

## Tom, Meet Geri (New Cat Introductions)

When Tom Terrific turned one, his family decided to adopt a play pal for him. They believed that their rambunctious adolescent tabby would benefit from a buddy with whom he could play away the workday until they returned home.

With help from an adoption counselor at a local shelter, Tom's guardians carefully chose a smaller, younger female calico they named Geri. Geri appeared confident enough to hold her own with the boy and was young enough to appreciate Tom's playfulness in a way that an older cat might not. She would likely accept that her home was his home with minimal fuss — something an adult male would have more difficulty doing. But while careful selection was important, Tom's caretakers knew that a formal introduction was also in order.

### Who's There?

Change is difficult for cats, so the introduction needed to move ahead slowly. As soon as Geri was brought into the house, her new guardians set up a "guest room" for her in the spare bathroom, complete with food, water, comfy bed, litter box and toys. After releasing Geri into her temporary living quarters, they removed her carrier and left it out for Tom to investigate. Filled with her scent, the carrier served as a subtle introduction to the newcomer.

For the next several days, Tom camped outside the spare bathroom. At first, he had plenty to say about sharing his home with some girl cat. But over time, he seemed more comfortable having her scent in his territory. Soon he was lingering in the doorway, trying to swat paws under the door and catch a glimpse of his new housemate as his guardians went in and out with fresh food or used litter.

This two-week isolation period proved to be an advantage for both cats. It helped Tom get used to the idea of having another cat on his turf while Geri was busy acclimating to her new digs. Since a new home often means different food and litter material as well as new routines and environments, starting off in a small, cozy space helped keep Geri's stress level to a minimum. She had her own box and bowls so sharing food — or illness — wasn't an issue. If she were to come down with an upper respiratory infection, as some feline adoptees do, she wouldn't be sneezing on Tom or sharing germs via a communal water bowl. Also during this two-week period, Geri had a check-up and was de-wormed. (While she had left the shelter already spayed, this would have been the perfect time to spay or neuter an unaltered cat.)

When Geri was given a clean bill of health, it was time for the next phase in the introductory process. Since the guest room was quite small, and Geri was full of kittenish energy, the cats were given an opportunity to swap living spaces for an hour each morning and evening. Tom got to investigate Geri's quaint quarters while she made a mad dash around his kingdom. This was also a clever way to immerse the cats in each other's scent. To further build up pleasant associations, once the cats were back in their respective spaces, their guardians placed food bowls on both sides of the bathroom door.

### Hello, Gorgeous

Things were proceeding well. Both cats ate normally and appeared playfully curious about the other. And so came the day for their first face-to-face meeting. After feeding the cats and trimming their nails, the guardians left the bathroom door ajar and busied themselves around the house. They knew it was up to Tom and Geri to take the next step.

Aware that a little hissing, swatting and chasing was to be expected, the family planned to intervene only if World War III erupted. But thanks to their careful selection and a slow, cautious introductory period, no intervention was needed. Tom and Geri were soon playfully chasing each other around the house and napping in a shared patch of afternoon sunlight. Their well-orchestrated introduction resulted in perfect harmony.

*Jacque Lynn Schultz, MA CPDT, Director & Companion Animal Programs Advisor, National Outreach, ASPCA*