

Before You Get The Cat

A calm, welfare-first guide to what cats
experience and what humans often
don't expect

Furrever Wellness



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This guide is intended for informational and educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional veterinary advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of a qualified veterinarian or certified animal behaviourist regarding any questions you may have about your cat's health or behaviour.

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A portion of all Furrever Wellness resources supports small rescue organisations and welfare-led initiatives.

For every cat who arrived afraid and every human who stayed patient.

A Gentle Pause

You're probably here because you've already decided.

Or nearly decided.

Maybe you've been thinking about it for months. Maybe you've already picked out a name. Maybe you're reading this the night before you bring them home.

This guide won't try to change your mind.

But it will ask you to sit with something most cat content skips entirely: **what it actually feels like to be the cat.**

Getting a cat is often framed as an exciting milestone, a companion, a comfort, a long-awaited addition to the family. And for many people, that joy is real and meaningful.

But for a cat, arriving in a new home is not exciting.

It is **disorienting**.

Everything familiar disappears at once:

- known scents
- known sounds
- known routines
- known territory

A cat's sense of smell is fourteen times stronger than yours. When you move them, you don't just change their location; you erase their entire map.

This guide exists because many of the difficulties cats experience do not come from a lack of love. They come from a mismatch between human expectations and feline reality.

It is not here to persuade you to get a cat.

It is not here to test whether you are "ready enough."

It is not here to tell you how things should look.

It is here to offer clarity, honesty, and compassion for the cat, and for you, before anyone crosses your threshold.

Consider this a pause.

A moment to understand what a cat is likely to experience.

A moment to reflect on what you can realistically offer.

A moment to begin with awareness rather than urgency.

There is no perfect home.

There are only homes willing to learn, adapt, and go slowly.

Who This Guide Is For

This guide is for you if:

- You're thinking about adopting or buying a cat or kitten
- You want to make informed, welfare-led choices
- You're drawn to calm, non-judgmental guidance
- You care about doing things thoughtfully, not perfectly
- You want to know what can actually happen, not just what's supposed to happen

It's also suitable for:

- first-time cat guardians
 - fosterers
 - families preparing for a new cat
 - rescue organisations sharing pre-adoption resources
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What This Guide Is Not

It's not a training manual.

It's not a rulebook.

It's not a promise of a "perfect" transition.

It won't tell you what to do every step of the way.

It will help you understand why slowing down matters and what you might actually face when you do.

What a Cat Experiences When They Come Home

When a cat arrives in a new home, they are not comparing it to a better or worse place.

They are registering a loss.

From the cat's perspective, a move means:

- loss of territory
- loss of familiar scent markers
- loss of predictable patterns
- loss of control

Even confident or outgoing cats experience this shift. Confidence does not eliminate stress; it only changes how stress is expressed.

Some cats hide.

Some become silent and still.

Some hiss, swat, or vocalise.

Some appear unusually affectionate.

None of these responses tells you who the cat is.

They tell you what the cat is coping with.

A common misunderstanding is believing that a quiet cat is "settling well," while a cat who protests is "difficult."

In reality, both may be equally overwhelmed. They are simply responding differently.

In the first 48 hours, many cats don't eat. Not because the food is wrong. Because eating requires feeling safe enough to be distracted.

Understanding this early prevents misinterpretation, one of the biggest drivers of stress, escalation, and surrender.

The First Weeks Set Everything That Follows

The early days and weeks after a cat arrives home create the emotional foundation for everything that comes next.

This does not mean mistakes are irreversible.

It means early experiences shape how quickly a cat feels safe.

In the first weeks, cats are learning:

- whether their environment is predictable
- whether their signals are respected
- whether they can rest without being watched
- whether humans are demanding or patient

Many people believe bonding happens through interaction.

In reality, bonding often begins through **restraint**.

Choosing not to touch.

Choosing not to follow.

Choosing not to rush.

The goal of the first weeks is not friendship.

It is safety.

When safety is established, curiosity emerges naturally.

When curiosity emerges, connection follows.

Trying to fast-track this process usually slows it down.

What People Don't Expect: The Realities No One Mentions

Most adoption stories you hear are the success stories.

The cat who settled in three days.

The instant bond.

The perfect match.

What you don't hear about as often, but what happens regularly, are the harder, messier parts.

Not because they're rare.

Because they're uncomfortable to talk about.

When cats urinate or defecate outside the litter box

This is one of the most common reasons cats are returned to shelters.

It happens for many reasons:

- stress and anxiety in a new environment
- medical issues like urinary tract infections
- litter box aversion (wrong type of litter, box too small, not clean enough)
- territorial insecurity, especially in multi-cat homes

When it happens, it doesn't mean the cat is "bad" or "dirty."

It means something is wrong, and the cat is communicating the only way they can.

It might happen once.

It might happen repeatedly.

You may find urine on your bed, your sofa, or your clothes.

You may step in faeces that were left just outside the litter box.

This requires:

- patience to identify the cause
- willingness to try different solutions (litter types, box locations, vet visits)
- acceptance that the answer may not be immediate
- the ability to stay calm rather than punish

If the thought of cleaning urine from your carpet at 11 pm on a work night feels unbearable, that's important information.

When cats don't get along with existing pets

If you already have a cat, the introduction of a new one is not guaranteed to go well.

Even with slow, careful introductions:

- Cats may hiss, growl, or swat at each other for weeks or months
- One cat may become stressed and start overgrooming, hiding, or refusing to eat
- They may never become friends
- In some cases, they may need to be permanently separated or re-homed

You may need to:

- feed them in separate rooms
- keep them apart for far longer than you expected
- manage tension and redirect aggression
- accept that your home may feel divided

Some cats will eventually coexist peacefully.

Some will tolerate each other.

Some will not.

If you're not prepared for the possibility that your cats may never like each other, reconsider bringing a second cat home.

When a cat stays hidden for days, weeks, or longer

Some cats hide when they first arrive.

Under the bed.

Behind the sofa.

In a closet.

And they stay there.

You may only see them at night when the house is silent.

You may not see them at all.

You'll wonder:

- Are they eating?
- Are they using the litter box?
- Are they okay?

- Will they ever come out?

The answer is usually yes, but it can take **much** longer than you think.

Days can turn into weeks.

Weeks can turn into months.

During this time, you are not bonding.

You are not cuddling.

You are not experiencing the companionship you imagined.

You are waiting.

And trusting.

And resisting the urge to force progress.

If the idea of living with an invisible cat for an extended period feels lonely or frustrating, that's worth acknowledging now.

When a cat becomes aggressive seemingly without reason

Some cats lash out when they're stressed.

They may:

- swat or bite when you walk past
- attack your ankles
- redirect aggression toward you or another pet after seeing something outside
- seem affectionate one moment and volatile the next

This is not malice.

It's a nervous system in overdrive.

But it can be frightening.

It can be painful.

It can make you feel unsafe in your own home.

It requires:

- professional behavioural support
- management strategies (avoiding triggers, creating safe zones)
- time and consistency
- the emotional resilience to not take it personally

If you're not prepared to seek help, stay patient, and potentially live with some level of unpredictability, this is something to think about.

When the financial cost is higher than expected

Cats can be expensive.

Beyond the predictable costs (food, litter, annual vet checks), there are the costs no one budgets for:

- emergency vet visits (£200–£2,000+)
- behavioral consultations (£100–£300+ per session)
- prescription diets
- medications for chronic conditions
- damage to furniture, carpets, or belongings

A single urinary blockage can cost over £1,000.

Dental work can cost £500+.

Chronic conditions like diabetes or kidney disease require ongoing expenses.

If an unexpected vet bill of £500 would cause significant financial stress, consider whether now is the right time.

When you feel regret, and that's okay to name

Many people, at some point in the early days or weeks, think:

"I've made a mistake."

Not because they don't care.

Not because they're cruel.

But because:

- The reality is harder than expected
- The cat isn't who they thought they'd be
- The adjustment feels overwhelming
- They feel guilty for not feeling joy

This is more common than you think.

It doesn't mean you're a bad person.

It doesn't mean you need to immediately rehome the cat.

It means you're human, and transitions are hard for humans, too.

Sometimes that feeling passes as things settle.

Sometimes it doesn't.

Both outcomes are valid.

What matters is being honest with yourself and getting support before things reach a breaking point.

The Part No One Talks About: The Human Side

It is rarely spoken about, but many new cat guardians experience:

- doubt
- anxiety
- disappointment
- guilt
- worry that they are "doing it wrong"

This does not mean you are unsuited to having a cat.

It means your expectations were shaped by stories that focus on outcomes more than transitions, which is common

Bonding is often gradual.

Trust is often quiet.

Progress is often invisible.

You might feel like you made a mistake. You might wonder if the cat even likes you. You might scroll through photos of other people's cats curled up on laps and feel a small, sharp pang of failure.

That feeling is not a sign you're failing.

It's a sign you're adjusting.

Both of you are.

Comparing your experience to others, especially online, creates unnecessary pressure.

Cats do not follow timelines.

They follow nervous systems.

If things feel harder than expected, that is not a failure.

It is reality meeting expectation.

And that gap is where growth happens.

Questions to Sit With Before You Commit

These are not tests.

They are reflections.

Not to determine if you're "good enough," but to help you know yourself honestly before another being depends on you.

- How do I respond when things take longer than expected?
- Am I comfortable with quiet progress rather than visible affection?
- If this cat never becomes affectionate, will I still want them?
- Can I allow a relationship to unfold without forcing closeness?
- What will I do if the cat urinates on my bed repeatedly?
- Can I afford an unexpected vet bill of £500–£1,000 without significant hardship?
- If my existing cat and this new cat never get along, what will I do?
- How do I cope when I feel unsure or out of control?
- Am I prepared to live with a cat I rarely see for weeks or months?
- Am I willing to ask for support before things escalate?
- If I feel regret in the first few weeks, do I have people I can talk to honestly without judgment?

There are no perfect answers.

Awareness matters more than certainty.

Cats thrive in homes that value patience over performance and honesty over optimism.

What Actually Helps in the Early Days

What helps cats most at the beginning is not intensity.

It is consistency.

This looks like:

- predictable routines
- limited changes
- stable placement of food, water, and litter
- calm movement
- gentle observation

It often means doing **less** than you think you should.

Resist the urge to constantly adjust, rearrange, or intervene.

Stability builds trust.

When a cat feels in control of their environment, confidence follows.

The most supportive homes are not the busiest ones.

They are the calmest.

The most consistent.

The most patient.

If You're Still a Yes- FANTASTIC!

If, after reading this, you still feel drawn to welcoming a cat into your life, not just the idea of one, but the responsibility of hosting another being's safety, that matters.

It means you're not approaching this lightly.

And that, more than perfection, is what cats need most.

The early days may be quieter than expected.

Bonding may take longer than imagined.

Progress may look subtle, not obvious.

There may be mess.

There may be conflict.

There may be moments of doubt.

That doesn't mean you're failing.

It often means you're doing the real work of creating safety.

You don't need to have all the answers before a cat arrives.

You only need to be willing to listen, observe, and adjust.

The cat you bring home will not arrive whole.

They will arrive in pieces: scent-memory, muscle-tension, breath held.

Your job is not to put them back together.

It's to let them remember themselves, slowly, in a place that doesn't rush.

When You Need Help: Resources Without Judgment

Struggling does not mean you've failed.

It means you're in the middle of something difficult, and you need support.

Too many people wait until they're at breaking point before asking for help, or worse, they don't ask at all.

If you are struggling with your cat, please reach out before the situation becomes unbearable.

You deserve support.

Your cat deserves a chance to stay in their home.

And there are people and organisations whose entire purpose is to help you through this.

If your cat is showing behavioural issues

Certified Cat Behaviourists can assess what's happening and create a tailored plan. Look for professionals accredited by:

- International Association of Animal Behaviour Consultants (IAABC)
- Animal Behaviour and Training Council (ABTC)
- Certified Applied Animal Behaviourists (CAAB)

These consultations can be done remotely or in-home, and many offer sliding scale fees.

Your vet should always be your *first port of call* if behaviour changes suddenly. Pain, illness, and medical issues often present as behavioural problems.

If you're feeling overwhelmed or regretful

Talk to the rescue or shelter you adopted from. Many offer post-adoption support, behavioural advice, and even temporary fostering if you need breathing space. They would rather help you keep your cat than have the cat returned.

Reach out to a friend, family member, or online community where you can be honest without fear of judgment. Facebook groups like "Cat Guardians Support Network" or breed-specific groups often have experienced members who've been through similar struggles.

Consider therapy or counselling if the stress is affecting your mental health. Adjusting to a new pet can trigger anxiety, guilt, or feelings of failure, and those feelings are valid and deserving of care.

If you're considering rehoming

Speak to the organisation you adopted from first. Many have contracts requiring you to return the cat to them rather than rehoming privately. This ensures the cat goes to a screened home and doesn't end up in an unsafe situation.

Reach out to breed-specific rescues if you have a pedigree cat. They often have waiting lists of experienced homes.

Never advertise your cat as "free to a good home." Free cats are at high risk of being used as bait animals, sold on, or neglected. Always charge a rehoming fee and vet potential homes carefully, but in all honesty, we advise you work with a rescue to do this for you.

If you're in financial hardship

PDSA (People's Dispensary for Sick Animals) offers free and low-cost veterinary care for people on certain benefits.

Website: www.pdsa.org.uk

Cats Protection may be able to help with vet costs in specific circumstances, or refer you to local funds.

Website: www.cats.org.uk

Helpline: 03000 12 12 12

Blue Cross offers financial assistance for vet treatment in some cases.

Website: www.bluecross.org.uk

Local animal charities often have hardship funds. Call your local rescue or ask your vet if they know of any schemes.

If you're experiencing domestic abuse and need to leave with your cat

Cats Protection's Paws Protect scheme fosters cats for people fleeing domestic abuse, so your cat is safe while you find stable housing.

Website: www.cats.org.uk/paws-protect

Dogs Trust Freedom Project (despite the name, they sometimes work with cats or can signpost to cat-specific services).

Website: www.dogstrust.org.uk/freedom

If your cat has gone missing

In England, the law now says **all owned cats must be microchipped and registered on an approved database before they reach 20 weeks old**- that includes indoor cats too.

You must also **keep your contact details up to date** on that database.

If you don't comply, you can be **given 21 days to fix it or face a fine of up to £500**.

This requirement currently applies in **England**; in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, it isn't yet compulsory (though it's strongly recommended).

National Pet Register

Website: www.nationalpetregister.org

Animal Search UK

Website: www.animalsearchuk.co.uk

Local Facebook lost and found pet groups are often faster and more effective than official channels. Post with a clear photo and your location.

General support and advice

Cats Protection National Helpline: 03000 12 12 12

They offer advice on behaviour, rehoming, financial support, and welfare concerns.

International Cat Care: www.icatcare.org

Evidence-based advice on health, behaviour, and welfare.

Your vet's nursing team often has time for phone advice and can signpost you to local resources.

A final word on asking for help:

You are not weak for struggling.

You are not failing for needing support.

You are not a bad person for admitting this is harder than you thought.

Asking for help is not giving up.

It's choosing to try differently.

And sometimes, with the right support, everything shifts. Thank you for being a caring and responsible cat guardian.

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A portion of all Furrever Wellness resources supports small rescue organisations and welfare-led initiatives. If you would like to join the Furrever family and receive daily tips and well-being care for your cat, we invite you to join our free newsletter, [The Digital Cat Cafe](#), and follow us on [Instagram](#) !

