

I've Adopted a Spirit/Shy Cat

It can take time and patience to help a shy cat build trust and confidence in their new environment with new owners, but watching them blossom is incredibly rewarding and worth the wait.

What will you need?

Patience: Patience goes a long way when it comes to socializing spirit cats. Each cat comes around at their own pace regardless of age – although younger cats tend to socialize faster. You'll have to go at your cat's pace and not expect too much too soon.

Routine: If you can, interact with your cat at the same time each day so they begin to anticipate your visits. Cats feel more secure in a predictable environment.

Frequency: Short, frequent visits work best in the first few weeks. A five-minute session twice a day will do wonders. However, if your cat can see and hear humans most of the time, that is an ideal setup. For example, a carrier in the living room of a home is better than a quiet bedroom where the cat is rarely exposed to humans. If your cat is in a quiet area, leave a talk radio station on and place T-shirts with your smell in their safe space.

Confinement: Confining your cat to a small room will help everyone adjust. A small room can be equipped with a cat tree so the cat can get up off the ground, and lots of appropriate places to hide, like boxes and hidey beds. Block off hiding places that may be dangerous for your cat to get stuck in.

Isolation: We recommend isolating any new cat for the first few weeks. This will give them time to settle in to start seeing humans as their source of food, comfort, and love.

A step-by-step plan:

Day 1: Bringing Your New Friend Home - Once your cat is home, keep them in a small room that, ideally, has already been set up. Make sure that this room is quiet and calm, and that there are no animals or small children in this room. First, only visit your cat to take care of their personal needs such as food, water, and litter box. Again, food is a very big motivator for shy or feral animals, so get your cat used to the fact that you are the one taking care of their needs. While you are taking care of your cat, feel free to talk to them very slowly and softly. This will also get them used to you and your voice. Always move slowly around your cat.

Week 1: Beginning to Build Trust - Once your cat seems comfortable with your presence, try sitting with him or her for a few hours a day. Don't try to touch your cat yet – just sit near and talk to them. Each time you visit, you can also try to sit closer and closer to your cat, being sure to pay attention to body language. Remember that any time your cat gives you a signal to 'go away,' do so. Never push. Go at the pace your cat chooses. This step could take several weeks to several months.

Month 1: Attempting Touch - This step should only start once your cat has already attempted to touch you, such as approached you and rubbed against you. When you start, move your hand slightly away from your body and see if your cat smells your hand. If they do, and your cat seems calm enough, you can try to pet your cat gently. Again, don't push things. Start slow, petting beneath the chin and working toward the head and back. At any time, if your cat seems to be angry or scared, stop. And remember, most cats strongly dislike their paws and backsides/tails being touched, so try to stay away from those areas at first. If your cat is nervous about your touch, you can try a few tricks: try to give your cat a little tuna or chicken baby food on a spoon before touching to coax them into trusting you, or use a pipe cleaner, tooth brush, or back scratcher and 'pet' your cat with it from a distance. If you are attempting to pet from a distance, first, slowly move your tool to your cat's cheeks or chin and gently start to stroke them. After a few sessions like this, if your cat is agreeable, start to move your hand down the tool each time you use it, so eventually, your hand is right beside them when you are rubbing gently. Finally, you can start touching your cat with your own hand. Once your cat appears to enjoy this you are well on your way!



Introducing Your Cat to the Household - You have bonded with your cat and it is time to introduce them to other people and to the rest of your household. If family members haven't previously been involved, get them to sit in the room talking to your cat and also playing with them with toys. If you have other animals in your household, at first, introduce them to one another's scents by exchanging articles of bedding. Rub down your resident cats with a towel, blanket, or bed and put it in your new cat's room. Do the same with something from your new pet's room that has been laid on. A screen door or gate is great for a protected barrier, so the cats can watch each other and still be safe. Try to make a point of interacting with your pets in view of your new cat, especially picking them up (if they enjoy this), loving them, and putting them back down. Make sure your new cat sees how much your cats find this enjoyable (stick to interactions that your cats enjoy otherwise your new cat will learn to be fearful of interaction).

When your new cat is relaxed, you can leave the room open, as long as you feel that all pets in the household will get along. Make sure to first cat-proof the rest of the house so your new cat can't escape or get into problems. Because your cat may become overwhelmed at having access to the whole house at once, decide which rooms they can visit, and which ones will be kept closed. At first, they will likely make forays out into the rest of the house to explore and find other hiding places. Your cat may return to their original room or settle into another 'safe place'. Spend time with them in the new space. This reinforces taming and socialization work. If he or she hides around the house, always talk gently when you are near one of their hiding places. Don't force them out of these hiding places, though you can try luring them with food or toys.

As your cat explores and learns more of the house, you can start to leave other rooms open. Gradually move your cat's litter tray and food and water out of their original room to encourage them to spend time in the rest of the house. At first, they may hide from you in the daytime, but the combination of night-time forays, moving food bowls, morning feeding, and continual reinforcement will hopefully bring your cat out in the daytime.

Tips:

- Your new cat may never want to be petted or picked up, and that is okay. Do everything at your cat's pace.
- Keep a cat carrier out as a hiding space, so that your cat is used to it when it's time to go to the vet.
- Using Feliway and/or calming music or bird sounds can help your new cat feel more relaxed.