

Inside Your

Cat's Mind

WHAT THEY REALLY THINK

- * Giving Them the Good Life
- * The Best Way To Train Your Kitten
- * Friendships Between Felines

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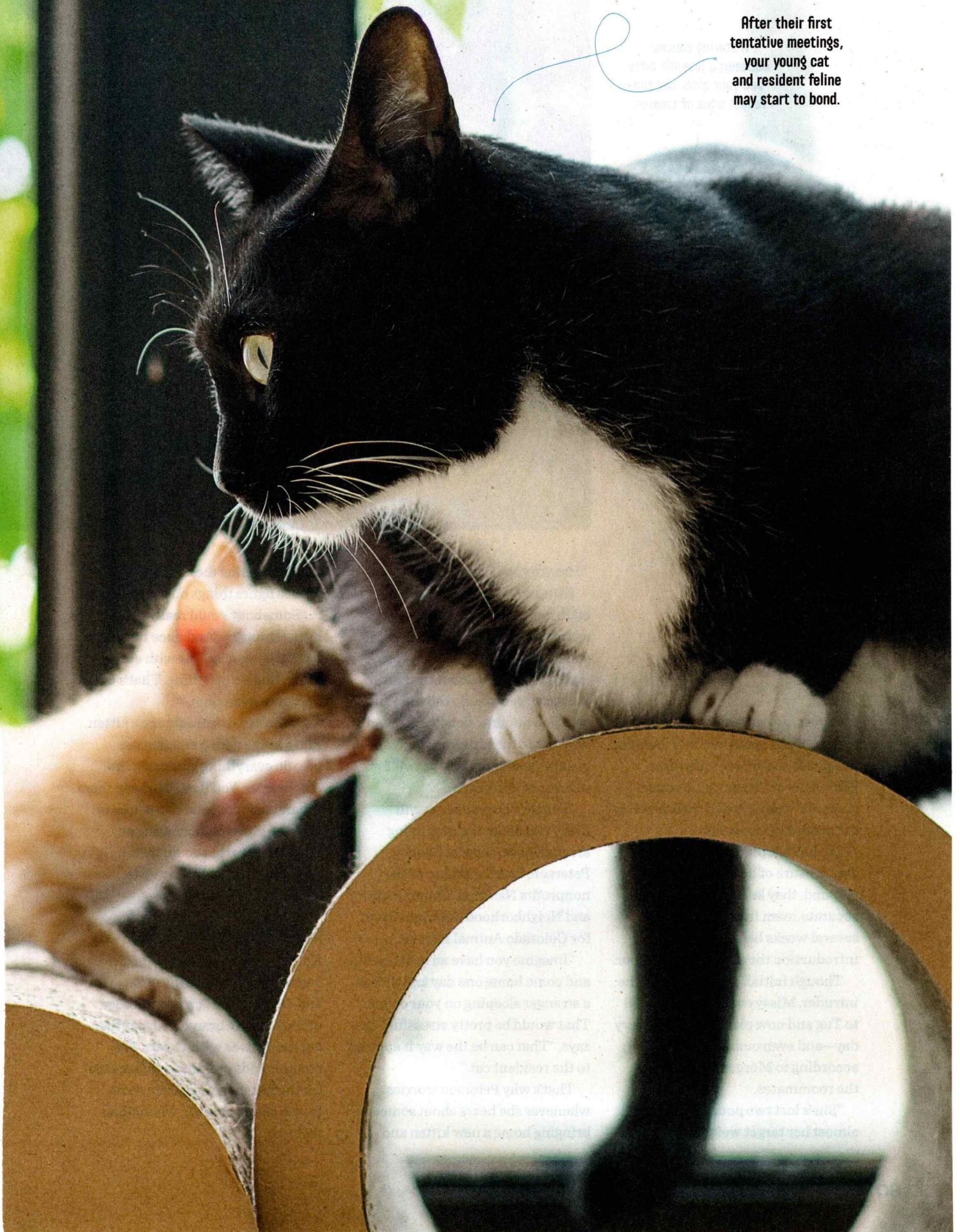
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A KITTEN MAKES TWO

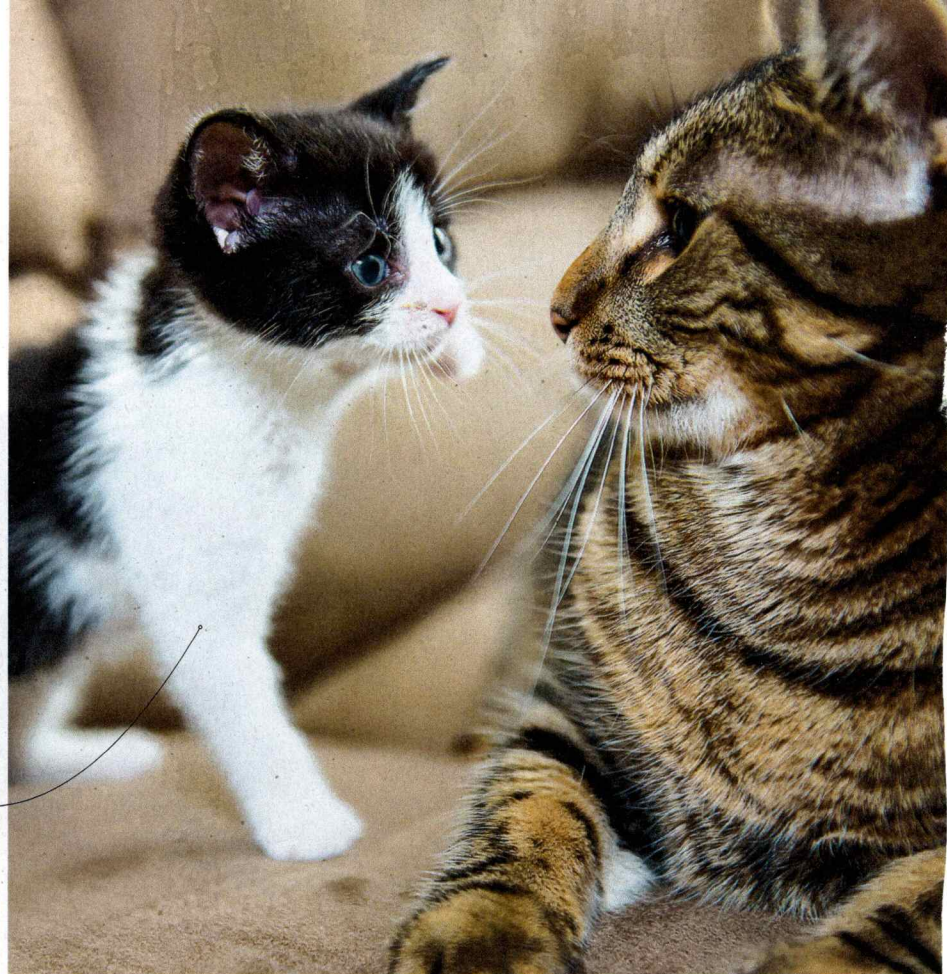
**INTRODUCING A YOUNG FELINE
TO A HOME WITH AN EXISTING CAT
REQUIRES CAREFUL PLANNING
AND GRADUAL INTRODUCTIONS TO
MINIMIZE CONFLICT
AND STRESS.**

» *By Jen Reeder*

After their first tentative meetings, your young cat and resident feline may start to bond.



A staring contest between a juvenile kitty and your older cat can reveal signs of tension.



Last year, a 5-year-old rescue cat named Missy spent her days lounging in a house she shares with three University of Pittsburgh graduate students—who learned their inactive cat needed to lose weight.

So they adopted a kitten named Tug. Unsure of how Missy would respond, they kept the kitten in a separate room from their cat for several weeks before making an introduction through a cracked door.

Though initially unamused by the intruder, Missy eventually warmed to Tug and now plays with him every day—and even cuddles with him, according to Morgan Rose, one of the roommates.

“She’s lost two pounds, which is almost her target weight,” she says.

“They’re good friends now.”

Kittens can be an adorable addition to any household—and adopting one can save a life. But if you already have a cat, they might not be as thrilled about the new arrival as you are. So the time and care you put into slowly introducing your cat to the kitten so they can coexist peacefully will pay off for the rest of their lives.

Consider how your cat will likely feel about the new living arrangement, suggests Nancy Peterson, board member of the nonprofits National Kitten Coalition and Neighborhood Cats, and foster for Colorado Animal Rescue.

“Imagine you have an apartment and come home one day and there’s a stranger sleeping on your couch. That would be pretty stressful,” she says. “That can be the way it appears to the resident cat.”

That’s why Peterson worries whenever she hears about someone bringing home a new kitten and

simply opening the carrier to let the felines figure things out on their own.

“Somebody could really get hurt,” she says. “And once they have negative associations with each other, that’s a bad thing. That’s even harder to overcome.”

So the key to introducing a kitten into a home with a resident cat is to do everything gradually, she emphasizes. You’ll need to keep them separated for at least two weeks in case the kitten is incubating any viral diseases that could infect your cat—who should be up to date on vaccinations.

PREPARING FOR THE KITTEN

Kate Benjamin, co-author of the bestselling books *Catification* and *Catify to Satisfy* and founder of the lifestyle brand Hauspanther, currently lives with 11 cats. She recommends creating a “basecamp” for the kitten in a separate room (some use a pet tent), where they feel safe.

"You're not just getting a kitten and then letting them hide under the bed for three weeks," she says.

Kitten-proof the basecamp by removing any loose cords, screens, curtain cords or small objects that could become choking hazards, and by blocking off anywhere the kitty could get trapped—what Benjamin calls "the unders": under the bed, under the sofa. Instead, provide hideaways such as a semi-enclosed bed or a cat carrier with the door and the top removed. Getting used to the cat carrier in this way will also help make kitty's future car rides to the veterinarian easier.

You'll also want a low-sided litter box with non-clumping litter, placed as far as possible from tip-proof, low-sided food and water bowls. Also include toys in a low bin or basket, a kitten-sized scratcher, and cardboard or paper toys they can tear up.

"Remember, your home is their entire world," Benjamin notes.

SUCCESSFUL INTRODUCTIONS

After the kitten has spent two weeks in basecamp—and you've made frequent short visits each day to play with a wand toy while seated on the floor—it's time to prepare for introductions, according to Peterson.

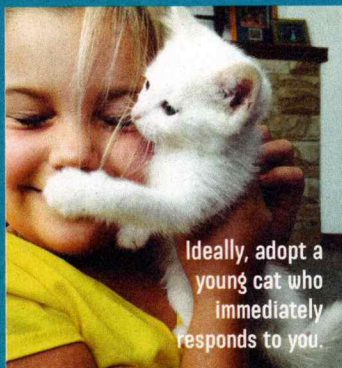
She recommends taking the following steps—reminding that each step should take at least a few days, during which you should monitor each cat for signs of stress.

- ✦ With help from a friend or family member, simultaneously feed each feline on either side of a closed door. Gradually move the food bowls closer to the door. This helps create positive associations.

- ✦ Using a clean, mismatched pair of socks, gently rub a sock on the kitten's face before placing it in your cat's area. Do the same with your cat,

RULES OF ADOPTION

BEFORE YOU SELECT A KITTEN FOR YOUR FAMILY, KEEP THESE THREE THINGS IN MIND.



Ideally, adopt a young cat who immediately responds to you.

1 / Make sure your kitten is simpatico with you.

Remember that cats have innate personalities, just like humans. When you greet a new kitten, she should be happy to play with you and curious about the world. If a kitten growls or claws when you lift her, she's not the one for you. But if she purrs when stroked, take her home!

2 / Adopt a healthy kitten.

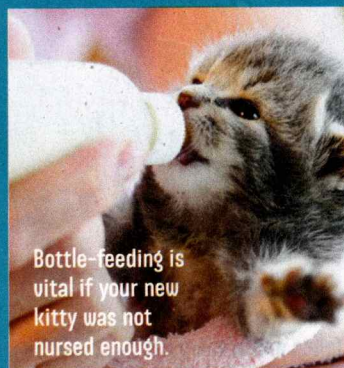
A kitten's poor health is often obvious, up front. If it is too thin, be cautious. Look out for fleas or other parasites apparent to the human eye. And, like humans, cats present with flu-like illness when viral or bacterial ills are bringing them down: diarrhea, runny eyes and runny nose, or lethargy and fatigue. Kittens may also be born with FIV (feline immunodeficiency virus). FIV-positive cats are adoptable because their

condition can be well-managed by a vet, but they must be in single-cat homes to prevent infecting others. This is definitely not the animal to bring home when other cats are in the house.

3 / Be sure your kitten is old enough but not too old.

Remember, cat mothers must teach their kittens to negotiate the feline world before humans enter the scene. Any kitten separated from a mom before 8 weeks of age is sure to face challenges, and if your kitten can stay with their biological mom for a full 12 weeks, that's the best option of all. Of course, your new kitty shouldn't be much older than that, either. Kittens adapt best to humans when young, between 2 and 9 weeks old. If possible, it's ideal for the kitty to socialize with the human world while his cat mom is still around.

—Joelle Renstrom



Bottle-feeding is vital if your new kitty was not nursed enough.



It's a positive sign when your new young feline and primary cat can sit peacefully in close contact.

leaving the sock in the kitten's area, to help them get used to the new scent. Do this several times a day, and reward them if they approach the sock and have no reaction. (Note: Spray calming feline pheromones in each room about an hour before they exchange scents or spaces.)

- * Using a door stopper or a pet gate covered with a blanket, crack open the door separating the kitten and cat so they can see each other while someone on either side engages them with treats. (As always, gradually give the treats closer to the door.)

- * Spend some time playing with the kitten with a wand toy to help tire her out before meeting the resident cat.

- * When you allow the kitten and cat in the same room, hold a wand toy in either hand so they both can play and not stare at one another.

- * Keep providing two separate litter boxes, scratchers and bowls.

- * If issues arise, call your veterinarian or animal shelter with questions, or consult a behaviorist from the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants or Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists.

Samantha Bell, cat expert at the nonprofit Best Friends Animal Society, agrees it's important to read your cat's body language throughout the transition, slowing down if you notice stress signs such as ears pinned back or a hunched back.

She suggests figuring out their favorite reward—whether brushing, treats, petting or play—and offering it more than usual.

"When you bring home a kitten, it's a great time to really spoil your resident cat," Bell says. "Give your cat extra enrichment and love to show them how important they are, and so they associate that new kitten with good things."

"GIVE YOUR CAT EXTRA ENRICHMENT AND LOVE TO SHOW THEM HOW IMPORTANT THEY ARE."

**Samantha Bell, cat expert*

She believes that bringing home two kittens instead of one makes things easier, as the kittens will expend their energy on one another, learn boundaries and be less likely to pester the cat.

While people often return a new kitten because a resident cat hissed at it, Bell urges patience, noting that hissing is a gentler way

to communicate discomfort than swatting or biting. She notes the 3-3-3 rule of adjustment for adopted shelter pets: three days for kitty to initially relax and decompress; three weeks to settle in and explore; and "three months until everyone gets along," she says.

Fostering can be a good option for gauging whether your cat will accept a kitten, according to Halle Hamilton, senior foster and adoption support program manager at the nonprofit Austin Pets Alive!

"I call it a 'try before you buy,'" she adds. "Some cats need a little bit more convincing and some just accept it."

Fostering kittens and other pets in need for the past five years has been a rewarding experience that she has shared with her now 10-year-old daughter, Tinsley. She feels kittens are "absolutely" worth the effort to incorporate into a home with a cat, whether you foster or adopt.

"Kittens are great," she says. "They're too young to know any better, so they can acclimate really well into a new household." #

LINKS FOR MORE INFORMATION

National Kitten Coalition
kittencoalition.org

Neighborhood Cats
neighborhoodcats.org

Colorado Animal Rescue
coloradoanimalrescue.org

Hauspanther
hauspanther.com

International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants
iaabc.org

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists directory
animalbehavior.society.org/web/committees-applied-behavior-directory.php

Best Friends Animal Society
bestfriends.org

Austin Pets Alive!
austinpetsalive.org