



PENINSULA HUMANE SOCIETY

Advocating quality and compassion for all life

MAKING FRIENDS WITH A SHY CAT

Thank you for adopting that poor cat who's been cowering in her cage at the shelter all week.....or for bringing into your home the stray who lurked under your back porch, occasionally darting out to grab a bite of food, then running back to her hiding place.

Now that she's safe and indoors and with a caring, responsible human, how do you get her out from under the bed so she can begin her new life?

Time to Relax

It can take weeks or even months for a stressed cat to realize that the worst is over and her life is stable now. While there are a few simple exercises you can do to help her along, sometimes patience is what's most needed.

Every cat is an individual. The speed with which she adjusts to her new home will depend in part on how much she's been through and how sensitive she is. Sometimes the cats who require the most patience and time are the ones who form the strongest attachments to people.

A Place of Her Own

When placed in a new environment, cats will typically look for a small area where they can sit and get their bearings. Eventually they will make brief forays from their hiding place, venturing out and running back to build their territory.

You can satisfy your cat's need for a safe haven by confining her to a single room that has some suitable hiding places. A cardboard box, in a closet, in a quiet room is a good starting point. A litterbox (changed daily), food, and water should be placed within a few feet of the hiding place.

Keep the door to this room closed until the cat is confident enough to spend time outside of her hiding place when you are present. If you allow her to explore the whole house while she's still feeling fearful, she may pick a hiding place that is less convenient for you, such as behind the refrigerator.

Getting to Know You

What's the best way to show your new friend what a wonderful person you are? Look for ways to entice her to approach you. Often our attempts to offer love and affection are overwhelming to the animal. Reaching for, holding, or restraining the cat may frighten rather than reassure.

Try to find toys and treats that interest the cat. Maybe you can sit next to or near her while she eats her meals. With a very frightened cat, the first step may be to sit on the floor near her hiding place with a few pieces of chicken or fish next to you. Read a book, listen to music, talk softly to the cat. In a few days you may be able to engage her in a game of chase-the-catnip-mouse. Take your time. Let the cat determine the pace at which your friendship progresses.

Written by Amy Shapiro for Peninsula Humane Society, 1989.