

Cats and Names

Cats don't respond to their names in quite the same way that dogs do. And unlike people, cats don't consider their names to be part of their identity. Although cats can be taught to respond to their names, it's more likely that they're actually responding to the sound, cadence and tone of voice that you use when you call them. To a cat, his/her name is just "that word that those people say when they mean me."

When adopting a cat from a shelter, where names are typically given to cats instead of numbers, it depends largely on how long the cat was at the shelter and how long he has had to get used to the shelter name, or whether the cat already had that name when he came to the shelter. Sometimes we just don't know....

The first step is to get the cat home and after he is comfortable, see if he responds to the name that is on the shelter paperwork. Does he turn around or come to you when he hears it?.....Do his ears "rotate" when he hears it? If there is no response (OK, remember this is a cat and sometimes they just ignore us), then you are pretty much free to name him what you and HE want....you need to pick a name that he likes, and will respond to when he hears it. Remember, animals don't hear words, they hear sounds.....

If you've ever had cats before, you probably realize that they respond to (or ignore) the sound of your voice, not necessarily what you are saying.

You may have to choose various names to see which one he responds to...

If your new cat DOES know his current name, but you don't want to use that name:

Always pay attention to your pet's emotional health. Some new pets will need the stability provided by their old name, especially when in a new environment....at least for a while.

Try (if possible) to choose a name that is similar (sounding) to his current name...again he/she is responding to the sound of the name...(Example: old name=Callie-new name= Sally or Allie)

Start the transition (yes, it is a transition) by calling him his old name AND new name together (Example: old name=Fred-new name= Oscar) Call him Fred Oscar for a while (may take a few days/weeks-treats may help here) and then gradually eliminate "Fred" when calling him and see if he responds...when he starts responding to Oscar you are done....