



I just adopted a shy cat, how can I help?

You're thrilled about your new cat, and you're anxious to give her the loving forever-home and warm lap you know she's been yearning for. But as soon as you open the carrier, she flees. For days, you see no sign of her, except maybe some food missing from the dish or some pee in the litter box. Or maybe you start looking under furniture and, in the farthest, darkest corner under your sofa, you see a pair of terrified golden-green eyes staring at you. You, my friend, have just adopted a shy cat. But don't worry: You can help your new friend overcome cat anxiety and come out of her shell. It's just going to take some time, love and patience.

Here are some tips to help you and your shy cat along the way.

1. Understand that it's not your fault or hers

You adopted this cat into your life with very good intentions. Thank you! Your shy cat may have been traumatized or she may never have had a chance to be properly socialized.

2. Patience and compassion are key with a shy cat

It can be frustrating to try to help your shy cat to no avail. You may even start thinking about bringing her back to the shelter, but please don't give up! You've probably been in situations where you were terrified or traumatized; recall those times and think about what would have helped you to cope.

3. Start with a small space

Hopefully when you brought your cat home, you placed her in a small room – either a guest bedroom, a bathroom or something similar – along with bedding, food, water, litter boxes and toys, all in that same room, for now. Later on, once she is comfortable exploring your home, these things can go into their permanent spots. A shy cat will cope better if she can familiarize herself with a small space first. It also helps to put them in a room that you use so she can also get to know your scent!

4. Keep it quiet

As much as possible, avoid startling your cat or subjecting her to loud noises. A football game, a party or that new loud video game at full blast are fun noises for you. For cats, not so much. Not only do cats have very sensitive hearing, but loud noises terrify a shy cat. If you'll be running the vacuum,

having a project done around the house, or throwing a party, put kitty in a quiet, secure area of your home.

5. Talk to your shy cat in a soothing voice

Keep the pitch and volume of your voice low and soft, tell the cat what you're going to do, and use her name often. Imagine you're talking to a baby who needs comforting.

6. Allow a shy cat to approach you

When your shy cat does poke her head out from her hiding place, don't rush to touch her. Hold your hand out in a relaxed position, with the palm down, and allow her to determine how close she gets.

7. Let her sniff you

Cats gather a lot of information about their environment through their sense of smell. Before touching your shy cat, put your hand out (palm down and relaxed so it is minimally threatening) and allow her to sniff it. A trusting cat may use this opportunity to rub her face on your hand. Your cat has glands on the sides of her mouth used to mark objects and people she considers to be safe. Take facial rubbing as a great sign!

8. On her level

Move slowly, and whenever possible, get down on her level to interact with her. Touch her without forcing contact, and pet her gently around the head, ears, and face. Never bring your hand directly toward your cat's face, as this may startle her. Instead, gently approach her from the side.



PLAYFUL



FRIENDLY, RELAXED



"THIS IS MINE"

9. Make hiding spots accessible

She is going to hide in the beginning. Block off hiding spots like under the bed or large closets. Those are spots you won't be able to reach in and pet her. Instead, put out a covered cat bed, or a large cardboard box tipped on it's side with blankets in it so she has a little "cave". She will feel safe but you are still able to give her gentle pets once she is ready. You will never reach her under the bed! Cats are most comfortable when they feel in control of their surroundings and interactions, so keep that in mind whenever you approach your timid kitty. Encourage her to come to you, and until she does, pet and interact with her in her hiding place.

10. Food is a great way to win friends

Even the most shy cat can be won over by tasty food. Offer yummy treats whenever you invite her to interact with you. The goal is to help your cat make a positive association between you and delicious food.

11. Use a calming pheromone

Feline calming pheromones are synthetic analogues of the "happy cat" pheromones that cats leave when they rub their cheeks on you or your furniture. Plug in a couple of pheromone diffusers and allow them to help calm your shy cat. They also come in spray form. (Feliway is an example, or similar anti-stress products.)

12. Keep it positive

Don't stop working with your shy cat if she regresses in response to something you did. Instead, finish your interaction with something you and she have previously enjoyed together.

13. The cat "i love you" slow blink

Don't stare (because that is threatening), instead look at your cat softly, and very slowly close your eyes, then slowly open them back up. This shows her that you trust her to close your eyes in her presence. Do this a few times until she blinks slowly back at you. If a cat will reciprocate the slow blink, it means she is starting to trust you. Success!

14. Play!

Many cats can't resist a feathery toy fluttering by them. It wakes them up and tempts them out of their hiding spot. Use interactive, non-threatening toys that encourage her natural instinct to stalk prey. Bringing out the "inner hunter" in a shy cat can work wonders for her confidence. And, before she knows it, she is so engaged in play that she forgets to be afraid and has made her way closer to you and the center of the room. Active play every day also builds confidence! What a great way to bond with your cat.

Favourite Food: _____

Favourite Treats: _____

Favourite Toys: _____

Other Tips! _____

