

Dealing with Scaredy Cats
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You step into your neighbor's house and her cat takes one look at you and runs from the room. Do you have bad breath? Are you badly dressed? Possibly. However, your neighbor tells you that her cat runs and hides from everyone. So it isn't just you. Why is it that some cats are so shy of people and other cats are so friendly? One factor is the genetic predisposition of the cat. It is known that some cats are born shy and reticent while others are born bold and friendly.

Experiences early in life also influence the fearfulness of cats. Cats that are exposed as kittens to new people, new situations and other animals are more likely as adults to be friendly and tolerant of the things they are exposed to and less likely to be fearful. This is true only if the experiences are pleasant ones. A lack of pleasant experiences early in life or bad experiences can lead kittens to be more fearful as adults.

Bad experiences in adulthood can also influence the fearfulness of cats. A cat that is repeatedly chased by a dog is unlikely to be friendly to other dogs. It is the combination of genetics, early experiences and later experiences that determines the fearfulness of cats. Owners can help their cats be less fearful by providing pleasant experiences for them with new people, situations and other animals. Taking your cat for a ride in the car, on a walk in the neighborhood and to visit your friends could help to provide such good experiences. Usually, the younger you start exposing your cat to these pleasant experiences the better.

What do you do if your cat is fearful of new people, places or things? Don't force your cat to experience them. Let her move away or hide if she wishes. Try to lure her out with a tasty treat or with an exciting toy and gradually expose her to the new person or situation. If she becomes uncomfortable or fearful during the experience, let her move away. Fears are not easily overcome and owners need to be patient with their fearful cats.