

The First Week with Your New Cat

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Congratulations on adopting a SFAHS shelter cat! By adopting, not only will you have a loving and devoted pet to add to your household, but you are also helping to reduce the amount of unwanted animals that flood animal welfare organizations each year.

Cats by nature are wary of new situations. New places, new people, new pets and new smells make even the most confident cat duck under cover. So, how can you bond with a cat that is hiding under your kitchen sink? And how can you introduce your new cat to the resident cat without a fight?

Believe it or not, CONFINEMENT is the answer. By separating the adopted cat in a room of its own, the cat will feel more secure. A room can be a spare bedroom, a bathroom, a den, or even your own bedroom. Just make sure the cat has a litter box, dishes for food and water, and something to sleep on. Whenever possible, spend time petting the cat and getting her used to your presence.

We recommend this method for a variety of reasons:

- Cats will hide until they can determine they are safe. Cats will feel safe when their new family approaches them in a gentle manner. When they learn to associate their new family members with love, food, and attention, they will settle in quickly.
- People cannot bond with a new pet if they cannot find it. Cats are notorious for finding the most inaccessible place and staying there until the house is quiet, which means they will most likely come out at night. A new owner will only know he has a cat when the food dish starts to get low. It can take up to six weeks for a cat to come out of hiding and start to bond with a new owner once it has been allowed to hide in the first place. This can be very frustrating to the new adopter who is looking to enjoy a new pet.
- Although all the cats adopted from SFAHS receive vaccinations against upper respiratory infections, they can take 7-10 days to offer immunity. This is important if the house is also home to another cat, as it is contagious from cat to cat (but very treatable).
- If your cat just underwent spay or neuter surgery, a confined environment will give you a chance to keep a close eye on the surgery site. A small room also prevents the cat from leaping around and possibly tearing out stitches.
- If you already have a cat, he will need some time to get used to another cat in the house. Having them separated gives your resident cat a chance to smell the new cat under the door without experiencing the shock of a face-to-face confrontation. A week of this non-threatening association makes it easier for your cat to accept a new addition.
- Think a room is too small for a cat? Just remember many of these cats have been sitting in a cage, sometimes for a long time, while they wait for someone to take them home. An entire room to themselves will seem like a sprawling mansion by comparison!

When you first arrive home with your cat, set up the litter box on one side of the room, and the food and water on the other. Gently lift your cat from her carrier and set her in her litter box so she will know where it is. Most likely she will sniff around and then find a place to hide. THIS IS NORMAL. Give her a cardboard box tipped on its side with a warm towel for a bed, or just let her come out of her hiding spot at her own pace, and she will gradually gather more courage to keep approaching you. After a full week of this, she can usually be allowed out of the room for supervised periods of time.

Once your new cat is comfortable in your house, feel free to move the litter box to a permanent location. Place it in a quiet area, free of dogs, children or noisy appliances (like washing machines or furnaces). Just make sure you bring your cat to the box so she knows where it is now!

By following these simple guidelines, your new cat will be able to associate you with all things wonderful. With a minimal amount of time, your new cat will act as if she's always been a member of the household.