



Paw Perfect Introductions podcast Episode Three – Introducing a new cat to your cat

Cathy: Hello, I'm Cathy Beer from Pets4Life, and this is episode three of the Paw Perfect Introductions podcast. Today's topic is about introducing a new cat to the family cat. With me is the lovely Dr Joann Righetti. Hi Jo, how are your three cats getting along with Chilli dog and your chickens today?

Dr Righetti: Well, everything's good. You know, I can't complain. And it does take a bit of work to make sure that every family member—every *furry* family member—is happy, but that's well worth it because we have peace and harmony most of the time.

Cathy: Oh, that sounds good. Quite often I've talked to a few people who think, *Oh, my cat's lonely*, and they're thinking of getting another cat. Is getting another cat the solution?

Dr Righetti: It's one potential solution. I think the right time to get another cat—indeed, to get any other animal—is when the person is ready for it, because when a human who loves animals is ready for another animal, they will put their life and soul into making sure that that animal is loved. And I think that's the answer. So, a lonely cat, yes, getting another cat can alleviate the loneliness, but it does make a bit of double work for people, so we need to be ready for it ourselves.

Cathy: And the two cats may not necessarily get along anyway.

Dr Righetti: Well, that's true. Fur can fly; cats can be a little bit stroppy. But in general, if we approach it very cautiously and with a lot of supervision and a lot of positive introductions, we actually can encourage our cat to get along with other cats.

Cathy: So let's say I've decided to get a second cat. How would I introduce it to my first cat?

Dr Righetti: When you're bringing home that next cat—that beautiful new family member, whether it's a cat or a kitten—what we do there is set aside a room in your house that this newcomer can go to, and you can also spend time there. Because a cat needs to come in and feel safe. It needs to know where its food and water dishes are. It needs to know that it's got a litter tray. It needs to feel

comfortable getting to know you, and that's very important. Your other cat will no doubt know that this cat's there because they'll smell it or they'll hear it or they might even see it, but at first we just need that newcomer to feel very safe. With time—and this time may vary depending on each of the cats' personalities—with time, we can actually let the two meet. And we do that by being very realistic about our expectations. They may not be best friends. But we can separate them by letting them look at each other through a glass window, by making sure that we have an adult present per cat in a room, and we could keep one cat in a cat carry case while the other cat has the ability to move around the room. So in that case, the cat in the carry case is getting to know the movements, the smell, the sounds, the visuals of this other cat, and then we can swap them over, and the one who was free to move around is now going in the cat carry case, and the other one is moving around. So they're getting to know one another. What we need to be careful of is that there's no "booing" going on, as I like to call it. A lot of cats may not fight, but they do go up to others and intimidate them with a look that only cats can do.

Cathy: Right.

Dr Righetti: We just need to make sure that we're encouraging them to have distance between them at first, and praising your existing cat for being calm around this new cat. This is the time to give your existing cat its favourite treats, praise, pats from you. If it's got a favourite toy, play with it then. So it's now getting these positive associations whenever this other cat is here—this newcomer, this interloper. *I'm getting really great things—I'm getting food, I'm getting treats, I'm getting mom's attention, I'm getting playtime.* And of course, it's important that eventually we do let both cats out of the box to wander about the room, and that's when we set up our room—preferably in advance. But we set it up with lots of bookshelves, windowsills, benchtops (if you allow it), table tops (if you allow it)—places that cats can get away from one another and feel as comfortable and as safe as possible, and with cats that tends to be up high. So if we can arrange all of those sort of things to happen—positive interactions, safe places for cats to go—then chances are that they will—over days, weeks, perhaps even months if we're patient—get along together quite nicely.

Cathy: So, would things like having their own scratching posts—would that help? You might already have a scratching post and a few shelves and things already set up for the first cat. Would you get a second one for the second cat, or will they quite happily use the same one?

Dr Righetti: Again, here it's all individual. We can have four cats using one scratching post; we can have four cats insisting on their own. So a scratching post, while it does shorten nails, is a place that they can scent-mark. They can put their own scent on there, which makes them feel less stressed. It also just makes it feel like home to them—it's their mark; their own scent is around them.

So, having more than one is certainly a great solution to help your cats get along, and also to preserve your furniture...

Cathy: Yes.

Dr Righetti: ...Because they will tend to mark areas around the home, and if you want to keep your furniture intact, scratching posts are a very good idea for cats.

Cathy: And I'm just thinking too, you know how you're setting up that separate room to confine the new cat? After the cats have been getting along quite happily throughout the house and everybody's getting on, do you leave all the items that you've set up in that first room, or do you move them to the more permanent place? Or, with the first room, do you leave it as a safe space?

Dr Righetti: Yeah, it's interesting because it really depends on your own situation here. So, if you live in a small place and you only have two main rooms—perhaps a lounge room and a bedroom—then you probably very quickly have everything interacting with everything else. If you live in a larger place, and you can have a dedicated room for that new cat, then you might like to keep that litter tray there. It's important that you feed them away from litter trays—any cat or kitten has to be fed away because living areas are for playing, for feeding, for sleeping. Toilet areas are purely for toileting. So it is important that we separate a toilet area, especially after the cat's been there a little while; you need to make sure they have a bit of space to get away from toilets, to live. But if both cats are confident around your home, you may find that eventually they will toilet in the same area as one another, and that can be your preferred area for them to toilet—perhaps the laundry or your bathroom. And you may find that they're actually sleeping on the sofa together. With cats, it's really a wait-and-see attitude. They may be best friends, or they may just simply tolerate one another. Or they may just keep different hours and different spaces entirely. Whatever we can do to keep our harmonious, peaceful household, we should encourage.

Cathy: That's great advice, Jo. And I think you've managed to introduce three cats to a dog and chickens. <Laughs>

Dr Righetti: <Laughs> And with my own, it has been very individual. I've had two cats that have had to go very slowly with my dog, and I've had one cat that almost completed this process within an hour, which even astounded me! So yes, there are no rights and wrongs to this—we just have to go at the animals' pace and have a lot of patience ourselves.

Cathy: Great. And maybe a bit of thinking before you bring home that second cat, to work out where that room's going to be, and getting all the items, and getting set up before the cat comes home.

Dr Righetti: Absolutely. Always good to plan in advance.

Cathy: That's great. Thanks, Jo. Next time we'll be talking more about introducing cats to the family. In episode four, we'll talk about introducing a dog to a cat, and a puppy to a cat. So we'll talk then, Jo.

Dr Righetti: Excellent!

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