

Help for Skittish Kitties

BY RITA REIMERS

You've brought your new cat home, and she promptly hides under the bed or behind the dresser, only venturing out to eat or use the litter box once everyone has gone to bed. The problem is, if you leave that shy cat to her own devices, she'll probably stay that way and won't bond with you or feel secure in her new home.

So how do you encourage your cautious cat to trust and bond with you? With patience and the right approach. ***These tips will help:***



Create a safe room

When bringing home your skittish kitty, know that she's feeling overwhelmed by the changes in her life. Start her off in a smaller room, like a bathroom, office or spare bedroom, to give her time to get accustomed to her new surroundings. If you give her the whole house at once, she may panic and hide behind or under furniture or appliances, which will take much longer for her to trust her new home.

Don't ignore

It's very easy to just let the shy cat do as she pleases. But a shy cat can quickly turn into an aloof feline if left alone all the time. This doesn't mean crawl under the bed after her, but make time to sit beside her hiding place, talk to her in soothing tones and say her name often. I encourage our sitters at Just For Cats Pet Sitting to sit by the shy cat, talk to her, read their email out loud in a soothing tone and let her get used to them being nearby.

Use bribery

Have a supply of your shy cat's favorite treats with you as you talk to her. Offer her a piece or two, and eventually she'll associate your presence with those yummy goodies. She'll start coming out of her hiding place more and more, establishing a bond with you as you give her what she craves. Eventually, you'll be able to pet or give her a little scratch behind the ears, and she'll begin to interact with you more and hide less.

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Appeal to her nature

Cats are naturally curious, even when they are in self-protect mode. Find toys that allow you to play with her yet allow her to keep her distance at first. Fishing pole type toys, long feathers and laser pointers will awaken her desire to explore and have fun. The more she finds that being with you is a fun activity, the more she'll begin to trust and come out of hiding.

Take time

Be patient and let her set the pace of your relationship. If you spend some quality time with her every day, the bond between you will grow. But this process can't be rushed. Depending on just how skittish your cat is, it could take anywhere from a few days to a couple of months before she trusts enough to fully interact with you. When I adopted shy Colby, it took him

about six months before he would sit on my lap. One day, out of the blue, he decided I was OK, and he hopped up into my lap. That was a happy bonding moment for us both.

Love her

This is perhaps the most important thing. Shy kitties can become the most loyal of cats, but you can't expect them to suddenly break out of their shells and become friendly with everyone in all situations. Shy cats usually let down their guard only for a few select people and in quiet situations. They quickly retreat to their hiding place or "safe room" when there are new people or loud noises.

Giving these wonderful shy kitties the room to become comfortable with you will allow your shy cat to trust you in her own time. Once she decides you are trustworthy, you'll have a bond that is truly unbreakable. 🐾