

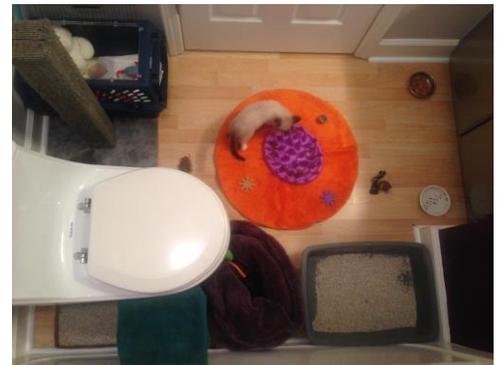
## Under-socialized Cats

Cats that have come from situations where they lived in large groups with other cats have spent most of their lives with other cats and many times have had very little contact with people. They can be fearful in new situations, especially when meeting new people. However, with time, patience, and positive reinforcement techniques like clicker training and play therapy, these cats will experience a reduction in their stress and become a part of the family.

### What to expect:

#### **When you first get your new cat home, they will be fearful and want to hide.**

The best way to help them adjust is set them up somewhere in your house that is small, like a bathroom. In this room, provide everything they will need: food, water, litter box, bed, and toys. Visit them every day, several times a day, doing positive things with them like offering high value treats or engaging in play. As your cat starts to become more comfortable and is seeking attention, you can let them out into the rest of your house. Start with another small area of the house though and build up to giving your cat total access. This process may take weeks.



#### **Your new cat may not consistently use the litter box, especially if given too much space.**

When a cat is afraid and hides, they may eliminate wherever they are hiding. By placing your new cat in a small room, you are helping them to adjust and increasing the chances of them using the litter box. The more your cat uses the litter box, the more it becomes a habit. When your new cat is reliably using the litter box and is given access to the rest of the house, additional boxes are recommended to help ensure consistent use of the box. It is also recommended to keep the original box in its original location if possible.

#### **Your cat may always be fearful of new situation and new people.**

Due to a lack of socialization, these types of cats may always be quick to run and hide when people come over or loud noises occur. You can help your new cat work through their fear and recover quicker using positive reinforcement techniques. Find a high value treat that your cat really loves and can't resist. Give this special treat every time something scary occurs. To start, you may have to give the treat with your cat in hiding as they may be too fearful to coax out. Eventually your cat will learn that something positive happens whenever the "scary thing" happens and they won't be scared anymore!

#### **Your cat may not handle being in a carrier. They may be vocal or struggle to get out.**

Most often, the only times these types of cats were ever placed in a carrier was the day they were taken from their "home" and during their time at the shelter. The best way to help your new cat be less fearful of the carrier is to work on positive reinforcement training. Start by giving your cat a treat when it walks towards the carrier, then when it sniffs the carrier, then when it touches the carrier, then when it walks in the carrier, etc. (Note: this process may take several training sessions.) You can also leave the carrier out, allowing your cat to go in when they please and feed them treats in the carrier to help make better associations. Avoid bringing the carrier out ONLY when going to the vet.





Changing Lives by Connecting Pets and People

**Your cat may never be a lap cat or enjoy being picked up and held**

Due to the lack of handling, these types of cats are not used to being handled and may avoid sitting in laps or struggle when picked up. You can prolong the amount of time your new cat will tolerate being handled through use of food rewards. Every time your cat comes near you when you are sitting down, reinforce them for staying using treats. If they ever get into your lap, continue to reinforce using treats but leave them alone if they want.

When picking your cat up, pair it with treats and remember to keep the handling to a minimum and build up the amount of time as they become more comfortable. Until your cat becomes comfortable with handling, you can positively interact in other ways such as clicker training and play therapy.

**Your cat may do well in a home with other cats, due to living with many cats previously, but there is no guarantee that they will get along with a new cat.**

Due to the high volume of cats in these situations, most of them have spent their entire lives around cats and prefer the company of cats. Keep in mind though, that even a cat that enjoys the company of other cats, may not do well with a *new* cat. With proper introductions, going slow (over the course of weeks), and using positive reinforcement, these cats can learn to co-exist with a new cat.

What not to do:

- Never force your cat to spend time with new family or new people. Allow them the chance to approach and reinforce them for interacting with people.
- Never chase your cat. If you find yourself in a situation where you need to handle your cat for medicating or putting in a carrier, wait until your cat has settled somewhere (like their bed) and then approach them.
- Never punish your new cat for inappropriate elimination, showing fearful behavior like hissing, or any other inappropriate behavior. Punishment will only make your new cat fearful of you and can lead to aggression.

***If your cat is showing concerning behaviors, contact Mountain Humane's Behavior Department at [behavior@mountainhumane.org](mailto:behavior@mountainhumane.org) or by phone (208) 788-4351 x114 for step-by-step guidance and advice.***