

My Pet Has Issues!

I just adopted a second cat, and she and my first cat spend all their time hissing at one another, swatting, staring and making awful noises. Is this ever going to change?

Introducing a new cat into your household can certainly be anxiety-provoking. Unlike dogs, who are pack animals, cats tend to be more solitary and independent. They have a clear sense of territory and often become agitated when they feel their territory is being invaded! As such, it is normal to see the behavior you are describing.

Cats usually have a collection of locations in the house where they like to rest, eat, or potty. When you're bringing a new cat into the home, create new spaces for her so she doesn't try to take over the resident cat's favorite spots. Cats compete for resources in the wild, and if the resources are too few, there will be escalated fighting and territoriality. Setting up a second window perch, cat bed, cubby hole, and especially a second litter box will help your cats to accept each other more quickly. You do not need to keep the resident cat away from these items; it's okay for him to explore. We simply want to create enough resources that each cat has his own space.

Begin the introductions by closing the new cat into a large room in the house with toys, litter box, and other items she will enjoy. This will give her an opportunity to adjust to her new environment. Spend time in there with her as well as outside the door with the resident cat. Allow the cats to sniff under the door, and play with each cat on its own side of the door to encourage positive experiences in the presence of another cat. After a few days, move the new cat to another enclosed area and let the resident cat sniff and explore the room the new cat was in. This will help the cats adjust to each other's scent and begin to accept each other. After a few days, or when the cats seem unalarmed by the other cat's presence, allow them to meet. Supervise the meetings for a few days, and separate the cats when you cannot monitor them. During meeting times, play with both cats and distract them from one another to avoid confrontation; the cats should be happy to be together because it means that you will pay attention to them and play with them.

Learn more about Amy Wallis on her website: www.mypethasissues.com. If there is an issue you would like to see addressed in this column, contact her at amy@mypethasissues.com.