

Homeless Pets Foundation

INTRODUCING A CAT TO A NEW TERRITORY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CONFINEMENT

When introducing Tigger into a new home, all cats need time to adjust to their new space. Make the adjustment period shorter by allowing Tigger become accustomed to her new home slowly.

Cats are territorial by nature, and their first priority in any situation is establishing and understanding their territory. Only once they are comfortable in their space can they feel comfortable eating, drinking, resting, and eliminating.



Tigger's safe space should be a small, quiet room such as a bathroom, small office or large walk-in closet. A room without any hiding spaces such as under the tub or bed, or behind a bookshelf. Tigger shouldn't be pulled out of hiding to interact – that will just get the visit off to a bad start. However, provide Tigger with an acceptable hiding space by tipping a box on its side and putting a towel inside. Many cats also like cat cozies or tee-pee style beds.

Tigger's room should be set up with a litter box on one end of the room, and food, water and bedding as far away from the litter box as possible. Tigger should be given some safe toys with which to play and should be given visits while confined to this space. Start off slowly when visiting Tigger – don't do too much petting or interacting until she has had some time to settle in. Sit in the room and watch if Tigger will approach. If not, offer her a hand to sniff and try some gentle face pets. Give Tigger frequent breaks and work up to more handling. Be patient and remember, the more love, the quicker she will adjust.

Confinement is especially crucial for shy or fearful cats as they may be overwhelmed when moving into a new home. This is very normal behavior. However, if Tigger is fearful by nature, it will be even more terrifying for her to be in an unfamiliar space. Given the free run of the house, a scared cat will often bolt around, looking for a safe place to hide. Many cats injure themselves running into furniture or walls in a panic. They may also hide somewhere unsafe, such as under the stove or inside a reclining chair, and stay hidden for several days. These cats may forego eating, and even urinate or defecate in their hiding space. A safe room will allow Tigger a small space where she'll feel secure, and will also make her more sociable. The less she is worried about her territory, the more social she'll become. By providing Tigger with a cozy or box in which to hide, she'll feel safe.

Kittens also benefit from an initial confinement to a small room or even to a large cage/crate. This will provide time to kitten-proof the rest of the house. When left alone, a smaller kitten should be confined for three reasons:

- it reinforces good litter box habits
- it prevents accidents where the kitten might injure her/himself
- it means no more searching for kittens hiding from view

When moving Tigger into a new home, it is best to confine her to a safe room before and after the move. The more Tigger is prevented from being exposed to the chaos of people and all things foreign in her new home, the better. If startled, there's a good chance Tigger might slip outside when doors are left open. Be sure movers know there's a cat inside or place a sign on the room in which Tigger is located.

Eliminate any chance of escape when transporting Tigger to her new home by placing her in a secure carrier while she is still in her safe room. In the new house, again give Tigger a safe room to adjust to before allowing her full access of the house.

Put a collar and identification tag on Tigger with name, current address and phone number. Even if Tigger isn't allowed outside, this is still a good idea because there's always the chance Tigger might slip through an open door or window and become lost. There are collars made especially for cats with a short piece of elastic. These break-away collars can be buckled snugly around Tigger's neck, but will stretch and let her escape if she should become hung up on a tree limb or fence.

The first time a collar is placed on Tigger, provide her a new catnip-filled toy at the same time. The toy will distract Tigger's attention from the odd feeling of wearing a collar and by the time she's finished shredding the toy, she may have already forgotten about the collar.

When bringing Tigger into a home with resident kitties, Tigger should be confined to one room for a few days, or even weeks. This allows the resident cats and Tigger to get to know each other by scent and accept each other's presence without having to see each other face to face, which can be a very threatening experience for any cat.

For some cats, the confinement period will be only a few hours – for others it might be several weeks. Don't mistake one signal for readiness. Even a very scared cat may meow or scratch at the door for attention. This alone doesn't mean Tigger is ready to explore more space. The important thing is not to rush Tigger into being exposed to more space than she can handle. Be sure the following has taken place first:

- Tigger is performing her natural functions: eating, resting, grooming, using the litterbox
- Tigger is responsive, petting and playing.
- Tigger is comfortable with normal activities in the room, and is not afraid
- Tigger is showing interest in leaving the room.

When possible, expand Tigger's territory slowly, especially if she's fearful. Close all the doors to bedrooms and allow Tigger to first explore the hallway and rooms that don't close, such as the kitchen and living room. If at anytime Tigger seems overwhelmed, return her to her safe room for a few hours and try introducing her to the rest of the house later.

Don't feel bad about confining Tigger at first. It will help her relax and adjust to her new surroundings much quicker. The sooner Tigger adjusts, the sooner she will have full run of the house, and the sooner she'll feel comfortable in her new home!