

HELPING YOUR VERY SHY OR SCARED CAT

Please read the general Cat Care Guides 'What do I need for my cat or kitten' & 'The Safe Room – the secret to your cat's happiness' for tips on settling any cat into your home.

Then follow the specific advice below for supporting the cat you have adopted



Very shy or cats that are scared are generally frightened of things that are unfamiliar and can take much longer to feel safe in any new environment. There will be challenges as both you and your cat adjust to life together. Your home is a very strange, scary place for them & their senses are overwhelmed with the many new smells, sounds, sights & people. They will probably try to make themselves invisible by hiding &/or shrinking away. Having their own safe room is especially important for your very shy or scared cat as they may be there as long as 6mths to a year and it could take this long for them to gradually start to relax show their true personality.



It's OK if they hide at first but it's not OK for them to hide all the time!

You might think you're helping them to relax by allowing them to hide but cats actually don't like to hide...

they hide because it's the only way they can control their nerves! Their safe room must have a door that closes. It should be a room that is quiet and not used. You need to ensure that the cat can't hide in places where you can't engage with them so you block the 'unders' & spaces behind or at the side of pieces of furniture, close cupboard/wardrobe doors and drawers. Then you need to provide them a few options for hiding so they can choose. These could include a cocoon or pod, a deep bed, a bed with a hood or a blanket over the top, a carrier covered with a blanket or a cardboard box on its side with a snuggly blanket inside and a towel draped over the opening. Cats like sunning themselves to put these hidey holes in sunny parts of the room. Before you put your cat into its safe room you can also spray these hiding places with a calming essence or use a Feliway diffuser in the room (Feliway is a pheromone which helps cats relax).



The first few days – these videos will help you work with your shy or scared cat

www.jacksongalaxy.com/blogs/news/help-your-shy-and-scared-cat-gain-confidence

www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3zUmTyeAw

www.jacksongalaxy.com/blogs/news/is-your-cat-afraid-of-everyday-things

[Help my new cat/kitten is scared of me https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOksJ4pmHGo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOksJ4pmHGo)

Don't be tempted to let your cat out of their SAFE Room too soon. If you don't take it gradually with a scared cat they will withdraw even more and this will make it harder to break the pattern. It can also lead to other problems such as inappropriate toileting which is often associated with anxiety.

The first week or so is all about keeping them safe, setting up routines and giving their life a new rhythm. They will gradually feel more confident when things become predictable & they know what to expect

- Scared cats can get desperate and often try to escape from new situations and when you're not around they'll check every bit of the room to find a way to escape. They have been known to claw holes in fly screens or bat them until they dislodge from the frame & they can get through the tiniest gap if a window is left open. Be prepared for them trying to make a dash for it by being prepared. You might find it helpful to hold a piece of cardboard behind & in front of you at ground level when you enter or leave the room. Only open windows when you are in the room and close them completely when you leave.
- **DON'T STRESS** if your cat hides, if they don't eat or if they have an upset tummy or don't use their litter tray for a couple of days. They might sneeze a few times, they also might cry or make a noise at night. They're just showing how overwhelmed they are. Don't respond, don't give them any food or treats as you will create a habit that will be very hard to break. If necessary wear earplugs.

By feeling sorry for your cat you are saying they should be scared that's not what you or they want. It's a bit like bringing a baby home, you need to be the responsible one who knows best. Give them a little of what they need but at the same time set some small challenges so that you gently expose them to the things they fear. In time they will learn that they are not so bad after all and that they can even lead to good things happening

- Cats generally have a fear of strangers so don't involve the whole family at the start. Nominate the same person to go into the room to deal with the cat at first. The cat can then focus on them and start learning to trust them
- Tempt the cat to play by using a wand toy. Even if they don't play right away they will be watching it as you move it.
- Set up a routine. When you go into the room clean their litter tray and try to get them to play. Then put their food bowl down right next to their hiding place and leave the room



After the first week or two

The aim is to get them to choose to come to you (and not for you to force them into doing things you want them to do)

- Your cat may still hide and not show any interest in playing or interacting with you. Don't give up and just think things will get better if you leave them alone. If you allow this behaviour to continue for a long time you are not helping them to adjust
- Don't force them out of their hiding place or reach into it to try and stroke them
- Draw them out of hiding by continuing to try to get them to play. Find out what movement attracts their attention most with the wand toy – jerking it across the floor, flying it in the air or moving it slowly. Roll a ball to them or throw high value treats near their hiding place. It may take a few sessions and you might feel you're getting nowhere but you are and gradually things will change



Even if you can't see them they know you are there. The more you ignore them, give them space and don't crowd them, the more they will start to trust you.

- Use feeding time to draw them physically closer to you
 - When you put the food bowl down next to their hiding place, go & sit quietly on the floor as far away as you can. Avoid looking at them. At first they may stay hidden & not come out. Sit for 3 or 4 minutes without moving a muscle and then leave
 - Repeat this at every feeding time and the cat will know what to expect. Eventually they will start to eat in your presence. Still don't look at them. Along the way the cat may venture out and then dash back to their hiding place several times before being brave enough to eat
 - Once they have been eating in front of you for a few days put the food bowl **a little bit** further away from their hiding place and towards where you sit. Go back to your place, sit & wait. If the cat stays in hiding leave after a few minutes. You might need to play around with where their 'Challenge line' is by moving the bowl backwards and forwards slightly each time until they will eat in front of you again.
 - Follow this process until you have been able to move the the bowl near where you sit on the floor. It's important that you still don't look at them
 - Next try resting your finger on the floor a few cms away from the bowl. Stay still, and if they don't come to eat after a few minutes, take it away, keep still and they may come to eat. Keep trying each feeding time until you have gradually moved your finger to rest on the side of the bowl

At several other times during the day for short periods of about 5 minutes, go into the room and sit on the floor. Don't talk, focus on something else such as reading a magazine or a book (something quiet). Ignore the cat, don't look at them

- If they come to you don't touch them, just allow them to investigate you
- Don't get anxious or think nothing's happening - it takes time to build a relationship...



Next

When your cat is comfortable eating next to you there's still work to be done!

- Sit with your feet on the floor and your knees up. Put the food bowl down next to your leg and rest a relaxed hand across your knee with your index finger hanging down (the Michelangelo effect!). if the cat runs away leave your hand there and keep it very still. If you're lucky the cat might come back to and eat or even rub against your hand/finger. This will be a big step. Keep trying but don't be tempted to try doing more.



Don't try to stroke them. The idea is that they are petting you not the other way round and at the same time they're being rewarded with food

- As they rub against your finger or hand you can try moving your finger very slowly to stroke them lightly on the cheek. Eventually they will come to enjoy your touch. If you put your legs up they might run under them. If you stretch them out and put the food bowl on them they might walk over your legs to get to it. Eventually they might settle down on your knee. Stay calm and don't make sudden moves. Take it one step at a time and keep trying. Go slowly

Often cats who are frightened or shy at SAFE Haven change when they have space & a special person to call their own. Each cat is different and it will take as long as it takes for them to trust you. If you are patient, consistent, gentle and understanding it will be worth it in the end.

What about letting the cat into the rest of the house?

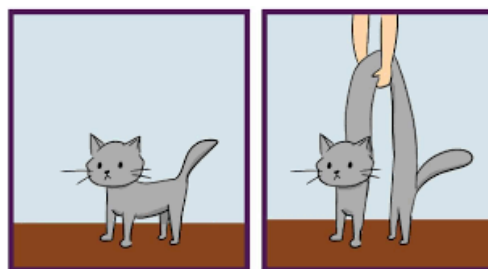
- When your cat seems relaxed and comfortable in the safe room and is interacting with you, you can gradually open up other parts of the house to them. Open the door to their safe room and leave it open. Do this when the house is quiet, & you have made sure all outside doors and windows are closed. Let them decide if they want to come out or not. You might want to try luring them out with a wand toy. If they haven't come out after about half an hour close the door and try again the next day. Gradually the cat might look around the door or dash out and back to the safety of their room and finally come out to explore. Do something quiet like reading a book and ignore them
- The cat should always have the option to run back to their safe room when they are frightened or things get too much for them

Can I pick my cat up?

Cats don't see cuddling as a sign of affection, and actually feel threatened if they are restricted as they have a fear of being held down. Cats who are shy or have been very scared need to trust a any person before they can be picked up. So don't be in a rush to pick them up.

You can, however continue to build trust by touching/stroking them gently on different parts of their body. A good time to do

this is when they are eating so that they associate it with good things. Start by touching them gently on both sides of their body for a second or two. Then build up to putting your hands loosely around their middle for a couple of seconds before letting them walk away. When you first do this they may be startled, so if they jump in the air, walk away or stop eating take your hand away and try again when they come back and continue eating. When they get used to you touching them briefly you can hold them with a hand on each side of their body, lift them off the floor and straightaway put them back down so they can continue to eat. They might run away but they will come back and you can keep repeating until you can lift them up for longer.



If you need help at any stage along the way or are not sure how to proceed from this point, please contact us.