

10 Ways to Make Friends With Your Scared, Shy Cat

Does your cat spend most of her time hiding in closets or under beds? Do loud noises or meeting new people freak her out? If so, you may have a cat with fear issues. But don't worry ... here are 10 great ways to draw her out of her shell.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Some people confuse very timid cats with feral cats, however, a shy cat will usually bond with at least one family member, whereas feral cats avoid all contact with humans
- Shy cats do best in quiet, calm households without young children
- A crucial step in helping a shy cat gain confidence is providing him a calm, stable environment and consistent daily routine
- There are additional steps guardians of shy cats can take to help their pet feel more confident and sociable

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Most of us know or have known a very shy cat, either our own or a kitty belonging to a friend or family member. Animal shelters often have an abundance of shy cats, although the experience of being in a shelter can make even the most outgoing kitty temporarily wary and fearful.

It used to be that very timid housecats who spent most of their time under the bed or in another hiding spot, rarely if ever hanging out with the rest of the family, were left mostly to themselves. They had all their physical needs met by their humans, but it just didn't occur to anyone to try to help kitty come out of her shell.

Fortunately, things are changing. Cat experts and advocates like Jackson Galaxy are helping cat caretakers understand that shy kitties are often capable of learning to be more confident, approachable, and sociable.

The Difference Between a Shy Cat and a Feral Cat

It's important to note the difference between a shy cat and a feral cat. Feral cats are either born wild, or have adapted to feral life after being lost or abandoned.

They keep their distance from humans, and while some have adjusted to living indoors with people, it's often not possible to turn a feral cat into a house pet because their instincts drive them to avoid human interaction. If their basic survival needs are met, feral cats usually do better living outdoors on their own terms.

A cat who is tame but timid will ultimately bond with at least one person in the family. He'll be physically affectionate with that person, he'll purr and meow, and he'll definitely seek his human out at mealtime!

Shy Cats Do Best in Quiet Homes

There are many reasons why some cats are more timid than others. Examples include lack of adequate socialization to people and a variety of stimuli in the first 2 to 12 weeks of life, a traumatizing event, or a genetic predisposition to being fearful.

As you might guess, shy cats typically do much better in relatively quiet homes as opposed to households with young children, boisterous adults, or other large or dominant pets. Loud sounds, sudden movements, or the family dog giving chase will send a shy kitty running to her hiding spot.

The more often it happens, the more time she'll spend hidden away, and no amount of coaxing will help a fearful cat get comfortable in an environment that feels threatening to her.

If you're considering adding a kitty to the family, please choose your new feline companion carefully. There are feisty, seemingly fearless cats that thrive in households with kids, dogs, and lots of noise and activity. However, this is far from an ideal environment for a timid kitty.

Cats are very sensitive to new environments, sounds, tastes, and smells, and they're easily stressed by any change in their routine. When you bring a new cat into your home, I recommend you set her up in her own little "apartment" for at least her first week. This will allow her to get adjusted on her own terms, which is the way cats prefer things.

Put your new kitty's bedding, litterbox, food, and toys in a spare bedroom or bathroom, and keep noise and visitors to a minimum. Introduce other members of the household one at a time in calm, quiet, and low-stress situations.

Don't leave the new kitty unattended with other pets in the home until you're completely confident your new cat has acclimated to the other animals and vice versa.

10 Tips for Socializing a Shy Cat

1. All cats thrive on a daily routine they can count on, and this is especially true for shy kitties. Feed and interact with your cat on a consistent schedule, and scoop his litterbox at least once daily. It's important to gain your cat's trust, and caring for his basic needs on a regular timetable will go a long way toward helping him feel more comfortable.
2. As much as possible, avoid startling your cat or subjecting her to loud noises. If you'll be running the vacuum, having a project done around the house, or throwing a party, put kitty in a quiet, secure area of your home.
3. Each time you interact with your shy cat, be calm, encouraging, and gentle. Talk softly, move slowly, and don't stare at her, because this can be perceived as threatening. Whenever possible, get down on her level to interact with her.

Touch her without forcing contact, and pet her gently around the head, ears, and face. Never bring your hand directly toward your cat's face, as this may startle her. Instead, gently approach her from the side or from behind.

4. If your cat scurries away when you walk near her, try turning your back to her as you pass.
5. Use delicious, wholesome food to encourage your kitty to bond with you. Feed a fresh, balanced, and species-appropriate diet. Offer yummy, healthy treats whenever you invite her to interact with you. The goal is to help

your cat make a positive association between you and delicious food.

6. Never force anything on your cat. Don't pull him from his hiding spot or hold him against his will (unless there's an emergency of some kind and you need to move him).

Cats are most comfortable when they feel in control of their surroundings and interactions, so keep that in mind whenever you approach your timid kitty. Encourage him to come to you, and until he does, pet and interact with him in his hiding place.

7. Schedule play sessions with your kitty as often as possible, especially if he's play-motivated. Use interactive, non-threatening toys that encourage his natural instinct to stalk prey. Bringing out the "inner hunter" in a shy cat can work wonders for his confidence.

Also, try walking around the house with a ribbon or string trailing behind you (you can just hold it or tie it to a belt loop, for example) and see if kitty chases you. If he does, stand still and let him investigate you.

8. Consider offering your kitty a natural stress relief formula such as a Spirit Essences remedy or an OptiBalance cat formula. You might also consider EFT or TTouch for animals, as well as using Feliway pheromone spray. Also ask your holistic veterinarian about homeopathic remedies for shy kitties.
9. To improve the communication between you and your shy cat, learn to interpret his body language, facial expressions, and vocalizations.
10. Remember that with a shy cat, time and patience are your biggest allies. Take the process of socialization one small step at a time, and repeat steps as often as necessary until your kitty is comfortable. Watch his body language carefully for signs of fear, including hiding, freezing in place, and hunching down to appear smaller.

Cats are individuals and progress at different speeds. Typically, kittens can be socialized more quickly than adult cats. Don't be discouraged if it often feels as if you've taken one step forward and two steps back. Each positive interaction your shy kitty has with a human is a step in the right direction.

Sources and References

[VetStreet September 10, 2015](#)
