

Cat Socialisation

Socialisation with other cats

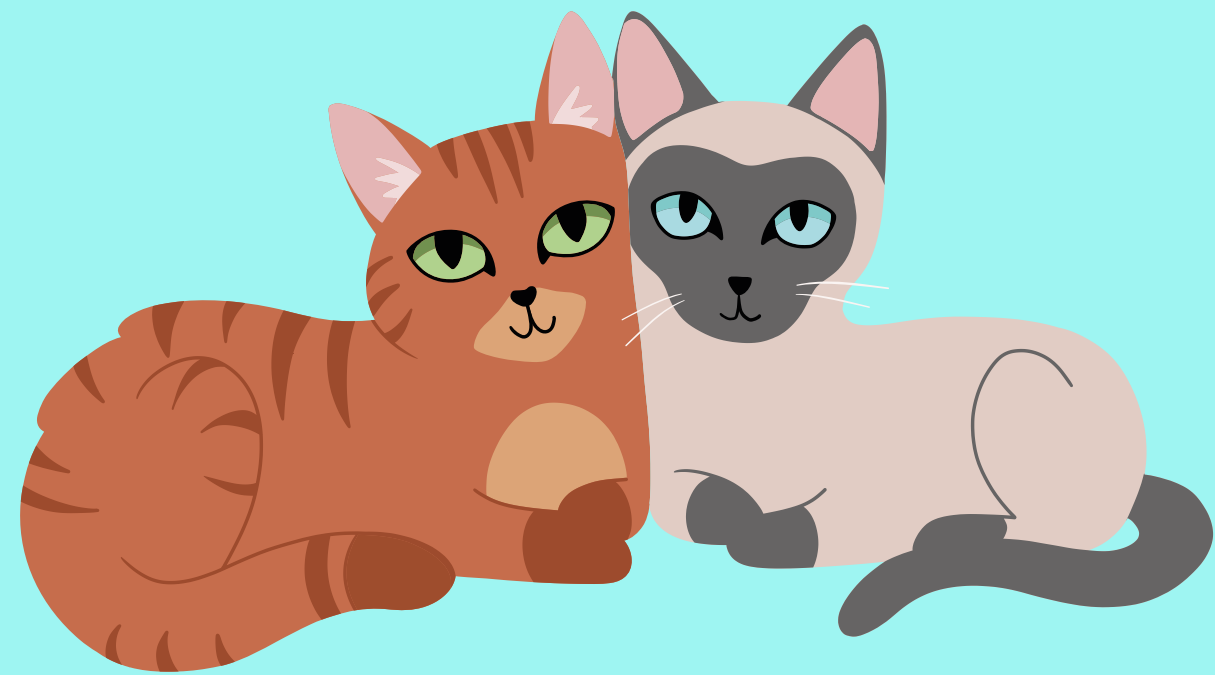
Felis silvestris lybica, the ancestor of all domestic cats, was a solitary animal. Through centuries of domestication, this wildcat developed into *Felis catus*, the domestic cat, which has an amazing ability to be social. This makes our cats part of a very select group of animals that demonstrates complex and fascinating social behaviour, including fostering and nursing one another's young¹.



¹Bernstein, PL, 2006, Behavior of Single Cats and Groups in the Home, Consultations in Feline Internal Medicine, pp. 675-685]

Socialisation with other cats

Cats will recognise members of their group by their scent and in cat colonies, scent rubbing or marking takes place when cats reunite after being apart. Indoor cats tend to rub less than their outdoor counterparts, because they don't have to re-establish their communal scent, which may be lost after several hours of stalking through tall grass, hunting for dinner². Scent is also used to help establish a territory as 'safe' and may help to reduce stress and anxiety³.



**Compared to humans,
scent plays a much
more important role in
communication for cats**



²Ellis, S, Kitten Socialization, Available at: <https://icatcare.org/app/uploads/2020/02/kitten-socialization.pdf>, Accessed: 10 January 2022

³Vitale Shreve, KR, & Udell, MAR, 2017, Stress, security, and scent: The influence of chemical signals on the social lives of domestic cats and implications for applied settings, Applied Animal Behaviour Science, Vol 187, pp. 69-76



Multi-cat Households

Cats will often form strong bonds with other members of the same species and the ability to experience these positive interactions begins as a kitten with their siblings and mother. Cats that aren't comfortable interacting with other cats were usually not well socialised as kittens and/or may have been separated from their family too soon⁴. This can have serious consequences if a cat is then forced to live in a multi-cat household as they have not developed the crucial skills and confidence to cope in this situation.

The stress caused may even lead to physical illness such as skin conditions, gastrointestinal problems, and lower urinary tract disease (see [Health](#)), as well as being detrimental to their mental health and emotional wellbeing. Conflict between cats can also become a welfare issue if one of the cats is injured, constantly stressed, along with possibly being rehomed or abandoned.

⁴Cromwell-Davis, SL, 2007, Cat Behaviour: Social Organization, Communication And Development, The Welfare Of Cats, Vol 3, pp. 1-22

Companionship

This is why it can be a good idea to adopt two kittens at once, to provide companionship and help develop the social skills required to grow into a well-adjusted adult cat. Juvenile cats will usually get along well with each other, even if they are not related, and they often form lifelong relationships.

Cats that are well socialised with other cats are also able to express species-specific behaviours that are important for their mental and emotional needs (see [Individuality](#) and [Environment](#)). As most cats don't go out on walks like dogs do and don't often meet other cats (unless they are outdoor cats), having friends within their home is even more crucial⁵. However, the dynamics of cats that were littermates can change quickly, often due to competition for resources or territorial conflict, so it's important to take all aspects of their [environment](#) into account.

Review the relationship regularly. Do they still make each other happy? (See [Environment](#))



⁵Casey, RA, & Bradshaw, JWS, 2008, The effects of additional socialization for kittens in a rescue centre on their behaviour and suitability as a pet, Applied Animal Behaviour, Vol 114(1-2), pp. 196-205



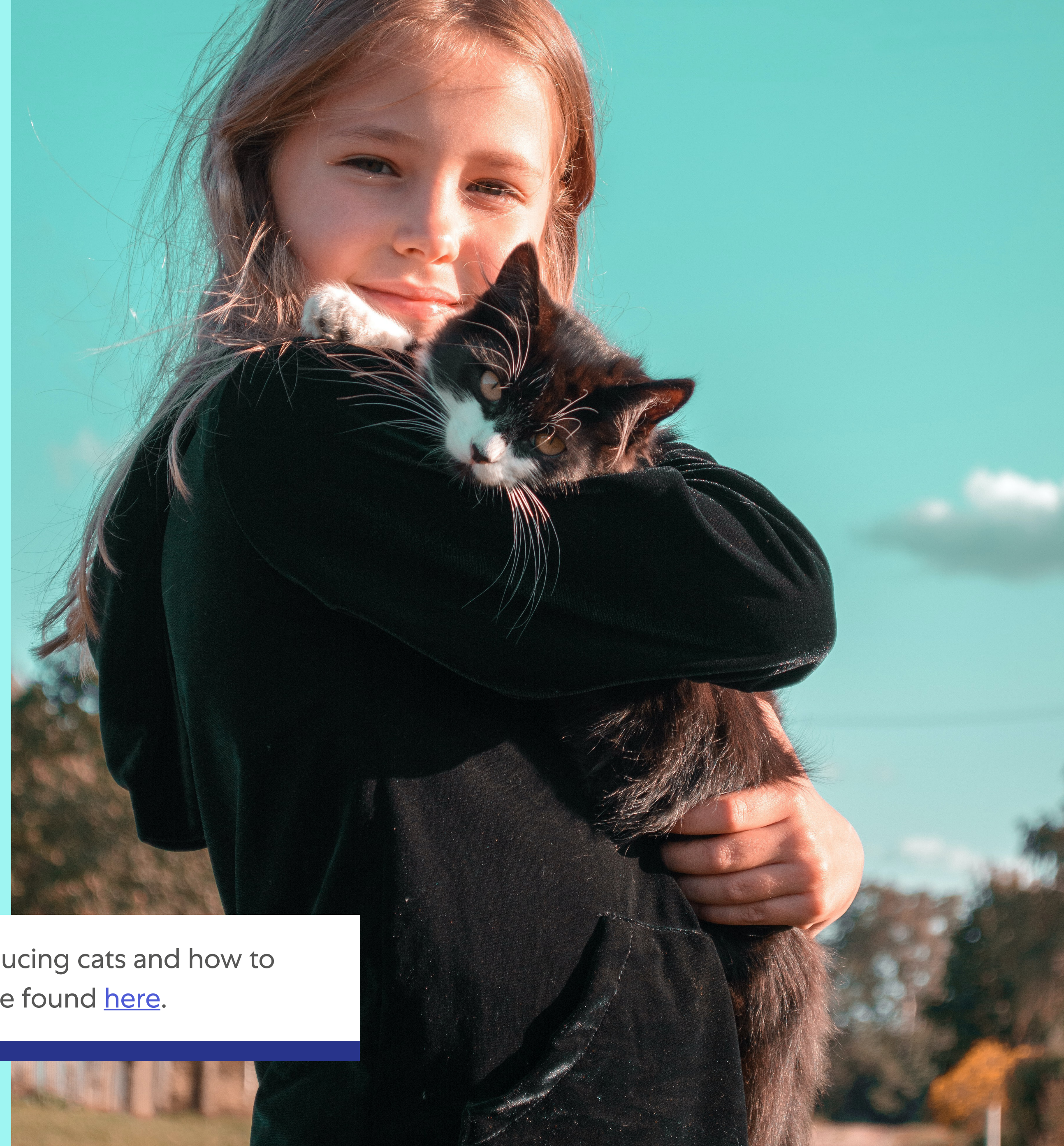
Top tips for positive social interactions between cats:⁶

- **Consider compatibility.** Think about your cat's personality and individual needs before choosing a potential companion (see [Individuality](#)). For instance, a young kitten might be a less threatening addition to the family for a healthy adult cat but might be too boisterous for a senior cat suffering from arthritis
- **Give them space.** Give a new cat at least a few days to settle in a safe and private space so they can adjust to their new surroundings before beginning any introductions
- **Swap scents.** Scent is a crucial part of feline communication. Exchanging bedding or blankets with each cat's scent helps them to become familiar. You can also pat one cat and then the other to transfer the scent on your hand, just be sure both cats are healthy to decrease the risk of transmitting infectious diseases (see [Health](#))

⁶Blue Cross For Pets UK, 2019, Introducing cats, Available at: <https://www.bluecross.org.uk/pet-advice/introducing-cats>, Accessed: 10 January 2022

- **Use a barrier.** Allow the cats to catch a glimpse of each other and gradually begin to interact through a barrier such as a stair gate. Small kittens may slip through the bars and may be better kept in a dog crate that is partially covered by a blanket for the initial introduction
- **Meet on neutral territory.** Where possible avoid zones where one cat prefers to eat, sleep or play to reduce the chance of territorial conflict
- **Consider kitten classes.** Many vet clinics run socialisation classes for kittens and their human families. This may also help cats to become used to the clinic environment, which can be a significant source of stress in later life (for more information see [Health](#), and [Environment](#)).
- **Be mindful of body language.** Make sure your cat is comfortable, confident and calm when interacting with others

More information, including a step-by-step guide to introducing cats and how to intervene if they are showing signs of stress, can be found [here](#).





Understanding cat-cat interactions

Though we might want our cats to behave like best friends, we must remember that some cats are more social and outgoing, whereas others may coexist with little interest in each other (see [Individuality](#)).

Signs of positive interactions between cats include:⁷

- Spending a lot of time together
- Mutual grooming behaviour
- Rubbing against each other
- Sleeping next to each other
- Sniffing each other's tails
- Greeting each other with their tails up, noses touching
- Play fighting – taking turns chasing each other, gentle rough and tumble play with claws retracted

⁷Cats Protection, Getting Another Cat, Available at: <https://www.cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/cats-and-your-family/other-cats>, Accessed 21 July 2022

Signs of negative interactions between cats include:⁸

- One cat 'blocking' access to resources such as litter trays or food bowls
- One cat leaving the room every time the other cat is around or keeping to a confined territory around the house
- Clinical signs of medical conditions commonly associated with stress, such as lower urinary tract disease or IBD (see [Health](#))
- Redirected aggression towards other cats, people or animals including; hissing, growling and biting
- Other behaviour problems such as overgrooming or inappropriate toileting behaviour (see [Health](#) and [Environment](#))





Agression between cats

When cats don't get along, this can become a problem, aggression in cats is often severe. Especially true if the behaviour escalates to regular fighting and conflict, as it may cause injuries as well as mental and emotional stress⁹. Interventions that can help include providing additional hiding places (particularly up high), neutering both cats, interrupting fights with a distraction (e.g. a noisy toy), providing separate living areas and reintroducing the cats slowly and rewarding positive behaviour.

**The help of a qualified
behaviourist is often
required**



What is social spacing? ^{9,10}

Social spacing refers to the distribution of cats within areas where they live. Cats will naturally maintain a distance between themselves and other cats, even within their home environment. As we, their owners, are responsible for choosing the location of food and water stations, sleeping quarters, and litter boxes, we inadvertently impact social spacing. Cats will communicate their need for social spacing using visual cues such as changes in body language, or by scent marking (with pheromones or even urine spraying). Each cat will be different in how much personal space they need (see [Individuality](#)), both from other cats and humans. Therefore, having multiple zones for these vital resources is essential to reduce stress and promote optimal emotional wellbeing.

Learn more about socialisation and emotional wellbeing for your pets at shine.waltham.com

⁹Ellis, S, Kitten Socialization, Available at: <https://icatcare.org/app/uploads/2020/02/kitten-socialization.pdf>, Accessed: 10 January 2022

¹⁰Casey, RA, & Bradshaw, JWS, 2008, The effects of additional socialization for kittens in a rescue centre on their behaviour and suitability as a pet, Applied Animal Behaviour, Vol 114(1-2), pp. 196-205

