



How To Guide

Transitioning or setting up for an indoor cat



Pictured:
Lucinda and Meema enjoying the cat enclosure,
South Bunbury

A guide to preparing for an indoor cat

This guide will help you to learn more about your cat and how you can prepare to meet your individual cat's needs.

The guide will help to set you up for success in preparing to have an indoor cat or transitioning a cat indoors, including how to keep your cat happy and entertained for an enriched life.

Keeping a cat indoors can include being inside the house with access to an enclosure, inside the house with access outside in a harness and lead or contained inside the house at all times.

By keeping our companion cats contained to the property, we can have peace of mind in knowing we are doing the right thing to keep our cats safe. Cats that are contained can live 4 times as long as free access cats.

The guide was developed by South West Catchments Council in consultation with Dr Kate Lindsey from Kalmpets. Dr Kate is a vet and animal behaviourist who assists pet owners to keep their pets happy and healthy at home.

South West Catchments Council is working on a project in the Greater Bunbury Region to reduce conflicts between our pets and our threatened western ringtail possums. This guide aims to assist cat owners to allow for a harmonious co-existence between both of these special creatures.

If you find this guide useful or if you would like more detail on a particular topic, please email your feedback to swcc@swccnrm.org.au. Similarly if you would like to suggest changes, please email them through.



Step 1.

Know your cat

By understanding your cat's communication, sensory, health and support needs, preferences for activities, skill level, and engagement style you can set them up for a successful transition to the indoor environment. Before you transition your cat indoors...

Observe the following behaviours

1

Potty preferences



Under low hanging shrubs



Out in the open

2

Preferred resting locations

In trees



Under bushes



3

Preferred hunting prey



Mice



Bugs




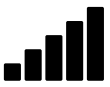



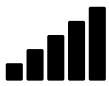




Birds

It's time to do
some detective
work !



Feline Five personality types

How would you rate your cat against these five personality types?

	Personality Type	Level & Traits	Meet their needs indoors
1	Skittishness	 Low - Calm, trusting and bold  High - Neurotic, anxious, shy, fearful, suspicious and insecure	<p>Low ratings may reflect that your cat is well adjusted to its environment. It may travel further if not confined. Bolder cats are more vulnerable to feline immunodeficiency virus.</p> <p>Additional hiding places around the home or access to quiet areas. High ratings may require an assessment of social stress by observing interactions with other animals or humans.</p>
2	Outgoingness	 Low - Clumsy, aimless, quitting  High - Smart, curious, active, inventive, extraverted	<p>Low ratings are uncommon. May indicate age related health issues i.e. cognitive dysfunction or related health issues; see vet for assessment.</p> <p>High rating indicate a need for additional stimulation and more complex environmental enrichment to avoid boredom. Extra room to play, additional sensory items or toys, more social interactions with humans or other animals may be required.</p>
3	Spontaneity	 Low - Predictable, constrained  High - Impulsive, erratic, reckless	<p>Low ratings may indicate that your cat is well adjusted to their environment and enjoys routine.</p> <p>High ratings may indicate a stressful environment that is negatively affecting your cat's health and welfare. Try and rectify the stress or consult with a behaviourist to help locate the source of the stress.</p>
4	Friendliness	 Low - Solitary, irritable, aggressive towards people  High - Agreeable, affectionate, well adjusted	<p>If unfriendly behaviour is unusual for your cat, it may indicate frustration, pain, or illness; see vet for assessment. If this is a regular trait, your cat may be solitary in nature or poorly socialized.</p> <p>High ratings indicate your cat may adjust well to other people and animals in the home.</p>
5	Controlling	 Low - Friendly, appealing  High - Aggressive, bully	<p>Cats with low ratings may adjust well to being in multi-cat households.</p> <p>When cats are stressed they can try and control the actions of other around them to feel safer. Highly controlling cats will do best in low stress environments or with the help of a vet behaviourist.</p>

Top tip!

Cats that score highly for friendliness can serve as a source of enrichment for other cats.

Feline Five personality types

Enrichment suggestions for your cat's personality type

Personality Type

Enrichment suggestion

Skittishness -

Low



Calm, trusting and bold



Book recommendation -
Clicker Training for Clever
Cats, Martina Braun

Skittishness -

High



Neurotic, anxious, shy,
fearful, suspicious and
insecure



Diffuse low dose essential oils
particularly lavender,
frankincense, bergamot

Research the T-touch cat
massage method to improve
well-being and trust

Outgoingness -

Low



Clumsy, aimless,
quitting



Stationary puzzles e.g.
The Twirly Bird Snacker by
Doc an Phoebe

Non-slip matting on cat
shelving

Outgoingness -

High



Smart, curious, active,
inventive, extraverted



Cat agility exercises

Push and pop cat feeder

Spontaneity -

Low



Predictable,
constrained



Variety of stationary and rolling
food based puzzles e.g. Buggin out
by Nina Ottoson

Feline Five personality types

Personality Type

Enrichment suggestion

Spontaneity - High



Impulsive, erratic, reckless



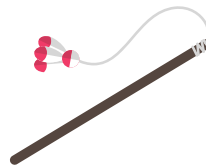
Massage with almond oil

Stationary puzzles e.g. Trixie cat activity fun board

Friendliness - Low



Solitary, irritable, aggressive towards people



Fishing pole type toys

Predictable daily routine

Friendliness - High



Agreeable, affectionate, well adjusted



Research the T-touch cat massage method

Book recommendation - Clicker Training for Clever Cats, Martina Braun

Controlling - Low



Friendly, appeasing



Variety of food base puzzles including Cat Amazing Epic!

Controlling - High



Aggressive, bully



Scratch pad with treat dispenser

Dominant cats are generally anxious and need support from your local vet behaviourist or cat behaviour trainer

Step 2.

Get your resources ready

There are 7 stations that need to be set up in order to set your cat up for behavioural success. Use the information you have gathered from Step 1 to tailor each station to meet your cats needs.

1

Feeding



Allocate each cat a quiet/safe place for meals.



Avoid placing feeding stations in thoroughfares



Trial different locations e.g. on a shelf/bench versus floor level



Use food based puzzles to provide mental stimulation

2

Drinking



Provide one drinking station per cat in different locations (floor and shelf level)



Avoid thoroughfares



Consider your cats' preferences for running (e.g. electric cat fountain) or still water



3

Scratching

Scratching is a normal cat behaviour. Scratching helps shed loose nails and is also used for communication. Every cat has a preference for substrate (e.g. cardboard, carpet, wood) and surface type (horizontal or vertical). Provide at least one scratching station per cat located in main living areas of your home.

Vertical Preference



Tree log



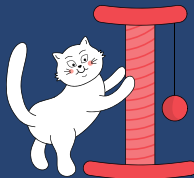
Sisal wrapped cat tower



Carpeted cat tower



Wall mounted scratching panel



Horizontal Preference

Tree log



Carpet square



Cardboard panel



Step 2.

Get your resources ready

4

Litter tray

Set your cat up for success by ensuring the litter tray is the most desirable location to toilet.

Size

Minimum 1 ½ times the length of your cat



Hygiene

Scoop daily, weekly full litter change and wash with mild dish-washing detergent.



Number

One for each cat in the household plus one additional tray



Substrate



Fine-grained



Unscented



Resembles dirt

Use outdoor sand in your litter tray when transitioning your cat indoors. Gradually add more litter with less sand to get your cat used to it.

Top tip!

If your kitty litter is listed as compostable, you can place in your FOGO bin. These are commonly clay, paper and plant based. Silica based litters cannot go in the FOGO bin.

Location

Avoid thoroughfares and reflective surfaces



Idea! Convert a second hand cabinet into a cat toilet and play tower. Great for privacy, odour control and pet separation.

Step 2.

Get your resources ready

5

Safe Place

Cats are vulnerable when engaging in grooming and resting so they prefer to access a safe place for these activities. Some 'ground floor' cats prefer floor level dens while other 'top floor' cats prefer open but higher viewing points. Cat beds, dens or cardboard boxes lined with polar fleece located at different heights in your home will ensure a 'just right' safe place is accessible to your cat.

Ground floor cat



Floor level cardboard box



Cat crate/den



Cat bed on empty low bookshelf



Place cat bed under a desk/bed/staircase

Top floor cat

Bed on the top level of cat tower



Clear top shelf (bed or cardboard box)



Polar fleece on top of sofa backrest



Bed on window sill



6

Play

Cats need outlets for hunting behaviour and play each day. Try to match play opportunities to your cats' preferences.

Bugs



Live crickets



Small pieces of food tossed across the floor



Small, knotted string on a fishing pole



Birds



Collect a feather on your walk



Feathers on fishing pole



Feathered toys



Toys that make chirping sound

Fur

Small stuffed toy



Small rubber ball



Ping pong ball



Top tip!
Let the cat win! Avoid toys where the cat cannot capture the 'prey'. This will build anxious behaviour and frustration. This includes the use of lasers and circuits where the ball cannot be captured.

Step 2.

Get your resources ready

7

Perching

Like everyone else in the family cats want to know what is going on around them. Perches allow a safe viewing point for cats to investigate the world around them.

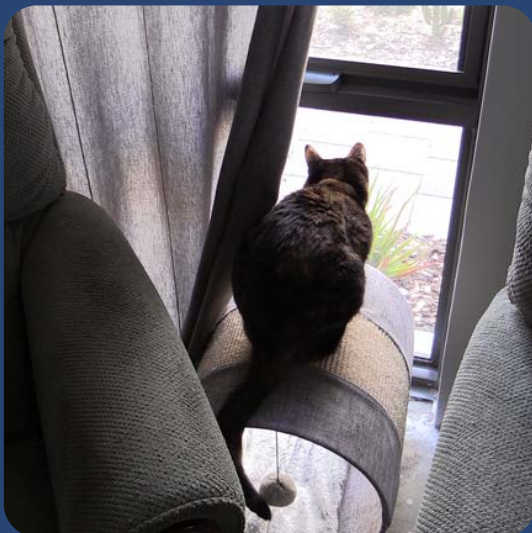
Position a perching spot to observe the world



Cicca, South Bunbury



Mocha, Australind



Mittens, Dalyellup



Squid, Withers

Step 3.

Introducing your cat into the indoor environment



Kat and Lena sharing a kiss in their enclosure



Watch the full story about Kat, Lena and Missy here

Introducing your cat into the indoor environment - Steps

Once you have your cat's 7 stations ready you can start to introduce your cat to a safe and healthy life indoors.

START

Starting with a free access cat



Set an evening curfew. Plan your cat's tastiest food to be delivered each evening and lock the cat flap. Establish an evening routine of play and cuddle time that you can commit to. Once your cat has adjusted to this routine, they have become a 'curfew cat'.

Top tip!

It is important to reduce adlib feeding and start meal times indoors. We want to identify the indoor environment as a place where good things happen. This means the tastiest meals at meal time.

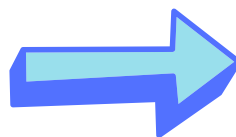
START

Starting with a cat who has previously been indoors at night (curfew cat)



Open the cat flap each morning one hour later week-by-week. Establish a daily routine of mealtimes, play time, grooming time and cuddle time. Once your cat spends 70% of the daytime indoors the cat flap can remain closed at all times.

FINISH



“

After about a month and a few squabbles with Missy, Kat accepted the indoor lifestyle quite well. You just need to remember to shut doors behind you. Jenny, Eaton

”

Kat was transitioned indoors with access to an enclosure after having free access outdoors.



Trouble shooting

Problem

Solution

1

Toileting outside of the litter tray

- Try different locations
- Offer different litter types
- Try different sized litter trays (covered, semi-covered and un-covered)
- Review hygiene procedures
- Ensure Urine has been cleaned effectively. Download Kalmpets 'Urine Cleaning Guide' using the QR code below.
- Ask your vet to rule out bladder/kidney disease

2

Scratching furniture

- Offer alternative scratching posts that match the location, size and texture of the furniture being scratched

3

Other cats outside the enclosure

- Block visual access with shade cloth or planting. Or you could use frosted window film.
- Use gentle deterrents outside the enclosure e.g. SSScat, dog faeces.

4

Excessive vocalisation

- Increase access to outdoors and focus on evening Curfew
- Gently increase time indoors each day by 30-minute increments
- Increase hunting/play opportunities
- Move mealtimes to later in the day or set up a timed feeder to open early in the morning
- Use a Feliway diffuser
- Review all resources
- Ask your vet to rule out underlying medical disease



Download Kalmpets 'Urine Cleaning Guide' for cats inappropriately urinating in the home

Reference

Litchfield CA, Quinton G, Tindle H, Chiera B, Kikillus KH, Roetman P (2017) The 'Feline Five': An exploration of personality in pet cats (*Felis catus*). PLoS ONE 12(8): e0183455.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0183455>

Roetman P, Tindle H, Litchfield CA, Chiera B, Quinton G, Kikillus K, Bruce D, Kays R (2017) Cat Tracker South Australia: Understanding Pet Cats through Citizen Science. 10.4226/78/5892ce70b245a.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the cat owners of the Greater Bunbury Region who have welcomed us into their homes and shared their experiences so far. We are looking forward to sharing these stories and ideas with all cat owners in the region to keep our companion cats safe and happy.

This project is supported by the South West Catchments Council, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.



Visit our Responsible Pet Pawrent Program webpages to see more local Greater Bunbury Region videos and information to help you become a Proud Indoor Cat Pawrent.
swccnrm.org.au/our-work/environment/pets/

