



Sussex Brighton and East Grinstead Branch

Registered Charity No. 206630

SETTLING IN YOUR RESCUE CAT

Cats find themselves in rescue and in need of rehoming for a variety of reasons, but regardless of the animals' history, finding themselves in a rescue environment and then, in a brand-new home will be difficult for any cat. There are some things that are very important to remember when bringing home a rescue cat, to help them relax and acclimatise to their new surroundings and to help prevent any problems behaviours from developing.

SETTING THEM UP

Choose one room of the home, which is ideally the quietest room in the home to set them up for the first few days. Most rescue cats would have been living in a cattery environment with limited space and so having access to the whole house on the first few days will likely be overwhelming for them. They will also not be used to having to roam far for the important resources, such as food, water, and litter tray and so having these things in the same space can help them settle.

ESCAPE-PROOFING YOUR HOME

For the first few days or weeks, your cat will not be familiar with you or their new home and will likely be scared. A scared cat's instinct could be to escape and so management should be put in place for this. Windows and doors should be kept securely closed unless you are certain that your cat is secured and cannot escape. Consider other potential escape routes such as cat flaps and chimneys, as these will need to be blocked just in case. This should stay in place for at least the first week or 2.

LETTING CATS OUTSIDE FOR THE FIRST TIME

It is recommended to wait 2-4 weeks before letting your cat go outside and for some cats, this will be even longer. This is as they will have no bond with you or their home if you do it too soon, which may lead to them going missing. Let them out for a short while the first few times and slowly build up the amount time they are outside. If they are scared and don't want to go outside, don't force them. Let them grow in confidence at their own pace. Make sure your cat is microchipped and vaccinated before they are let outside and for kittens, they should be at least 5 months old before being let out on their own. The first time they are let out, do it before they are fed, so you can use their food to encourage them back in if necessary. Also, sprinkle some used litter in the garden, in case they do decide to go further afield, as this will help them find their way back.

SETTLING TIME

It can take several weeks and, in some cases, even months for a rescue cat to start to settle and relax in a new environment. They will need time to settle at their own pace and will require patience and space to be able to do this.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Although you may be tempted to bring all your friends and family round on the day you bring your rescue cat home, the advice would be to avoid this, as meeting too many people at first will likely be

very overwhelming for the cat. Instead, we would recommend staggering the introductions and if your cat chooses to take themselves away, let them.

MEETING NEEDS

Not having needs met can cause or exasperate problem behaviours in cats. A lot of reported issues in cats are usually down to not having enough of the following.

- Food
- Sleep
- Play
- Exercise
- Enrichment

FEEDING

If you decide to change the food your new cat is eating, from what they were given at the shelter, do this slowly. A sudden change in diet can cause an upset stomach, and providing what they ate at the shelter for a while, may also provide some familiarity and help them settle.

LITTER TRAYS

Make sure you have litter trays available in the home, especially when the cat cannot go outside when they are settling in and in some cases, you may need to always provide a tray. For some cats, you will need to supply more than one tray, as they can be fussy about doing pees and poos in the same tray. If you are having trouble with your cat not using the tray, consider the type of litter you are using, as cats can also be fussy about texture and the type of tray you are using, such as a covered or uncovered tray, or if the size is appropriate for the cat to use. More information on this can be found in our **"Cat litter tray/toileting issues guide"**.

HIDING PLACES

Make sure to provide lots of places to hide for your cat. This could simply be under the bed, on top of wardrobe, or you could create specialist areas designed to be your cats' safe spaces (Although, there is no guarantee that the cat will choose to use this space). If your cat is hiding, leave them too it. Resist the urge to try to lure them out. They are hiding for a reason, and it is likely they are trying to feel safe and so trying to get them out could set them back. There should only be an attempt to get a cat out of a hiding space if there is concern for the animal's health or safety.

ENRICHMENT

Enrichment is vital for all cats, not just rescue cats. Enrichment provides appropriate outlets for natural cat behaviours and encourages activities that burn energy in a positive way. It also teaches problem solving, encourages solo play and releases calming and feel-good hormones. Enrichment is particularly important when you are settling in a rescue cat, as it can prevent excess energy spilling over into anxious energy and enjoyable activities can help build positive associations with locations, people, animals, and situations. Enrichment items and activities can be purchased, or even homemade. Some examples of enrichment items and activities can include, lick mats, puzzle feeders, Scratching posts, Catnip toys and more.

CALMING AGENTS

Calming agents can work great to help a Cat settle and relax into their new environment. Natural calming agents, that are easily available at pet stores and online include pet remedy or feliway.

INTRODUCTION TO EXISTING PETS

- Scent swapping- Cats have a great sense of smell and can form familiarity via smell. Before you bring your rescue cat home, take in some blankets that smell of your existing animals to the shelter and request to take something from the cat's pen home with you for your existing animals to smell.
- When you bring your cat home, after a day or 2 to settle in their room, let your new cat and existing animals smell each other under the door.
- Let the animals meet for short periods, making sure they get as much space as possible and making sure that if any of the animals involved try to leave, they are allowed to do so.
- Make sure all animals have separate resources in separate locations in the home, so they do not have to cross paths unless they choose to.
- Monitor the body language of all animals during interactions to make sure bonds are forming and to see any signs of conflict forming, so you can act before there is a real issue.

BEHAVIOUR HELP

If there are any specific behaviour help that you require for your cat, please head to the advice section of our website, where there are advice guides on a lot of common behaviour issues, as well as advice on how to seek further professional help should you need it. www.rspca-brighton.org.uk