

Cat: Moving with Your Cat



The Importance of Confinement

When introducing any cat into a new home, there is one thing all cats need—time to adjust to his new space. You can make the adjustment period shorter by letting your cat get to know his new home slowly. Many adopters hesitate to confine their cats, thinking it is “mean,” but the nicest thing you can do for your cat is give him a “safe space” at first.

Cats and their territory. Cats are territorial by nature, and their first priority in any situation is establishing and knowing their territory. Only once the cat is comfortable in his space can he feel comfortable eating, drinking, resting, and eliminating.

The safe space. Ideally, this area should be a small, quiet room (bathrooms, small offices, or large walk-in closets are all good candidates) without any hiding spaces such as under the tub or bed, behind a bookshelf, etc. You don't want to have to pull your cat out of hiding in order to interact with him. However, you can provide your cat with an acceptable hiding space by tipping a box on its side and putting a towel inside. You may also find that your cat, like many others, enjoys cat cozies or tee-pee style beds.

The room should be set up with a litter box on one end of the room, and the food, water, and bedding on the other side of the room, as far away from the litter box as possible. The cat should be given some safe toys to play with, and should be given visits while confined to this space. Start off slowly when visiting your kitty—don't do too much petting or interacting until the cat has had some time to settle in. Sit in the room and see if the cat will approach you. If not, offer him your hand to sniff and try some gentle face pets. Give your cat frequent breaks and work up to more handling. Be patient and remember, the more love, the quicker he will adjust!

The importance of a safe space. Confinement is especially crucial for shy or fearful cats. Many cats are overwhelmed when they first move into a new place; this is normal behavior. However, for a cat that is naturally fearful, it is even more terrifying to be in an unfamiliar space. Given the free run of the house, a scared cat will often bolt around, looking for a safe place to hide. Many cats injure themselves running into furniture or walls in a panic. He may also hide somewhere unsafe (such as under the stove, inside a reclining chair), and stay in hiding for several days. He may forego eating, or even urinate or defecate in his hiding space. The “safe room” gives them a small space where he will feel secure, and will also make him more sociable with you. The less he is worried about his territory, the more interested in YOU he will be! By providing your scared kitty with a cozy or box to hide in, you are making him feel safe in a way that also allows you to pet him while he is hiding.

Kittens and confinement. Kittens also benefit from an initial confinement to a small room (or even to a large cage/crate.) This will give you time to kitten-proof the rest of your house. There are three reasons to confine a smaller kitten: it reinforces good litter box habits, it prevents injury, and it means you don't have to search for your kitten. This is especially important when you are unable to supervised during the kitten's initial adjustment period and if you have a large home.

Moving into a new home. When moving, it is best to confine your cat to a safe room before and after the move. The more you can prevent him from being exposed to the chaos that comes with moving, the better! If he is startled by the commotion, there is a good chance he could slip outside when doors are left open. Be sure that anyone helping with the move knows that there is

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a cat in the room by putting a sign on the door so they don't accidentally open it. Eliminate chances for escape when transporting your cat to his new home by putting him in a secure carrier while he is still in the safe room. In the new house, again give him a safe room to adjust to before allowing him full access to the house.

When bringing a new cat into a home with resident kitties, the new cat should be confined to one room for a few days (sometimes weeks). This allows the cats to get to know each other by scent and accept each other's presence without having to see each other face to face, which can be a very threatening experience for a cat. Please refer to our *Introducing Cats* handout for more instructions on this subject.

When to let your cat explore. You may be wondering when you can be sure that it's okay to let your kitty out of his safe space. For some cats, the confinement period will be only a few hours—for others it could be several weeks. The important thing is that you do not rush your cat into being exposed to more space than he can handle. You will want to see **all** of the following:

1. The cat is performing his natural functions: eating, resting, grooming, and using the litter box.
2. The cat is responsive, allowing you to pet and play with him.
3. The cat is comfortable with you doing normal activities in the room, and is not afraid of you when you stand up or walk around.
4. The cat is showing some interest in getting out of the room.

Don't mistake just one signal for readiness. Even a very scared cat may meow or scratch at the door for attention. This does not mean the cat is ready to explore more space—for example, if you notice that the cat meows at the door, but when you open the door he runs and cowers back in his bed or box, he is not ready.

When possible, expand a cat's territory slowly (especially for fearful cats). You should close all the doors to bedrooms and allow the cat to first explore the hallway and rooms that do not close off (such as the kitchen and living room). If at anytime your cat seems overwhelmed, return him to his safe room for a few hours and try introducing him to the rest of the house later.

Don't feel bad for confining your kitty at first. It will help him relax and adjust to his new surroundings much quicker. The sooner he adjusts, the sooner he will have full-run of the house in his comfortable new home!