

Introducing your Ragdoll to Resident Cats

Whether you are homing a kitten or adopting an older Ragdoll, the first introductions to your resident felines, can be stressful for all involved. It is important to ensure that introductions are done gradually and with extreme care, to ensure that all cats involved are given the best opportunity of a good start together. Bad experiences in the early days can lead to long term problems that can be difficult to resolve.

Timing

Make sure that you bring your Ragdoll into your home at a quiet time. Avoid times when there are lots of visitors, when you have decorators or builders in the home etc. Make sure that you have the time to give to your cats, to reassure them and keep things very calm

Confinement

When you first bring your Ragdoll home it is advisable to have a room prepared for them, where they can be confined, for as long as is needed. They will need time to recover from the journey and the stress of being removed from their previous home, into a strange environment. How long this will take depends on the individual Ragdoll. It is advisable to delay any actual meeting between your resident cats and Ragdoll for a few days, even a week.

Scent transference

Smell is the most important form of communication for all cats and so the first stage to introductions is mixing the smell of your new Ragdoll with the smell of your home.

- Stroke your Ragdoll and then without washing your hands, stroke your other cats. Then return to your Ragdoll and stroke them. Repeat this over the coming days, as often as possible. This transfers the smell of one cat to another.
- Using a cloth, gently stroke around your Ragdoll's face and head and then rub the cloth around the home, onto furniture, banisters, door frames etc This mixes the scent of your Ragdoll with the 'home' smell your other cats are used to.
- Leave the brush you groom your Ragdoll with in a place that the other cats can smell it.
- Swap bedding and blankets between your Ragdoll and the other cats
- Ensuring that the cats do not meet, allow them to explore and investigate each other's area.

Initial Introductions

Getting this right is very important to the settling in process.

It can be useful to use a pen or, if no pen is available, a cat carrier, with a mesh front, for the initial meeting. This allows for introductions in a safe, controlled way. It allows the cats to see and smell each other through the mesh, while avoiding any aggression or chasing.

- Place your Ragdoll into the pen carrier in the room that they have been confined to. If using a carrier, then place it on a bed or sofa, rather than on the floor.
- Allow your resident cat to come into the room, giving them calm, quite reassurance throughout.
- If your resident cat runs away at first sight of the Ragdoll, then leave it to do so. Do not chase it, retrieve and bring it back. A cat which reacts in this way is likely to need more time and may not be bold enough to cope with a face to face meeting. Once the Ragdoll is allowed to explore the rest of the house, the resident cat may just hide away, avoiding the Ragdoll, but they will accept their presence over a period of time.
- Your cat may choose to stay and in this case there is likely to be an amount of hissing and growling from them and the Ragdoll. Distract the cats with noise, from a favourite toy or by using your voice, if any sign of aggression occurs, such as swiping with claws.
- Whenever there are quiet periods of interaction, without hissing or swiping, praise the cats and reward them with treats. In this way the introduction becomes a positive experience, which is what you need to aim for.
- Remain calm throughout the introduction, even if you feel things are going badly. You need to avoid any negative experience the cats may associate from the meeting, such as you shouting at them or chasing them away.
- You may need to repeat this process, using the pen or carrier, several times over the coming days, to allow the cats to accept each other. As time passes hissing and growling should make way for curiosity.

Meeting without the pen

There will come a point when your cats will be ready to meet each other face to face, without the use of a pen or carrier. A good time to do this is when both cats are hungry, using feeding time as a distraction. Choose a room that has hiding place for either cat, should they feel the need to retreat. Begin by feeding your resident cat and once they are distracted by their food, allow your Ragdoll to come out of the carrier to eat. Do not be tempted to put the food bowls too close together to begin with.

Remain quiet and calm and offer reassurance to your cats throughout. Use a favourite treat as reward for positive behaviour. The cats may finish eating and then each find a spot to settle down, wash and nap. If this happens, then that is great progress. If either of them retreats behind the sofa, then leave them. Do not be tempted to drag them out.

If there is any sign of aggression, then you may need to remove the Ragdoll from the room and continue to keep them separate for a while longer, while bringing them into the company of the other cat at meal times. Over a period of time, the cats should get to a point where they are happy to feed in the presence of one another and settle down afterwards, without any chasing or aggression. Once you have reached this stage, then it is time to allow your Ragdoll access to the rest of the house to explore and make themselves at home. Over the coming weeks the resident cat and Ragdoll will establish a pecking order and general acceptance and tolerance should follow. With time your cats may become great companions, sleeping together, grooming one another and playing together. However be prepared for the fact that this is not necessarily so and although a general truce may exist, the cats may never be close.

How long will it be before things are settled?

This question is difficult to answer. It depends on the temperament of the cats involved and also on how well you manage their initial meetings. For some cats, peace will reign in just a few days, for others it can take weeks, perhaps even months before the cats are truly relaxed in the presence of each other.

The key to a settled feline household is time and patience. Do not be tempted to rush things. If you give your cats the space, time and reassurance they need, in a quiet, calm environment, then in the long run, you should be rewarded with cats who are settled and happy in the company of each other.