



# Cats living with other cats

A Yorkshire Cat Rescue Guide

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When cats are sharing a house (a multi-cat household of two or more cats) there are possible causes of conflict which can cause stress in cats. This is particularly true when the cats are unrelated. There are things to do to help all the cats in your house get along happily and be relaxed in their home.

## The cat colony

In the wild, cats live in feral groups and there is usually an established hierarchy that the cats agree on. The boss is the dominant female and she will happily live with her offspring and they will grow up and then will either stay in the colony or move on. They are related to her so she tolerates their presence and may enjoy their company. The males have a wider territory and range across different cat colonies where they will visit and mate with females in the group.

When we bring more than one cat to live together we are creating a cat colony very differently to how they would occur naturally. Yet cats living with us have different needs to wild-living cats, neutered cats are not looking for mates and there is no need to have disputes over food if it is always provided. So although we can try and use knowledge on how cats choose to live together naturally to help in deciding an ideal companion for a cat, the individuality of cats can make cat relationships in the home more complex.

## What cat will get along with my cat?

If your present cat is female then the one cat you do not want to introduce to her is another adult female. They will both feel the need to be boss and unless one of the cats decides to back down the two cats will always be in conflict. If your cat is an adult male then a cat of either sex may get along with him.

Introducing a cat younger than your existing cat can be an easier pairing to make and kittens will look to a resident cat as the dominant cat and so can be easier to fit into a cat household. This may be particularly true if you have more than one cat already.

It is always worth considering the temperament of your cat. Very timid cats will not appreciate a new boisterous friend and if your cat is very confident and domineering a quiet cat may find them frightening. Playful cats and kittens can liven up the life of older cats but make sure the older cat has a quiet place to go where they can take a rest from the attentions of a playful younger cat.



## Introducing a new cat

It is best to take it slowly when introducing a new cat. If at all possible give your new cat a single room to settle into without meeting the other cat(s) in the house, a spare room or even a utility room will do until he settles in. The cat will need his own litter tray and food and water bowls. During this process swap bedding with each cat. If your cat goes out then let the new cat explore and sniff his surroundings whilst he is out of the house, he will probably scent mark (rubbing his face, rolling and scratching) while he explores. When the other cat comes back in he will have a chance to smell the new arrival's scent. Cats have a group smell, a bit like a family surname, if they have smelt their mingled scents they will already feel familiar with each other. First meetings are best when the cats can see each other but cannot reach each other; do not hold either cat when they first meet as this will make the held cat feel vulnerable. Giving each cat treats in these first meetings will distract their attention and also give them positive associations with each other.

## What to do when cats don't get on

However well you have picked a companion and introduced them slowly some cats do not like each other. Usually this is just a process of acceptance and it can take a long time before cats learn to live harmoniously. It may be 6 months or more before a new addition is fully accepted into the household. If cats are not getting along make sure that they have their own places where they can be without the presence of the cat they don't like. It can often be just one of a cat pair that doesn't like the other, make sure that cat can have his own place as the other cat may not make an effort to avoid him if he doesn't feel the same way.

## Cat bullies

It is often hard to interpret cat behaviour and what can seem like bullying behaviour from one cat to another may actually be the reverse. Often a cat that attacks, growls or swipes at another cat is the cat that is feeling vulnerable and the other cat may be preventing him from doing something he wants. So do not try and tell the cats off or punish them, it doesn't help the situation even if you have worked out correctly who is bullying who. If you see conflict about to start (tails wagging, pupils dilating or growling and hissing) try and distract the cats with toys or treats. All cats find fighting stressful and as they want to feel safe in their home it is better to try and prevent any fighting or chasing before it happens.



Nemo and Brujo – Brujo was a young female cat when she met white and black kitten Nemo. They continue to be very close, playing together and sharing a bed.

## Resources in a multi- cat household

Resources are all the things that a cat uses in your house like litter trays, sleeping places, food bowls and water. Cats that are friendly with each other are usually happy to share litter trays and drink from the same water bowl. If the cats are not friendly to each other make sure they each have access to a litter tray and water bowl and give them each a food bowl at mealtimes and place the bowls so the cats aren't close to each other. Cats can sometimes guard a resource like a litter tray and that can be very stressful for the other cat(s) that can't then use it. Ensure there are several sleeping places in your house – and try to have as many as possible off the floor.

## Cats living together as indoor only

Cats can live happily in an indoor home and often the presence of a companion can give them more stimulation and increase their wellbeing. However, when cats do not get along the situation is more stressful for the cat in an indoor home as they cannot go outside to take themselves away from the situation. If this is the case consider letting the cats have outdoor access either free-roaming or in an enclosed garden. If this is not possible or dangerous then you can increase the amount of cat friendly space in your house. Keep doors open to spare rooms, leave cupboard doors open with blankets in and give the cats' access to higher up places like on shelves or wardrobes. With indoor living cats it is even more essential that cats can access and feel unthreatened when using litter trays and water bowls. Cats with access to the outdoors can always find a patch of earth and a puddle. Make sure there is more than one water bowl and the general rule is to have as many litter trays as cats plus one. This number can always be reduced if the cats are happily sharing the litter trays.