

BRINGING HOME A NEW CAT OR KITTEN

REASONS TO ISOLATE YOUR NEW PET/ A ROOM OF THEIR OWN

- Isolating your new pet helps reduce stress not just for the animal but for you too. There is less worry about what you might come home to when you isolate your new pet.
- Sounds and smells we take for granted can be frightening to a new pet, such as the washing machine, doorbells, furnaces running, doors slamming, water running, dog barking, or baby crying. A room of their own for five to seven days is less threatening to the new pet and to other animals in the home.
- A room of their own insures litter box habits are well established before allowing the new arrival full run of the house. This is especially recommended for young kittens that may not remember where the box is in a multi-level or large home or when they get busy playing.
- A slow introduction to other household pets reduces the risk of house soiling due to territorial disputes. Patience is the key to introducing cats to cats and dogs to cats. It isn't always love at first sight.
- Lavish your attention on your existing cat(s). If he/she hisses at the newcomer console him/her and ignore the new cat while in the presence of the existing cat. Your existing pet (and the newcomer) needs to know the current pets are first in importance. Sooner or later the newcomer will find his/her niche in the group. Owners are seen as territory to cats. If an existing pet feels threatened it may start marking the owners things trying to reclaim its territory. The newcomer may claim ownership of the owner and try to keep existing pets away from what the newcomer now is claiming as his domain. This can happen when too much attention is given to the newcomer and not existing pets.
- The first *visual* introduction to other household cats should be kept very short, three to five minutes. Don't stand idly by watching what is happening. Introduce using a food treat placed on separate dishes placed apart in a room or initiate a game with a laser light or cat dancer. Never allow negative physical contact to happen. One animal may become fearful and the introduction will take longer. Error on the side of caution.
- Whether the new arrival is a dog or cat, the **DOG** must learn to respect the cat. Dogs should never be allowed to chase cats. Until your dog understands the command "leave it" keep him under control by having him drag a light lead around for several days. It will be easier to grab than the dog should he decide to give chase. (If the dog is the newcomer he needs to respond to your commands before he can be expected to respect the family cat.)
- Be patient! Introductions take time. Your new pet will be a member of the family for many years. Take your time getting to know each other. Help your pet learn house rules. Cats love routine. What we see as boring they regard as security.

PROPER PLAY

- Hands are for loving and healing, not biting and kicking. Using your hands to play with a kitten does NOT teach them to respect human flesh. Play aggression can turn into just plain aggression.
- Try not to over stimulate your cat by over petting or grooming too long. This can lead to the “leave me alone” nip.
- If your cat puts his teeth on you or bites you **DO NOT** tap him on the nose or hit your cat. If you do you have just picked a fight with your cat! Instead squeal or cry. Don’t move your hand away but push it toward the cat. When the cat lets go put the cat down and ignore the cat for at least 10 minutes.
- If your kitten has not been well socialized or didn’t have the benefit of learning to inhibit his bite by playing with littermates use a small stuffed toy to play with your kitten or cat.
- Put interaction toys such as cat dancers, wands or feather toys away when you are not playing with them. Too many toys out at once can be boring. Rotate toys for variety. Put a paper bag on the floor or a cardboard box. Be inventive.

CLAWS AND SCRATCHING

- Scratching is as natural to a cat as barking is to a dog. It is the way they stretch their muscles. Scratching also is a visible way of saying “this is my territory.” Even declawed cats scratch to deposit their scent from the scent glands in their paws to tell other animals “this is mine.”
- Cats do not scratch to sharpen their claws but to remove the outer sheaths of their nails. Cats cannot wear down their nails like a dog can by walking on concrete. You can help your cat by routinely trimming his nails. (See nail trimming handout)
- When petting your cat massage his feet and toes so he gets used to you handling them.
- Cats **can** learn to scratch in appropriate places. Cats need consistent training and horizontal and vertical items they are allowed to scratch on. Scratching posts should be covered with sisal rope, not carpet and should be at least 30 inches tall. Vertical cardboard scratch pads help with horizontal scratching.
- When very young, kittens cannot retract their nails. By the age of 6 months they are usually done “experimenting” with their weapons and put them away unless they feel very threatened. Help your cat learn appropriate scratching behavior.

LITTER BOX ETIQUETTE

- Don't change brands of cat litter from week to week. Find one your cat uses and stick to it. The best is Everclean HD or ES. It is worth the price in the long run.
- Rule of thumb is one litter box per cat plus one. Cats are very clean and like to have more than one choice when it comes to bathroom habits.
- **Keep it clean!** Would you use an unflushed toilet? Neither will your cat. Scoop boxes at least once a day. If you are using a quality litter it is easy to keep the boxes clean. A pail with a cover and a bag liner is ideal to scoop soiled litter into.
- Make sure the box is of a proper size for your cat, not too small. Please, no liners or covered boxes.
- Placement of boxes is important. Place in a convenient spot for the **cat** but not in a high traffic area.
- If you want to try a new brand of litter give kitty a choice. Put the new brand in one box and keep another with the old brand. Kitty will tell **you** which one she prefers within a week.
- If kitty has an accident be sure to remove the cat before cleaning up the mess. Be sure to use an enzyme cleaner such as the Equalizer or Nature's Miracle.
- If you catch kitty in the act outside the box clap your hands and say "kitty No!" and take cat to box area. If cat finishes in box, praise the cat and then scoop the box right away to reinforce that this is the correct place to make deposits.
- Never punish an animal for going to the bathroom. Always reinforce the correct behavior with praise and by keeping the boxes sparkling clean.

DON'T WAIT

- If you have questions or concerns, please call the Oshkosh Area Humane Society (920-424-2128). We want you and your new pet to have a long and happy life together. With love, patience, and the right tools most behavior problems can be solved. We can only help when we **know** there is a difficulty.
- **Thank you** for adopting your pet from your local Oshkosh Area Humane Society.