come to you. Don't force it; just let your cats get acquainted on their own time. If they don't approach, leave them alone and try again later. Some cats are particularly frightened, and may retreat to their hidey hole and not come out when you're around at all. They may initially only come out at night when the house is quiet. Give her time, all of a sudden kitten will decide you're awesome.

- Your newly adopted cat may not eat much or at all at first. It's best to give kitty the same food they had at the shelter or in her foster home, at least at first. Keeping some things familiar will make them feel more secure. Be sure to change the water frequently (at least morning and night) and make sure they are drinking. If your cat hasn't eaten for a few days, call your vet (or foster carer!) for advice.

A FEW HOURS AFTER THE CAT'S ARRIVAL

- Go slowly into the room, sit or lie on the floor, talking in a friendly, soothing voice. Don't attempt to reach for the cat unless they come to you. If they don't come to you at this first meeting, you may need to have several sessions with them, leaving them alone in between visits.
- Spend as much time as possible in the room, ideally sitting on the floor or a low-down chair or beanbag. Talk to kitty, read a book, play board games, write a letter, take a nap - you are basically just letting them get used to you, and then leave them alone. Each human in the house should take turns going into the Bonding Room and spending some time with the cat, never trying to touch or pet the cat until they come to you first.
- *Grooming and Playtime:* once your new cat is comfortable in the Bonding Room, you could try brushing them (go gently though, some cats may be unsure of brushes if they are not used to them) and also use toys to make friends. One of the best interactive toys you can use is a good old shoelace. Most cats can't resist pouncing on it when it's trailed along the floor. This is often the first game you can have together, which will help the bonding process. If kitty has been used to a domestic environment, it shouldn't take too long for them to come up to you for a fuss.
- *Children:* young children should always be accompanied by an adult in the Bonding Room, because they may become too excited and slow down the bonding time.

NERVOUS CATS

If the cat is particularly nervous or shy, you may find the first few visits, or even the first few days of visits, consist just of you going in to put down food and water, and to change the litter, then do a little more talking (or reading) to the cat, and then going away again. Follow the same steps as above, but be aware that some cats, if they are particularly nervous, will take longer to come out of their shell.

Winning over a nervous cat is hugely rewarding; when they come to trust you, and let you stroke them for the first time. Just let kitty take things at their own pace - even if that takes days, weeks (or even months in extreme cases) it will be worth the wait.

EATING & TOILETING

Don't panic! Most likely, your new pet will eat, drink, and use the litter tray when you are not there. However, many cats can withhold these functions for a day or even two (or more). This is quite normal. Keep trying to soothe your new pet with your voice.

While most cats won't put you through this trauma, there is no way of knowing what their reaction will be to their new environment. In the event that your new cat is not eating, drinking, or using the litter tray after two days, call your vet for advice.

EXPLORING THE HOUSE

- *If you already have another resident cat*, careful introductions at this stage will help towards feline harmony. Let the cat take things at their own pace. Given time, even very nervous cats can blossom into friendly, happy cats.
- *Let the cat decide*: your new cat will let you know when he is ready to explore beyond the Bonding Room. On average, a new cat may stay in the Bonding Room for two to seven days, but generally the cat will let you know when he is ready for the next step. He will come to you when you enter the room and will be comfortable in your presence, and when he is ready, may try to follow you out.....
- Before allowing the new cat out of the Bonding Room, make sure all doors and windows are closed, and if you have a cat-flap, make sure it is locked – your kitty will need a couple of weeks to get used to your home before being allowed outdoor access.
- When you feel your kitty is ready, open the door to their room and let them explore the house. Leave the door to their room open, so they can return if they wish. Don't chase the cat, just let kitty explore and get comfortable.
- *Feeling secure*: cats will often return to the Bonding Room when they feel the need for security. This is normal. You will know if you have released your cat too soon if they run and hide. Should this happen, call the cat's name in a friendly, gentle manner. Do not attempt to touch the cat if they hide. Simply be there in a non-aggressive way so the cat does not feel cornered or threatened. It's far better to let them hide when they feel they need to.

LETTING YOUR NEW CAT OUTDOORS (IF YOU DECIDE TO)

Dandy Cat Rescue recommends keeping your cat as an indoor only cat or with access to an enclosure. By keeping your cat safe indoors only or in an enclosure, you will spend less on vet bills, keep local wildlife safe and also your kitty safe from people or vehicles that will do it harm.

There are ways that you can let kitty explore the outdoors and be safe.

- Train them to go on a harness and take them for supervised walks outside.
- Cat proof your backyard or part of using special, inexpensive netting or purchasing a readymade enclosure. We use and recommend www.catnets.com.au and there are small businesses that will install for you or if you re handy, can be easily done yourself. There are many other companies that offer these products and services so please feel free to do your own research.

If you decide to let your cat outdoors without a harness or enclosure:

- A new cat should be kept indoors, ideally for the first 4-8 weeks, to prevent them straying back to their old home, or simply getting frightened, lost or run over. You should also ensure your cat has an ID collar on and that the microchip details are up to date before being allowed out.
- The first time you allow kitty outside, should be just before a meal, so that they are hungry and have a good reason to come in soon. Let kitty out, but stand at the open door, let them sniff and explore the garden for a few minutes, then call them or rattle the biscuit box, to (hopefully) encourage them back for mealtime. A few small outings like this, over the next few days, will ensure your kitty is familiar with the immediate vicinity, and that they know where home is.

FOLLOWING WEEKS

It may take your cat a week or a few months to adjust. Be patient.

Within a week or two of being adopted, take your newly adopted kitty for their first wellness visit with a veterinarian. If you have a record of vaccinations, take it with you.

As your cat adjusts, they'll show signs they want to explore outside her safe haven. Make sure other pets or family members won't startle them while they gradually expand their territory. Kitty may be ready to play, so you can furnish some toys. Many cats like feather wands from the pet supply store, but homemade toys are often favoured. A wad of a tissue paper to bat around or a paper bag to hide in can be fun. Bottle tops on tiles provide hours of endless entertainment too!

Congratulations! If you follow these tips, you'll be on your way to having a well-adjusted feline family member.

Please tell the world about your adoption from Dandy Cat Rescue by liking us on Facebook and Instagram and tagging photos of your new baby. We'd love to have you be a part of our social media family so please tag us, share our posts and help spread the word about what we're doing to save the lives of cats and kittens!!!!