

Cat: Hiding Behavior



Cats normally take a while to adjust to a new environment. If you have recently acquired your cat, you should be aware that acclimation can take anywhere from a few hours to a few months. Cats are highly variable in temperament, and also in their levels of socialization. Here are some suggestions on how to help a cat that is hiding:

Dos and Don'ts

- **Do** start her off in a smaller room. If you haven't done this, and you are experiencing difficulties, move the cat into a small room and "start over."
- **Do** have a safe litter box and supply of food and water easily accessible to her. If your cat is scared to go to the litter box, she may start relieving herself in what she considers much safer spots, leading to the unwanted behavior of inappropriate elimination. If she is scared to get to her food bowl, she may not eat and get sick by starving herself.
- **Do** feed her on a regular schedule. Doing so will help your cat realize that good things come from you.
- **Do not** push yourself on the cat. Often in an eagerness to bond with their new pet, guardians make the mistake of going too fast—wanting to pet and cuddle a cat that is hiding. Cats do not get reassurance from this, and they may even fear you. Give your cat time to adjust—you won't regret it in the long run. Remember, patience is the key to building a good relationship. Your cat needs time to build trust in you.
- **Do not** try to reach for a hidden cat or grabbing her to pull her out of a hiding spot, a fearful cat that is hiding and feels threatened may become aggressive when feeling cornered. Therefore, always use food or toys to entice her to be curious and engage with the environment and you. Environmental enrichment can help a fearful hiding cat to become curious and outgoing over time.

Once your cat begins to feel more comfortable, you will notice her coming out of hiding more, engaging with you, vocalizing and perhaps coming to you when you enter the room. It is wise to keep her in the smaller room for a little while longer, until she shows interest in exploring past the door. If possible, allow her to gradually expand her territory, by closing off other rooms at first. At any point in this process, if you feel she is overwhelmed, you can backtrack and put her back in her "safe" room again. It takes time, patience, and sensitivity to help a shy cat adjust to a new home, but it will be worth the effort when you see a happy cat that knows where she belongs and loves her environment and her human.