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**FOSTERING SCARED CATS**

**You’ve adopted a Scaredy Cat - and now she's hiding under the bed.**

What does this mean for you, the new adoptive parent? Firstly, it's important to prepare yourself for a different and possibly challenging experience when you first bring home your new kitty. If you've previously adopted friendly outgoing cats who walked into your house and just made themselves right at home, you need to erase those images. It is rare a sensitive/scaredy kitty will acclimate right away, and it's not fair to the kitty or to yourself to have unrealistic expectations.

The key to a successful transition is **PATIENCE, PATIENCE** and more **PATIENCE.** You need to accept the fact that this process will be governed by the kitty's schedule, not yours. Kitty will let you know when she's ready to move to the next stage -- you can't force it. Always try to keep in mind that the reward for your patience, and for what can feel like a slow, frustrating process, is an enduring, loving, and trusting bond between you and your new cat. With that in mind, here are some suggestions for your first days and possibly weeks with kitty:

**ISOLATION: A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN** Make sure you put your kitty into a separate enclosed room. It’s fine if it's small (e.g. a bathroom) - and in some cases, smaller is preferable. Check the room first for any possible hidey spots you could lose the kitty into (crawl spaces, holes in window screens, etc.) Set up kitty's bedding, food and water bowls, litter box, toys and scratching post in the room.

**A HIDING PLACE (or two!)** Make sure there's some way for kitty to hide in that room. Scaredy cat instincts require a hiding place in order to feel safe. The kitty needs to know that they can get away from a perceived threat (such as their new family!) For example, if it's a bedroom, put some fleece or bedding under a bed or in a closet. In a bathroom, perhaps you can put a small box or bed behind a bathtub or toilet. Most likely, your kitty will let you know right away where she wants to hide and you can set up cozy bedding in that area. Some scaredy cats like to hide underneath things, and some prefer to be high up. Whatever you do, do not force your kitty out of her safe space! If, for example, you approach kitty when she's backed into a wall, she can feel trapped and may start running around the room in a desperate search for safety. It's good to be aware of this.

**FEEDING (or trying to get her to eat)** Chances are your kitty is going to be so nervous and stressed out by her new environment she is not going to eat right away.

* + **Where to feed** Set up dry food and water near her hiding spot so she doesn’t have to go too far to eat. Make sure there is dry food out at all times.
	+ **What to feed** Some kitties can be picky eaters. Offer super tasty kibble like meow mix or even kitten chow. Try offering several different kinds. This should out available at all times. 2-3 times a day offer wet cat food like Friskies or Fancy Feast. Wet food with a lot of gravy works best. Try a variety of food to see what she likes.
	+ **Social eating** Some kitties only feel like eating while you spend time with them. Try petting and talking with the kitty to encourage her to eat. Playtime can sometimes stimulate appetite. Try using a wand toy to get her playing or offer catnip.
	+ **What if she doesn’t eat** Expect that she may only eat at night when the house is quiet and everyone is asleep. If she doesn’t eat, take the old wet food away and offer fresh food several hours later. Don’t lose patience; she will eventually eat as she feels more comfortable in her new home.
	+ **How long should you wait for her to eat** Kitties can get very sick if they go a long time without eating but we know your scaredy cat may take time to settle in before wanting to eat. It’s normal if she doesn’t eat the 1st day. We should start to be concerned if she doesn’t eat by the 3rd night. If she doesn’t eat by then please contact Dakin to coach you on what to do next.
	+ **How do I tell if she’s eating enough** You should see the food disappearing. If you can tell she’s nibbling but not sure if it’s enough, monitor the litterbox. If’s she’s eating she should be pooping. You should see pee and poop every day when she’s eating regularly.

**RESPECT BOUNDARIES** If you're lucky, your kitty will let you pet her while she's in her safe space. Physical contact can be an important part of the bonding process. If she's not responding to petting, don't force it. Persistence, however, is good. Try again later, but back off if she seems too scared. Let her smell your finger before giving her a gentle cheek rub. Be sure to use a soft, gentle voice when you and kitty are interacting.

**WALKING ON EGGSHELLS** Try to be aware of things that frighten scaredy cats: sudden

movements, loud noises, loud voices, and strangers. It's good for you to introduce kitty to all the members of your household, but do it gently - one person at a time. Chances are, kitty may feel safest and bond most quickly with you, the primary adoptive parent, and that's fine.

**FOLLOW KITTY'S CUES (SHE'S THE BOSS!)** Your kitty will let you know when she's ready to explore the rest of your house. She may start spending time near the door, coming out of hiding more often, or acting restless and bored. Experiment - open the door and see what happens. Again, don't ever grab her and try to make her leave the room - but coax her and encourage her. She may want to explore at night when everyone is asleep.

**PATIENCE...PATIENCE...PATIENCE - OR, HOW LONG WILL THIS GO ON?** You may find that just when you're making progress, something spooks kitty and she's back in hiding. It can be maddening to be petting her, or finally holding her in your lap, when suddenly she flees, and all you did was look at your watch or rustle your pants leg! Just trust that you *are* making progress and things will indeed change. The amount of time will vary with each kitty. Some may be fine after a day, some may need two weeks, some may need a month. Hang in there if your kitty's one of the ones who's taking a long time.

If you follow the above guidelines, hopefully that day will come when kitty is now an integrated member of your household. Maybe you wanted that day to come earlier, but at least it's finally here! She's hanging out in your living room, she's in your lap or sitting next to you on the couch, she's eating in the kitchen, she's sleeping in your bed. She may always be a kitty that does a fifty-yard dash when the phone rings or you stand up too quickly, but remember that this is just part of what makes her special!