

Base Camp - What is it and Why is it So Important?

Base camp is a special room in your home where a new cat can settle in and feel safe. Many people adopt a cat, bring him/her home, and let him/her loose in the home with the assumption that things will work themselves out. However, base camp is a crucial part of a cat adjusting calmly and happily into your home.

- **Why?**
Cats are incredibly sensitive to change. If change happens too fast, a cat can develop litter box issues or other behavioral problems. The most common behavioral issue is hiding. “Scaredy cats” may be genetically predisposed to fear, but it is also common for this fear to be created by circumstances. Drastic changes without a proper adjustment period commonly results in anxiety. Rather than accept that you have a fearful cat, you can set up this safe haven room so that there is a place of calm retreat. Constant fear and stress leads to poor quality of life and, if at all possible, this should be prevented.
- **Set Up**
Select a separate room where your new cat can live with all the basic needs for a few weeks. This should be a relatively quiet area away from other pets. Provide food, water, litter box, scratching post, (ideally) a window, toys, and bed. It is also important that you frequently visit this base camp room to play with your cat. This not only helps increase the cat’s confidence, but it establishes a bond along with a sense of security and connection with you.
- **Timeline**
The big question with the base camp room is, “How long do we keep our cat there?” We recommend a minimum to two weeks. Remember, this is a minimum. Ultimately, it’s up to the cat. If your cat adjusts quickly and is very comfortable and confident in the base camp room, you can introduce to the rest of the house right after that two-week period. If you have multiple pets and the new cat is still pretty skittish, give it more time. It is not uncommon for this process to take as long as a month, especially with other pets in the home. Sometimes cats are so content in their base camp that they don’t leave the room even when more access is offered. This is ok. However, you may want to increase play leading to other areas of the house to encourage confidence.
- **Revisiting**
Another reason why base camp is so important is that it continues to be a safe haven throughout the cat’s life. Cats do not thrive during times of change or high activity or loud noises. So, if you’re throwing a party or having work done to your house, returning your cat to the base camp can help keep him/her as calm and content as possible. Base camp is a constant state of home, safety, and security for your cat.

If you have any issues introducing your new cat to your home- or any other behavioral issue- contact the HAWS Behavior Department at (262)542-8852 ext. 204. HAWS offers complementary cat and dog behavior consultations for the life of your HAWS adoptee. We are here to help!