



## **ADOPTING A FEARFUL CAT**

### **Why Are Some Cats Fearful?**

Fearful behavior in cats can be caused by various factors. Insufficient exposure to humans and/or a variety of stimuli during kittenhood as well as traumatizing events in their lives can teach them to react fearfully towards people or new situations. Cats can also be genetically predisposed to being fearful.

### **How To Introduce A Fearful Cat To A New Home**

Fearful cats usually do best in relatively quiet homes. They are not suitable for young children as children can easily scare them with loud noises or sudden movements.

Many fearful cats who come to us slowly become more confident as they get used to their living space and daily routine. Going to a new, strange environment can throw some of these cats off and cause them to regress at first. However, if you follow the procedures outlined in this handout this should only be temporary. The amount of time it takes a cat to settle into a new home varies from case to case. Some cats may take a week; others may take months, depending on the individual personalities.

Start by confining the cat, preferably to a small room, ensuring that the cat cannot hide in any inaccessible places (e.g. under the bed). You should provide hiding places that are easily accessible and comfortable. Be sure to place the litterbox within easy reach of the cat, but away from food and water.

Keep the cat confined until he feels comfortable in the room and doesn't hide any more. Let him explore the rest of the house gradually (too much territory all at once may be overwhelming). If at any point during this process he regresses, confine him to his "safe" room for a few days and start over by only allowing access to one room at a time.

If you have other pets, do not introduce them until the cat has bonded with you and is reasonably comfortable in the home. At this point you may also start to slowly introduce the cat to other people, but be sure not to overwhelm her.

### **How To Establish A Trusting Relationship**

Many fearful cats bond to their caretaker(s) and make wonderful pets but retain a shyness with strangers and hide when people come over.



### Tips That Will Help To Bring Your New Kitty Out Of Her Shell

- Always talk softly and move slowly around the cat. Avoid staring at her since this can be perceived as a threat. It helps to get down to the cat's level when interacting with her instead of towering over her.
- Food can be used as a bonding tool by feeding at scheduled times instead of leaving food out all the time. This will help the cat make a positive association between you and the food. You can also approach the cat with a small food treat to make friends (don't go overboard with treats. You don't want to ruin kitty's figure...).
- Never attempt to pull the cat from his hiding place or force him to be held. This will increase his fearfulness and may even result in bites or scratches. When he is ready he will come to you. Until then, gently pet him in his hiding place.
- Encourage play with interactive toys (e.g. cat dancer, fishing pole type toy), but make sure that the toy you are using is not big and scary. Some cats are very play-motivated and regular play sessions can help bring them out of their shell and out of hiding.
- Try not to startle the cat. If you have to do anything noisy in the house (e.g. vacuum, moving furniture, having a dinner party), confine the cat to her "safe" room.

Patience and understanding are essential with fearful cats. They will give you plenty of love and purrs in return!



From the San Francisco SPCA Cat Behavior Department



If you have further questions, please phone the SF/SPCA Cat Behavior Helpline at (415) 554-3075 or email [catbehavior@sfspca.org](mailto:catbehavior@sfspca.org)