



# Helping the Shy or Fearful Cat

Many cats seem “shy” in a new environment and need some time to adjust. But shyness isn’t a fixed condition or a personality trait. Rather, when we see “shyness” in a cat, it is a sign that they are experiencing fear. You can take steps to reduce your cat’s fear, build their confidence and improve their quality of life!

Cats who are experiencing fear avoid people or things that frighten them — they may hide or seem disinterested, and sometimes hiss, spit or swat to communicate that they’d like something to move further away. If you’ve welcomed a shy cat into your home, the following information can help you understand what they are feeling and set them up for success.

## Recommended Training Class

**Shy Cat:** This 5-week class is designed for cats 16 weeks of age and older who are experiencing fear — whether they’re always hiding or just vanish when company arrives. Learn to read a cat’s body language and use yours to build trust. Gain the tools to reduce your cat’s fear and help them feel comfortable and confident in their environment! Training moves at your cat’s pace (fearful cats not expected to attend).

Register at [sdhumane.org/trainingclasses](https://sdhumane.org/trainingclasses).

## Recommended reading on cat behavior:

**Cat Sense** by John Bradshaw

**Total Cat Mojo: The Ultimate Guide to Life with Your Cat**  
by Jackson Galaxy

**The Trainable Cat: A Practical Guide to Making Life Happier for You and Your Cat**  
by John Bradshaw and Sarah Ellis

## Tips for working with shy cats:

- Fearful cats usually do best in relatively quiet homes.
- Provide your cat with a safe, small, quiet room or space at first.
- This space can be set up with appropriate hiding places, like a cat tree and cozy blankets.
- Be sure your cat’s space has a litter box within easy reach of the cat, but away from food and water.
- Avoid staring, direct eye contact or towering over your cat.
- Avoid making loud noises.
- Avoid pulling your cat out of hiding or forcing them to be held.
- Speak softly and calmly.
- Allow your cat to choose to approach or interact (or not).
- Encourage and play with interactive toys (such as cat charmers or feather wands).
- Build confidence and positive interactions through reward-based, force-free training methods.
- Pair your voice or petting with high-value foods.
- Offer praise and treats in order to create positive associations with new sights and sounds, as well as to reward for relaxed, calm behavior.
- When your cat is showing signs of exploring, gradually let them explore the rest of the house.



## Need additional resources?

We’ve got you covered, from articles and videos to trainer consults, private training sessions and online class options!

Visit [sdhumane.org/training](https://sdhumane.org/training) or scan the QR code