
Welcoming a New Kitten or Cat Into Your Home

White Mountain Bengals

Everyone gets excited to bring home their new cat or kitten! How will they do with my existing cats, how will they like that new cat tree I got them, will they sleep with me at night...

While it is a very exciting time for you, it is a terrifying time for them. They are leaving a home they have learned was their own, going with a stranger either after a car ride or plane ride, and are now in an environment with new sights, smells, sounds, and maybe even new animals they don't know.

There are a few steps that you should take to ensure you set your kitten up for success in their new home.

Step 1 Kitty should go straight into your bathroom. I know this isn't what you want to hear, and it's not the instant gratification most want, but it is in the best interest of the kitty. Kitty should have a bed, litterbox, food, and water. This will last for 2 weeks.

Step 2 Kitty should visit the vet within the first 48 hours (or within the time your contract states) to ensure your kitty is healthy and has the proper vaccinations and deworming. We always recommend testing new kitties for FIV/FELV. Just note, that in kittens younger than 6 months, there have been false positives, so don't panic if this happens to you, just keep kitty separate from other cats until this test is proven negative.

Step 3 Visit the kitty every day, several times a day. This is the main time you want to spend bonding with your new kitty. Do not grab at your kitty, force them to come by you, or force yourself on them. Sit in the bathroom on the floor with a wand toy and just play with the wand, and play with other toys. Your new kitty will be intrigued and will eventually come to play with you. It may not be the first time you go in, or even the second, but they will. This builds trust and this slow, non-forceful introduction to you builds a life-long bond. After kitty is coming by you and playing with you, pet kitty and see how they respond. If positive keep petting kitty. Don't overdo it though, you want to end each "session" positively.

Step 4 Bond with kitty on a daily basis throughout the two weeks. Your kitty will also be learning the smells and sounds of your new home. Kitty will likely sniff and 'meet' your other pets from under the door, which will ease them into their new environment and make it less of a shock for all involved.

Step 5 Once your two weeks is up, if litterbox habits have been good for the two weeks, and your new kitty has bonded with you (and other members of the family) so that you can pet them, pick them up, and play with them, now we move kitty into a bigger room. The reason being is, the stress and sudden changes can cause litterbox habit issues. You want to slowly ease them into this new environment and teach them that their litterbox is always around, no matter how large or different of an area they are in. This step doesn't need to be as long, I would suggest about 3 days to 1 week. You can also slowly start introducing new pets to your kitty (if new kitty is healthy) but always be nearby to ensure that the interactions are calm and friendly.

Step 6 After three days to 1 week in the bedroom area, start opening your home up to your new kitty and keep an eye on them. Ensure there are ample cat trees / high places for kitty to jump and climb to get away from other pets (such as dogs). Cats enjoy being up high as they feel safer and are able to get away from the 'dangers' below. If you're still uncertain if your new kitty and your existing pet will live in harmony, do not leave them alone together. Put your new kitty in your bedroom when you leave and keep interactions to when you're there to observe. You don't want either pet to have a bad taste in their mouth from an early argument.

This does take time and isn't always what the new pet parent wants to hear but in the long run, this will keep new kitty happy and help them integrate to their new home better. It will help existing pets get used to the new kitty, and help new kitty get used to existing pets. It will also reinforce proper litterbox habits inside the new home. For more on litterbox habits, read our article "Dealing With Litterbox Problems in Cats".