



ADOPTED A SHY CAT?

HIDEAWAYS

A fearful cat feels more secure if they know they can't be seen. There should be hiding places set up for the cat in all the rooms they will be in. If you want to encourage your cat to venture out from under the bed, you need to set up cozy hideaway alternatives for them. "A" frame beds are great hideaways because the cat can peer out if he wishes, however he knows he won't be ambushed from behind. High-sided donut beds are also good. Cats love being able to curl up into a tight little ball and feel the sides of the bed surrounding them. You can create homemade hideaways with cardboard boxes. Place the box on its side and one of the flaps hanging down so the opening is partially covered. Make it a comfortable space by lining the box with a towel or cat bed.

A cat tree is a great piece of real estate for a cat, however if the cat is fearful, they may not feel secure enough being so exposed on a perch. Choose a cat tree that has at least one semi-enclosed perch or you can place an "A" frame bed on one of the perches. Some fearful cats may prefer an open high perch because it gives them a visible advantage. By allowing these high perches to be a "safe" place for your cat, it will help to build your cat's confidence. This may encourage them to come out more often. All cats are different in their preferences, so make sure to have plenty of different options.

INTERACT AT THE CAT'S PACE

Building your shy cat's trust can be a long process. It is important that you let the cat set the pace. Many people think you'll be able to convince your cat to get over their fear by forcibly holding him or insisting that they interact with you and your family members. This is a mistake. By doing this, it will severely set back the trust-building process.

What a fearful cat needs is choice. If he feels he has the choice to move closer and check things out or interact with you, then the cat will be more relaxed. A cat that feels he has no choice will feel backed in a corner and will look for the first opportunity to run for cover.



OFFER INCENTIVE

Keep treats on-hand and whenever the cat makes even the smallest positive step, reward him with something yummy. Clicker training works well. You can click and reward for any behavior you'd like to see again, such as when the cat walks in the room or pokes their head out from under the bed.

If your cat won't take the treat from your hand, then gently toss it closer to them. If the treat consists of wet food, place a little on a spoon in order to put a distance between you and the cat.

PLAYTIME

Use a fishing pole toy to encourage your shy cat to play. The pole puts a distance between you and the cat. They will be able to stay in their comfort zone. If they are more comfortable being partially hidden under the bed or behind a chair you can still offer playtime opportunities with the fishing pole. The movement should not be frantic or over-the-top. A shy cat doesn't want to view the toy as an opponent. Make your motions low-key and easy for the cat to conquer his prey.

Choose your interactive toy based on your cat's personality. If the cat is extremely frightened, you may need to start with something like a feather and gradually work up to more challenging toys.

RESOURCES

If you want your cat to feel comfortable venturing out from under the bed, create secure paths to resources such as the litter box, scratching post, and feeding station. If your cat doesn't feel safe then you'll never see them during the day because they will only wander out to eat or use the litter box in the middle of the night when the family is asleep. Locate resources so they don't have to walk across the house to reach them. You can create little tunnels along the way, so the cat remains partially hidden. You can use soft-sided fabric tunnels (available at your local pet product store and online) or you can make your own by connecting several paper bags that have the bottoms cut out. You can also use boxes or even large cardboard tubing.

BODY LANGUAGE

Observe and respect your fearful cat's body language. A contributing factor to the cat's fearful behavior may be that their communication signals haven't been respected. If your cat's body language is saying "please don't come closer" and you continue to move toward them then they will soon learn to dart away.



ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT

After you have set up a safe and secure living situation for your cat, try creating a more interesting environment. Try placing puzzle feeders around and distribute interesting little toys for the cat to bat at for solo playtime. This will help him begin to form a positive association with his surroundings.