

Cat Introductions

Training for Special Needs Fosters

DCIN Cat Introduction Guideline 2011

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Preparing for your new arrival

Congratulations on choosing to adopt a special needs cat. We hope you find the information in this handout helpful in getting to know your new “sweet feline friend.”

It is critical to keep in mind that cats coming through the Diabetic Cats in Need rescue system have most likely had a significant emotional trauma. While most fosters and adopters recognize the medical issues these cats are facing, it is easy to lose track of their emotional needs as well. They may be leaving loving homes and owners, have been dumped, or surrendered to a shelter. They are often older cats used to certain routines and certain conditions that have now been totally turned upside down. Add into that equation they may have significant medical needs or be in poor health. Therefore it becomes important that the introductions proceed slowly, patiently and consistently.

So preparing for their arrival should be a first priority. Consider where you can provide “safe room,” within your home for at least 4 weeks or longer. Most adult cats need 2-4 months to adjust to another cat.^[1] This safe room should be able to provide a quiet respite and calming atmosphere for rest, recovery, and making new friends. A great safe room is the standard bedroom, office den, or even a spare bathroom. Items to have in these rooms before the DCIN cat arrives is [diabetic appropriate food](#)^[2], water, and several litter boxes, a cat bed and maybe a cat tree. A few cat toys are helpful as well as affixing window bird-feeders to help your new cat pass their time in seclusion comfortably. Keep in mind the foster or adopted cat may have medical needs and their comfort is a priority to making the transition to their new medical routines and home.

Every cat is different and therefore you should discuss the needs of your DCIN cat with your case manager in determining the best ‘safe room’ situation for your particular cat.

Most people will opt to use a bedroom. You may want to cover the mattress with a waterproof mattress cover as an unregulated cat produces great quantities of urine. If the litter box is flooded, they may urinate in other locations. If this happens, it is a medical issue and not a behavior problem with the cat. It is that misunderstanding that most likely resulted in you DCIN cat being put up for adoption or rescue.

If possible remove the bed frame and let the mattress rest on the floor to avoid having the cat hide under the bed. Consider you may have a frightened cat who needs to be tested or given their insulin shot and trying having to coax them out. If you choose to do this, it is still important to provide the cat with a 'den.'



This can simply be a side-table with a blanket over it and bed inside where the cat can 'retreat' too or in an office/den a lower shelf can be converted to a secluded shelf by leaving half the door open or pinning skirting on the shelf or even a large overturned cardboard box with a cat entrance. You want the cat to feel safe, but you also want and need easy access to the cat for medical reasons.

It is worth repeating that you should plan for at least 4 weeks or longer for the transition. Many new owners and even fosters often want to rush through the introductions. Keep in mind that a cat adopted through Diabetic Cats in Need is already trying to adjust to their new health care routines, may not be feeling well or be fully regulated, and generally needs more extra tender loving care than a healthy cat.

Lastly do not neglect your resident cats. While it may seem like the DCIN cat will control your time, it is important to set aside time and attention to your resident cats too. Doing this will avoid the jealous cat syndrome.

Phase One

Resident cats should not be permitted in the room at all for 7-10 days. Week one is about calming the DCIN cat's fears, bonding with you and other designated human family members, and establishing the new medical routines. This also is a type of quarantine to insure the DCIN gets appropriately vetted and is not carrying any communicable diseases, parasites or upper respiratory illnesses. While every effort is made to insure your DCIN cat is healthy enough for transport, cats coming from shelters or clinics can harbor diseases picked up there. 7-10 days is the amount of time most common diseases need to incubate. The most interaction between resident cats and the DCIN cat is paw play under the door and pushing toys and treats back and forth.

When arriving home everyone will be curious from the humans to your other resident cats. Your new cat though will be stressed and exhausted. Bring your DCIN cat to their safe room and close the door. The safe room should already have food, water, litter box, and feline creature comforts ready. Open the carrier door and let the cat come out on its own. Some will be ready to get out of the carrier, others may need a few minutes or several hours. If the cat doesn't exit immediately don't force them out by dumping them. Simply leave the carrier door open and leave the room or sit quietly. If you are so inclined, new research indicates that classical chamber music is calming to stressed dogs and cats, certain scents can help, and even lighting should be controlled.^[3] You may also wish to have available [Feliway](#)

Let the new cat roam about the room at will. Relax there is no hurry. Offer the DCIN cat a high value protein treat such as pure turkey baby-food, Pure Bites Treats, boiled chicken. Start building the bond of trust. It is this bond of trust building, that will help with their transition to your home and their new medical routines. It provides you the opportunity to identify any quirks early and learn to deal with them with help from your DCIN Case Manager or the Feline Diabetes Message Board Forum.^[4] This first week is for you and the DCIN cat to bond.

Resident cats should not be permitted in the room at all this week. Toys and paw-play under the door are fine. If there is hissing or growling at the doors from either feline party, introduce high value treats to both cats to change the negative experience into a positive experience.

Phase One Results:

- Cat is no longer hiding most of the time and may even greet you when you enter
- Cat is eating , drinking, and eliminating appropriately
- Cat is starting to play, look out windows etc.
- Cat is adjusting to their new medical routine
- Cat exhibits the 5 P's of comfort (Peeing, Pooping, Preening, Playing, and Purring)

If your new DCIN cat is exhibiting the above traits, you are ready to move on to phase two. If your cat is still showing signs of stress it is OK to hang out here for a few more days to another week.

If you or your DCIN cat are having difficulty getting on an insulin regimen do not proceed to Phase Two. The cat may not be as agreeable as it would be under other circumstances. They have just been moved from their homes, across the country, and been handled by lots of strangers. Older cats take longer to make these kinds of adjustments. Most non-diabetic cats take a week or two to bond and trust, so adding in shots and testing could delay you another week. It is OK. The importance of this stage critical to the overall care of your new companion.

If you are having challenges, contact your Case Manager or post to the Feline Diabetes Message Board for assistance.

If your DCIN cat is needing extra medical care or it is ill do not proceed to phase two until all major medical issues are under control. Adding stress can make attaining healing more difficult.

Phase Two

Now that your new cat is well bonded with you and trusts you, it is time to do the initial introductions to the rest of your feline family. There are several ways to go about this stage, but it remains critical to keep stress levels low. Sharing scents by brushing the cats with the same brush is an easy way to help build familiarity first. You can also rotate cat bedding to allow for the exchange of scent for a few days before jumping into the face to face encounter.^[5]

One way is to use their carrier. Take the DCIN cat and place them in the carrier. Then let the other felines into the room to 'see' the DCIN cat. Use high value treats to reinforce this is a positive encounter. If it seems to be going very well, you may consider opening the carrier door, but be ready to intervene if they are not quite as ready as you thought. Towels make an excellent instant barrier and cat herding tool. If all else fails the towel can be dropped over the DCIN cat and they can be scooped up to safety or you can drop the towel over the offending resident cat and shuttle them out of the room. You may have some hissing and growling, but as long as it does not escalate try not to interfere. If hackles get raised, tails fluffed and yowls of anger ensue remove your cats from the room and go to strategy number two.

Strategy two consists of crating and removing the DCIN cat from the room for several hours and allowing your resident cats to investigate all the scents of the DCIN cat. If you have a secondary bedroom you may want to let the DCIN cat investigate the new room to become accustomed to the resident's cat scent. After several hours rotate everybody back to their appropriate locations. Continue to feed high value treats to both cats near the door. Do this for a week and then try the carrier introduction again.



One last strategy is to use stacked baby-gates in the doorway. You can purchase inexpensive, light weight gates at Walmart for around \$18. 2-3 of these gates will create a nice and safe temporary screen door. This will allow the cats to see and smell each other as well as even paw at each other. Place wet food on both sides of the gates to encourage positive face to face encounters. If you are not going to be home these gates should be taken down and the door closed. As a foster for the local shelter, this is a method I use and my fosters are often cat tested and approved...or not.

Continue with these daily introductions until little to no hissing or growling is taking place. In all my experience with cat introductions, I've only had one cat that was ready to take on the house in week two. The reason for that was the two cats were best buddies at the shelter. All other introductions required at least 7-10 days of controlled meet and greets.

Phase Two Results

- Cats can tolerate seeing each other
- Cats may interact within a controlled situation
- All cats are not showing signs of stress
- Cats exhibit normal cat greeting behaviors. "Happy Tail, Chortles, Purrs, head-butts and nose touches"
- All cats exhibit the 5 P's

If your new DCIN cat and resident cats are exhibiting the above traits, you are ready to move on to phase three. If your DCIN cat or residents are still showing signs of stress it is OK to hang out here for a few more days to another week

Phase Three

Most cats will be ready to begin exploration of the house this week. If you have other cats, you may want to confine them in the bedroom to allow the new cat some security to roam about the home, discover new hiding places, and basically find their own way. If you have a large home with many rooms you may want to close off certain areas for the time being and 'keep things small.' There is nothing worse than losing a frightened special needs feline in a big home.

Ideally, all the positive bonding time should bring them running when you call, but every cat is different.

Once the DCIN cat is done exploring the area, return them to the safe room. Release the resident cats to investigate the area. This lets the resident cats realize their new feline friend is part of the household. Watch how your resident cats react. If they appear stressed repeat this procedure for several days to a week. If the resident cats seem interested, but not stressed proceed the next day to let the DCIN cat out with your resident cats. Supervise this encounter and be prepared with a towel or spray bottle to break-up any escalating fights. If a fight does break-out you will need to start over in phase two or even back at phase one. A bad fight may ruin the relationships permanently, so it is important to supervise this phase.

During Phase three, the DCIN cat should remain supervised at all times. If you are leaving for work or going to bed, the DCIN cat is placed back in their safe room.

Phase Three Results:

- Cats become accustomed to being in each other's space
- Little to know hissing or fighting
- Cat interactions are mostly positive
- All cats exhibit the 5 P's
- No urine marking

Phase Four

Congratulations for getting this far. If you have achieved all the results over the last 3 phases, there is a good chance the integration to your household has been achieved. Continue to monitor for the next few weeks for signs of trouble, but if you've made it this far you are likely to have a success story on your hands.

Signs of a Failed Introduction

1. Serious hissing, growling, raised hackles, yowling

1. Cats need to remain separated and start the introduction over and more slowly
2. Cats may be incompatible
2. Urine Marking
 1. This is different than an elimination problem. Cat positions itself with tail raised and attempts to get urine onto objects. Territory marking.
 1. Too many cats in the home
 2. Top cat feeling stressed by newcomer
 3. Newcomer trying to exert their right to be there
2. Separate cats and remove urine marking odors, if they can smell it the marking will continue.
 1. Nature's Miracle
 2. [Cat Odor Off](#) (highly recommend)
 3. This is the hardest to accept, but the cats are likely incompatible or you have too many cats.
 4. Maintain separate living conditions, find a new home/situation.

If you are experiencing any of these indications of a failed introduction please contact you DCIN Case Manager immediately. Please understand that the DCIN cat's overall well-being is our highest priority.

[1] Cat to Cat Introductions,
<http://www.cuhumane.org/topics/catcat.html>

[2] Diabetic Appropriate Food, <http://www.felinediabetes.com/diet.htm>

[3] [Natural Stress Busters for Cats, Veterinary Practice News](#) ,
<http://www.veterinarypracticenews.com/vet-practice-news-columns/complementary-medicine/natural-stress-busters-for-cats.aspx>

[4] Feline Diabetes Message Board Forum, <http://www.felinediabetes.com/FDMB/index.php?sid=725b2699c067669cd1d8e83f640152f9>

[5] The Importance of a Good Introduction,
http://www.catsinternational.org/articles/getting_a_cat/good_introduction.html

Finicky Cat Sitting & Behavior, LLC

Information in this download was originally written for and used by Diabetic Cats in Need. All content is the property of Beth Pasek, Cat Consultant. Her volunteer time and effort has been greatly appreciated.

DCIN Behavior Consultant

Beth Pasek, founder of The Finicky Feline & Fido, LLC of Cleveland (Facebook page), has generously agreed to volunteer as DCIN's Behavior Consultant.

Sadly but not unexpectedly, DCIN has experienced some foster and adoption failures because of discord between the new cat and resident pets. Beth will help the caregivers of DCIN foster and adoptive cats integrate those cats into their homes. Beth already has helped DCIN immensely by authoring [this paper on Introducing Cats](#) and has started to consult with DCIN clients.

Please join us in welcoming Beth to the ranks of those volunteers who are helping DCIN successfully place unwanted diabetic cats into happy foster and adoptive homes. We are fortunate to have her experience and expertise.



Beth with her extra-sweet Atlas

POSTED BY YENITA AT 6:14 AM