



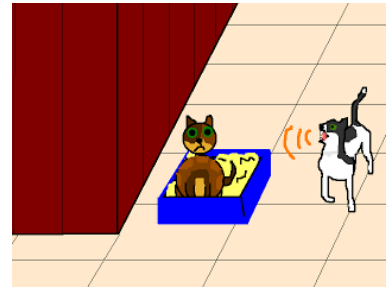
FELINE BEHAVIORAL CONCERNS

INAPPROPRIATE URINATION/DEFECATION: LITTER BOX ISSUES

Inappropriate elimination is a common problem that results in the deaths of countless cats when people abandon or give up their pets because they can't cope with it. What is really important to understand is that unless you address the behavior issue, the chance of finding a permanent new home is very small. After all, if you cannot tolerate the behavior of the animal that you have had for years, why would someone else?

Sometimes friends or family are willing to help. There is some evidence that changing the cat's environment will sometimes correct the problem. Spraying may be associated with some unhappiness in the home. However, caution must be taken when attempting to find a home for a cat with this behavior problem, because these cats are likely targets for abuse, neglect, and abandonment.

If you find someone willing to take a cat that urinates inappropriately, try to make an arrangement to have the cat returned if the problem persists. This way, you can determine the cat's future in a humane manner.



Generally, it is necessary to deal with the problem within the household. Even if you do have to rehome your cat, we encourage you to work on the problem in the meantime so that the animal will be more adoptable.

Specific Steps for Solving the Problem

1. Rule out medical causes. First, you should take the animal to the vet to rule out any health problems. Tell the vet about the specific problem. Several physical problems may cause even the best-behaved cat to not use the litter box consistently (these include urinary tract infection, parasites, and hormonal problems). Physical problems must be ruled out before moving on to working on the behavioral aspect of the problem. The good news is that the physical problems that cause lapses in litter box training can often be easily and inexpensively treated and will often resolve the behavior problem completely. Even young animals can suffer from some of these medical conditions

2. Try a few simple behavior modification techniques.

(This step is not a replacement for a veterinary check-up, which is always the first order of business.) Here are some suggestions from behavior experts:

- Eliminate the smell of the accidents. If the cat can smell that he has gone there before, it may seem like a good idea to go there again. A mild bleach solution can be very effective in removing urine odors; however, it must be cleaned up thoroughly after use since bleach is toxic. A product called "Simple Solution" from Outright (available at pet supply stores) is also very effective and safer to use than bleach on some surfaces. Never use ammonia to clean up accidents, because it smells like urine to the animals. Once the smell is gone, try placing an extra food or water bowl on the preferred spot. Most animals have an aversion to eliminating near their food or water.

- Make the litter box as accessible and appealing to the cat as possible.
- Add a litter box or two. It may be necessary to have one box for every cat in the house.
- Make sure the litter box is easy to get in and out of. An older cat or young kitten may need a box with a lower entry area.
- Keep the boxes scrupulously clean.
- Avoid strong-smelling cleaners.
- Try different brands of litter. Some cats do not like scented litter, and many prefer scoopable litter.
- Try uncovering the litter box. Some cats do not like to enter into a hooded/covered box.
- Get larger litter boxes. A large cat may have trouble fitting into a small box.
- Make sure the location is quiet and private. The litter box needs to be in a location that is not too busy and where the cat can enter the box without fear of people or other animals who may be in the area.
- Discontinue the use of plastic liners, since some cats do not like digging in a plastic-lined box.
- Putting a cat in a large dog crate or appropriate cat cage for a period of time in the home, with a litter box available in the cage, can help to retrain most cats to use the box.

3. Consult an expert. If a health problem has been ruled out and the techniques described above don't work, there are still several options available to get the cat back to using the litter box. These are a few suggestions:

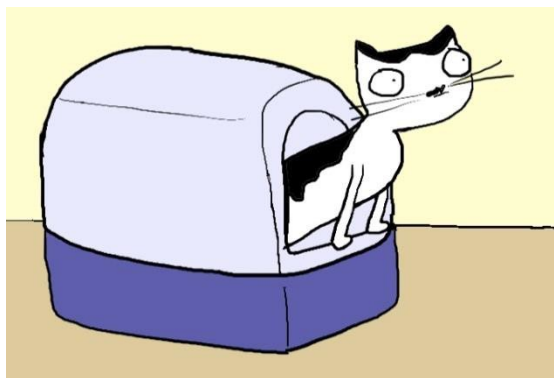
- Discuss the problem with a veterinarian. Some vets have experience with behavioral issues, so they may want to check with their vet first to see if he/she may be able to offer some assistance in that area.
- Consult with a board-certified veterinary behaviorist or ask your veterinarian to consult with Tufts University or one of the other universities that have animal behavior clinics. There are several medications that can be very effective, along with behavior modification. Board-certified veterinary behaviorists are more familiar with these medications and their effective use than most general practice veterinarians.
- Consult an animal behaviorist. An animal behaviorist attempts to understand the reason for the behavior, considering the cat's history, temperament, environment, experience, etc. After making a diagnosis, a behaviorist would help them understand how animals learn and how to work specifically on this problem to control and/or correct it. They can ask their vet or local humane organization for a referral. For help in finding an animal behaviorist, visit the Animal Behavior Society web site at www.animalbehavior.org.
- Consult a holistic veterinarian. A holistic vet uses alternative means for diagnosing and treating health and, sometimes, behavioral problems. As with traditional vets, experience will vary, so you will need to talk to them openly about what they may be able to offer.
- Read one of the following books on cat behavior:
 - *The Cat Who Cried for Help* by Nicholas Dodman
 - *Think Like a Cat* by Pam Johnson-Bennett

4. Change the cat's living situation. If none of these options is successful, or if trying them is not feasible, you might consider trying to change the cat's current living situation so that the inconsistent litter box use is not a problem.

An outdoor cat enclosure or cattery might be an option. A cattery is an outdoor protected area placed near a door or window (so the cat has some inside access) or it can stand independently (similar to the idea of a dog run, but built for a cat). We have information on cat fencing and catteries within this section (further below) if you're interested.

At least ten percent of all cats develop elimination problems. Some stop using the box altogether. Some only use their boxes for urination or defecation but not for both. Still others eliminate both in and out of their boxes. Elimination problems can develop as a result of conflict between multiple cats in a home, as a result of a dislike for the litter-box type or the litter itself, as a result of a past medical condition, or as a result of the cat deciding she doesn't like the location or placement of the litter box. Unfortunately, once a cat avoids the litter box for whatever reason, the avoidance can become a chronic problem because the cat can develop a surface or location preference for elimination, and this preference might be to your living room rug or your favorite easy chair. The best approach to dealing with these problems is to prevent them before they happen by making your cat's litter boxes as cat-friendly as possible. (See our common litter-box management issues below, and our ways to make litter boxes cat-friendly.) It is also important that you pay close attention to your cat's elimination habits so that you can identify problems in the making. If your cat does eliminate outside the box, you must act quickly to resolve the problem before they develop a strong preference for eliminating on an unacceptable surface or in an unacceptable area.

Litter box use problems in cats can be diverse and complex. Behavioral treatments are often effective, but the treatments must be tailored to the cat's specific problem. Be certain to read the entire article to help you identify your particular cat's problem and to familiarize yourself with the different resolution approaches to ensure success with your cat.



Why Do Some Cats Eliminate Outside the Litter Box?

Litter-Box Management Problems

If your cat isn't comfortable with their litter box or can't easily access it, they probably won't use it. The following common litter-box problems might cause them to eliminate outside of the box:

- You haven't cleaned your cat's litter box often or thoroughly enough.
- You haven't provided enough litter boxes for your household. Be sure to have a litter box for each of your cats, as well as one extra.
- Your cat's litter box is too small for them.
- Your cat can't easily get to the litter box at all times.
- Your cat's litter box has a hood or liner that makes them uncomfortable.
- The litter in your cat's box is too deep. Cats usually prefer one to two inches of litter.

Surface Preference

Some cats develop preferences for eliminating on certain surfaces or textures like carpet, potting soil or bedding.

Litter Preference or Aversion

As predators who hunt at night, cats have sensitive senses of smell and touch to help them navigate through their environment. These sensitivities can also influence a cat's reaction to their litter. Cats who have grown accustomed to a certain litter might decide that they dislike the smell or feel of a different litter.

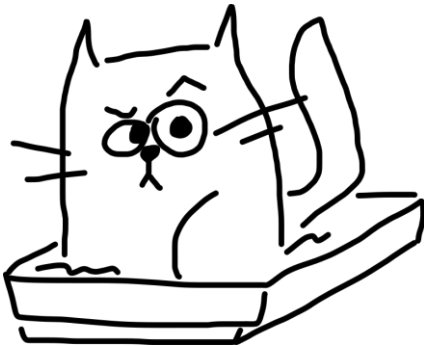
Location Preference or Aversion

Like people and dogs, cats develop preferences for where they like to eliminate and may avoid locations they don't like. This means they might avoid their litter box if it's in a location they dislike.

Inability to Use the Litter Box

Geriatric cats or cats with physical limitations may have a difficult time using certain types of litter boxes such as top-entry boxes, or litter boxes with high sides.

Negative Litter-Box Association



There are many reasons why a cat who has reliably used their litter box in the past starts to eliminate outside of the box. One common reason is that something happened to upset them while they were using the litter box. If this is the case with your cat, you might notice that they seem hesitant to return to the box. They may enter the box, but then leave very quickly—sometimes before even using the box.

One common cause for this is painful elimination. If your cat had a medical condition that caused pain when they eliminated, they may have learned to associate the discomfort with using the litter box. Even if your cat's health has returned to normal, that association may still cause them to avoid the litter box.

Household Stress

Stress can cause litter-box problems. Cats can be stressed by events that their owners may not think of as traumatic. Changes in things that even indirectly affect the cat, like moving, adding new animals or family members to your household—even changing your daily routine—can make your cat feel anxious.

Multi-Cat Household Conflict

Sometimes one or more cats in a household control access to litter boxes and prevent the other cats from using them. Even if one of the cats isn't actually confronting the other cats in the litter box, any conflict between cats in a household can create enough stress to cause litter-box problems.

Medical Problems That Can Cause Inappropriate Elimination

Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)

If your cat frequently enters the litter box and seems to produce only small amounts of urine, they may have a urinary tract infection. See a veterinarian to rule out this possible medical problem.

Feline Interstitial Cystitis

Feline interstitial cystitis is a neurological disease that affects a cat's bladder ("cystitis" means inflamed bladder). Cats with cystitis will attempt to urinate frequently and may look as if they are straining, but with little success. They may lick themselves where they urinate, and they may have blood in their urine. Feline interstitial cystitis can cause a cat to eliminate outside of the box, but this is only because of the increased urgency to urinate and because there is pain involved in urination. Feline interstitial cystitis is very serious and can be life-threatening to the cat. It must be treated immediately by a veterinarian.

Kidney Stones or Blockage

If your cat has kidney stones or a blockage, they may frequently enter the litter box. They may also experience pain and meow or cry when they try to eliminate. Their abdomen may be tender to the touch.

Other Behavior Problems to Rule Out

Urine Marking

Urine marking is a problem that most pet owners consider a litter box problem since it involves elimination outside the box, but the cause and treatment are entirely different from other litter-box problems and therefore it is considered a rule out. A cat who urine marks will regularly eliminate in their litter box, but will also deposit urine in other locations, usually on vertical surfaces. When marking, they'll usually back up to a vertical object like a chair side, wall or speaker, stand with their body erect and their tail extended straight up in the air, and spray urine onto the surface. Often their tail will twitch while they're spraying. The amount of urine a cat sprays when they're urine marking is usually less than the amount they would void during regular elimination in the box.

What to Do If Your Cat Eliminates Outside the Litter Box

Basic Tips for Making Cats Feel Better About Using Their Litter Boxes

- Virtually all cats like clean litter boxes, so scoop and change your cat's litter at least once a day. Rinse the litter box out completely with baking soda or unscented soap once a week.
- The majority of cats prefer large boxes that they can enter easily. Plastic sweater storage containers make excellent litter boxes.
- Most cats like a shallow bed of litter. Provide one to two inches of litter rather than three to four inches.
- Most cats prefer clumping, unscented litter.
- Your cat may prefer the type of litter they used as a kitten.
- Most cats don't like box liners or lids on their boxes.
- Cats like their litter boxes located in a quiet but not "cornered" location. They like to be able to see people or other animals approaching, and they like to have multiple escape routes in case they want to leave their boxes quickly.
- Because self-cleaning boxes are generally cleaner than traditional types of litter boxes, many cats accept them readily. However, if you're using a self-cleaning litter box and your cat starts eliminating outside the box, try switching to a traditional type of litter box.

Resolving a Litter-Box Problem

The first step in resolving elimination outside the litter box is to rule out urine marking and medical problems. Have your cat checked thoroughly by a veterinarian. Once your veterinarian determines that your cat doesn't have a medical condition or issue, try following these guidelines:

- Provide enough litter boxes. Make sure you have one for each cat in your household, plus one extra. For example, if you have three cats, you'll need a minimum of four litter boxes.
- Place litter boxes in accessible locations, away from high-traffic areas and away from areas where the cat might feel trapped. If you live in a multistory residence, you may need to provide a litter box on each level. Keep boxes away from busy, loud or intimidating places, like next to your washer and dryer or next to your dog's food and water bowls, or in areas where there's a lot of foot traffic.
- Put your cat's food bowls somewhere other than right next to the litter box.
- Remove covers and liners from all litter boxes.
- Give your cat a choice of litter types. Cats generally prefer clumping litter with a medium to fine texture. Use unscented litter. Offer different types of litter in boxes placed side-by-side to allow your cat to show you their preference.
- Scoop at least once a day. Once a week, clean all litter boxes with warm water and unscented soap, baking soda or no soap, and completely replace the litter. The problem with scented cleaners is that your cat could develop an aversion to the scent.
- Clean accidents thoroughly with an enzymatic cleanser designed to neutralize pet odors. You can find this kind of cleaner at most pet stores.
- If your cat soils in just a few spots, place litter boxes there. If it's not possible to put a box in a spot where your cat has eliminated, place their food bowl, water bowl, bed or toys in that area to discourage further elimination.
- Make inappropriate elimination areas less appealing. Try putting regular or motion-activated lights in dark areas. You can also make surfaces less pleasant to stand on by placing upside-down carpet runners, tin foil or double-sided sticky tape in the area where your cat has eliminated in the past.

If Your Cat Has Developed a Surface or Location Preference

If your cat seems to prefer eliminating on a certain kind of surface or in a certain location, you'll need to make that surface or its location less appealing. If the preference is in a dark area, try putting a bright light or, even better, a motion-activated light in the area. You can also make surfaces less pleasant to stand on by placing upside-down carpet runners, tin foil or double-sided sticky tape where your cat has eliminated in the past. At the same time, provide your cat with extra litter boxes in acceptable places in case part of the problem is the location of the usual litter box, and be sure to give them multiple kinds of litter to choose from so that they can show you which one they prefer. Put the boxes side-by-side for a while, each with a different type of litter, and check to see which one your cat decides to use.

Clean accidents thoroughly with an enzymatic cleanser designed to neutralize pet odors. You can find this kind of cleaner at most pet stores.

If Your Cat Has Developed a Litter Preference or Aversion

Cats usually develop a preference for litter type and scent as kittens. Some cats adapt to a change of litter without any problem at all, while other cats may feel uncomfortable using a type of litter that they didn't use when they were young.

If you think your cat may dislike the litter type, texture or smell, try offering different types of litter to use. Cats generally prefer clumping litter with a medium to fine texture. They also usually prefer unscented litter. To help your cat pick their preferred litter, put a few boxes side-by-side with different types of litter in them. They'll use the one they like best.

Clean accidents thoroughly with an enzymatic cleanser designed to neutralize pet odors. You can find this kind of cleaner at most pet stores.

If Your Cat Is Unable to Use the Litter Box

Special-needs cats such as those who are older, arthritic or still very young might have trouble with certain types of litter boxes. Boxes that have sides that are too high or have a top-side opening might make it difficult for your cat to enter or leave the box. Try switching to a litter box with low sides.

As in any situation where the cat may have eliminated outside the box, clean accidents thoroughly with an enzymatic cleanser designed to neutralize pet odors. You can find this kind of cleaner at most pet stores.

Treatment for Negative Litter Box Association

If your cat has experienced some kind of frightening or upsetting event while using the litter box, they could associate that event with the litter box and avoid going near it.

Things that might upset your cat while they're eliminating in the box include being cornered or trapped by a dog, cat or person, hearing a loud noise or commotion, or seeing something frightening or startling. These experiences—or any other disturbing experience—could make your cat very reluctant to enter the litter box. If your cat is afraid of the litter box, you may notice them running into the box and then leaving again very quickly, sometimes before they're finished eliminating. You may also notice them eliminating nearby, but not inside the box. This means that your cat is worried about using the box, especially if they have reliably used the litter box in the past.



Changing the Way Your Cat Feels

If your cat associates the litter box with unpleasant things, you can work to help them develop new and pleasant associations. Cats can't be forced to enjoy something and trying to show your cat that the litter box is safe by placing them in the box will likely backfire and increase their dislike of the box. It's usually not a good idea to try to train your cat to use the litter box by offering treats like you would a dog because many cats do not like attention while they're eliminating. However, a professional animal behavior consultant, such as a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB) or a board-certified veterinary behaviorist (Dip ACVB) may be able to help you design a successful retraining or counterconditioning program.

Sometimes retraining to overcome litter-box fears or aversions may not be necessary. Here are some steps that you can try to help your cat learn new pleasant associations.

- Move your cat's litter box to a new location, or add a few litter boxes in different locations at the same time. Pick locations where your cat can see who is approaching from any sides that aren't backed by walls. These locations should also have multiple escape routes so that your cat can quickly leave the litter box if they suddenly feel anxious. If possible, make sure that children or other animals who might seem threatening to your cat can't get near the litter box.
- Fill the litter boxes one to two inches deep with a litter that is a little different from the litter in the boxes your cat avoids. Use a finer or coarser texture. If you've been using scented litter, try unscented litter.
- Try playing with your cat near the litter box. Also leave treats and toys for them to find and enjoy in the general area leading to the box. Don't put the food bowl next to the box, though, because cats usually don't like to eliminate close to their food.
- If you have a long-haired cat, try carefully and gently clipping the hair on her hind end if you notice that it gets soiled or matted during elimination. Matting can cause the hair to get pulled when the cat eliminates. That can be painful for the cat and make them skittish of the litter box.

Treatment for Household Stress

Cats sometimes stop using their litter boxes when they feel stressed. Identify and, if possible, eliminate any sources of stress or frustration in your cat's environment. For instance, keep the food bowls full and in the same place, keep their routine as predictable as possible, prevent the dog from chasing them, close blinds on windows and doors so they aren't upset by cats outside. If you can't eliminate sources of stress, try to reduce them. Incorporate the use of Feliway® spray or diffusers, which deliver a synthetic pheromone that has been shown to

have some effect in relieving stress in cats. You can find Feliway products in many pet stores and online.

Treatment for Multi-Cat Household Conflict

Sometimes an elimination problem can develop as a result of conflict between cats who live together. If you have multiple cats and aren't sure which cat is soiling, speak with your veterinarian about giving fluorescein, a harmless dye, to one of your cats. Although the dye does not usually stain carpeting, it causes urine to glow blue under ultraviolet light for about 24 hours. If you can't get or use fluorescein, you can temporarily confine your cats, one at a time, to determine which one is eliminating outside of the litter boxes in your home.

If there is a conflict between your cats and one of them seems stressed, provide additional litter boxes in locations where the anxious cat spends the majority of their time. Also be sure to provide adequate resting areas for each cat. It can very useful in multi-cat households to create vertical resting spots on shelves or window sills or by buying multi-perch cat trees. It may help to distribute resources such as food, water, cat posts or trees, and litter boxes so that each individual cat can make use of them without coming into contact or having a conflict with one of the other cats. Using Feliway spray or diffusers can reduce general social stress in your household.

Medications

Always consult with your veterinarian or a veterinary behaviorist before giving your cat any type of medication for a behavior problem.

Medications can provide additional help in treating inappropriate elimination when the behavior is in response to stress or anxiety. It's unlikely to be helpful if your cat eliminates outside the litter box because of litter-management problems, an aversion to a particular kind of litter or location, a preference for a particular surface or location, or a physical inability to use the box. If you'd like to explore this option, speak with your veterinarian, a veterinary behaviorist or a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist who can work closely with your vet.

What NOT to Do

Regardless of what you do to solve your cat's elimination problems, here are a few things to avoid:

- Do not rub your cat's nose in urine or feces.
- Do not scold your cat and carry or drag them to the litter box.
- Do not confine your cat to a small room with the litter box, for days to weeks or longer, without doing anything else to resolve their elimination problems.
- Do not clean up accidents with an ammonia-based cleanser. Urine contains ammonia, and therefore cleaning with ammonia could attract your cat to the same spot to urinate again. Instead, use a product specifically for cleaning pet accidents, such as Nature's Miracle®.

FELINE AGGRESSION

Biting is a challenging problem in cats. Finding a new home is rarely an option, so it is best to address the problem within the household. Here are some additional suggestions:

- **Get a medical checkup.** Advise taking the animal to the vet to rule out any health problems. A painful injury or physical ailment can cause the sweetest animal to become ill-tempered. Since animals cannot tell us directly that they are hurting, their misbehaving may be their only way to communicate their pain to us.
- **Get the cat neutered/spayed.** Is the cat neutered/ spayed? Neutering helps to calm animals down. While it's best performed early in life to prevent the development of bad habits, it can be done at any age to help reduce aggressive behavior.
- **Watch for signs of over-stimulation.** Cats can become over-stimulated when being petted and may bite or scratch. Watch for subtle signs: Tail twitching or a shift in the tone of the cat's purr or facial expression can be cues. Learn to stop touching the cat before the cat has had enough. After an incident, withdraw all attention from the cat for several minutes. Briefly expressing your hurt verbally is okay, but reassuring and petting the cat are positive reinforcements and should not be done immediately following unacceptable behavior.



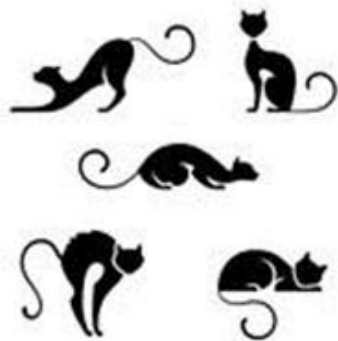
- **Be aware of your cat's sensitivities.** Some cats simply do not like to have their feet, stomach, or other parts of the body touched, and avoiding these areas can be the best solution. However, such sensitivity can be a sign that the cat is in pain, especially if the behavior is new. This is where the vet visit becomes so important!
- **Consult a board-certified veterinary behaviorist.** Consult with a board-certified veterinary behaviorist or ask your veterinarian to consult with Tufts University or one of the other universities that have animal behavior clinics. There are several medications that can be very effective, along with behavior modification. Board certified veterinary behaviorists are more familiar with these medications and their effective use than most general practice veterinarians.
- **Consult an animal behaviorist.** An animal behaviorist attempts to understand the reason for the behavior, considering the cat's history, temperament, environment, experience, etc. After making a diagnosis, a behaviorist would help you understand how animals learn and how to work specifically on this problem to control and/or correct it.
- **Consult a holistic veterinarian.** A holistic vet uses alternative means for diagnosing and treating health and sometimes behavioral problems. As with traditional vets, experience will vary, so you will need to talk to them openly about what they may be able to offer.
- **Read a book on the subject.** You may want to read one of the following books on cat behavior:
 - *The Cat Who Cried for Help* by Nicholas Dodman
 - *Think Like a Cat* by Pam Johnson-Bennett

Aggression is the second most common feline behavior problem seen by animal behaviorists. Although cat aggression is sometimes taken less seriously than dog aggression—perhaps because cats are smaller and don't pursue people to bite them like dogs can—aggressive cats can be formidable. They have five potential weapons (their teeth and all four clawed paws) compared to dogs' sole weapon: their mouth. They can inflict bites and severe lacerations, which are painful and can easily become infected. They can also cause cat scratch fever, a usually benign but potentially serious infectious disease that causes flu-like symptoms. Fights between cats rarely result in fatalities, but they can lead to infections and result in considerable veterinary expenses for cat parents. Aggressive cats can be risky to have at home and can pose a real danger to family and visitors.

What Is Aggression?

Aggression is threatening or harmful behavior directed toward another individual (a person, another cat or other animals). Virtually all wild animals display aggression to guard their territories, defend their offspring and protect themselves if attacked. Aggression refers to a wide variety of complex behaviors that occur for different reasons under various circumstances. Aggression problems in pet cats range from cats who hiss and avoid the target of their aggression to cats who aggressively attack.

Understanding Cat Body Language



Understanding what cats are communicating through their body language is essential for cat parents. It enables them to more accurately “read” their cats and understand their feelings and motivations for doing what they do. It also helps them respond more effectively to behavior issues like aggression. Body language is made up of cats' body postures, facial expressions, and the position and carriage of certain body parts, like ears, tail and even whiskers. Cat body language is more subtle than dog body language and can be harder for people to interpret. Nevertheless, knowing what the basic postures mean helps you to deal with problems more effectively and enjoy your cat's company more fully because you can understand a common language.

Threats and aggression can be either offensive or defensive. Offensively aggressive cats try to make themselves look bigger and more intimidating, whereas a defensively aggressive cat adopts a self-protective posture and tries to look smaller. Following are some typical postures seen in feline aggression. A rule of thumb for all the postures listed is—don't touch, attempt to reassure or punish cats showing these postures!

Offensive postures include:

- A stiff, straight-legged upright stance
- Stiffened rear legs, with the rear end raised and the back sloped downward toward the head
- Tail is stiff and lowered or held straight down to the ground
- Direct stare
- Upright ears, with the backs rotated slightly forward
- Piloerection (hackles up), including fur on the tail
- Constricted pupils
- Directly facing opponent, possibly moving toward them
- Might be growling, howling or yowling

Defensive postures include:

- Crouching
- Head tucked in
- Tail curved around the body and tucked in
- Eyes wide open with pupils partially or fully dilated
- Ears flattened sideways or backward on the head
- Piloerection (hackles up)
- In an anxious cat, whiskers might be retracted. In a fearful cat, whiskers might pan out and forward to assess distance between them self and the danger
- Turning sideways to the opponent, not straight on
- Open-mouthed hissing or spitting
- Might deliver quick strikes with front paws, claws out

Overt aggression, whether defensive or offensive, includes:

- Swatting, striking with paws
- Biting
- Fighting
- Growling, shrieking
- Scratching
- Preparing for an all-out attack by rolling onto side or back and exposing all weapons: teeth and claws
- In this position, your cat might attempt to grab your hand and bring it to their mouth to bite it

Classification of Aggressive Behavior

If your cat has been aggressive in the past or you suspect they could become aggressive, take time to evaluate the situations that got them upset. Who did they aggress toward? When and where did it happen? What was going on during the half- hour or so leading up to the incident? What was about to happen to yourcat?

Determining the answers to these questions can clarify the circumstances that trigger your cat's aggressive reaction and provide insight into why they're behaving this way. You need to understand the cause of your cat's aggression and their motivation for it before you can help him.

Keep in mind that a number of medical conditions can cause or contribute to your cat's aggression, including toxoplasmosis, hyperthyroidism, epilepsy, abscesses, arthritis, dental disease, rabies, trauma, and sensory decline or cognitive dysfunction in older cats. The first step in resolving your cat's aggression problem is to have a complete veterinary exam to assess their physical health.

Aggressive behavior problems in cats can be classified in different ways. A good way to understand why your cat is aggressive is to think about the function or purpose of the aggression. If you consider all the reasons why cats behave aggressively, you can determine what motivates your cat to do so and identify what they might gain from their behavior.



Between Cats

The most obvious and easily understood type of aggression between cats occurs between unneutered males. As males reach adulthood, they often begin to challenge each other for access to mates and territory. Tom cats who roam will get into threatening stand-offs and actual fights. They sit or stand stiffly, their hackles up, and stare at each other. Their ears are swivelled backward, and they often growl, hiss and howl loudly. One cat might eventually slowly leave, or one or both of them might attack.

Aggression between household cats is more subtle and complex than the conflicts between two outdoor toms. It can be so subtle, in fact, that cat parents don't notice it. The aggressor cat postures, and the recipient tries to look smaller and may break away to avoid the aggressor. The aggression can occur between females or between females and males. It can be related to physical size and activity (large cats often intimidate smaller or less active cats), to a lack of pleasant social experiences with other cats, to an accidentally learned association between the other cat and something unpleasant (like fireworks or thunder), or to a simple personality clash.

Fearful or Defensive

Fear aggression can occur when a cat perceives a threat, and it escalates if they can't escape. The more threatening the person, animal, object or sound seems to the cat, the more heightened their fear reaction will be. Typical body postures associated with fearful or defensive aggression are a combination of defensive signals (such as crouching, flattening the ears, tucking the tail, leaning away or rolling onto the side, and pupil dilation) and aggressive signals (such as hissing and spitting, piloerection, growling, swatting, biting and scratching). Aggressive signals are especially likely to be displayed if a cat can't escape the thing they fear. Often, the best way to deal with a defensively aggressive cat is to simply avoid them until they calm down.

Territorial

Animals of many species strive to expel or keep out other individuals from their territory, and cats are no exception. Both male and female cats are territorial, but males may defend larger territories than females. Cats' territorial aggression is usually directed toward other cats, but it can be directed toward dogs and people, too. A cat can show territorial aggression toward some family members and not others and toward some cats but not others. Cats mark their turf by patrolling, chin rubbing and urine spraying. They may stalk, chase and ambush a targeted intruder while displaying offensive body postures, including hissing, swatting and growling. Some cats take a slow and steady approach in their stalking, while others immediately and aggressively give chase. A cat's perceived territory could be the entire house or part of it, the yard, the block or the neighborhood. Some of the most common situations that trigger territoriality are:

- A kitten in the household reaches sexual maturity
- A new cat is introduced into the family and household
- Major changes are made in the cat's family or environment (for example, moving or someone moving in)
- Stray or roaming cats in the neighborhood enter a cat's territory

Play

Rough play is common and natural among kittens and young cats less than two years of age. Despite the playful intentions of a cat, however, when such play is directed toward people or becomes overly rambunctious, it can cause injury to people or damage household items. Play aggression is the most common type of aggressive behavior that cats direct toward their owners. It involves typical predatory and play behaviors, including stalking, chasing, attacking, running, ambushing, pouncing, leaping, batting, swatting, grasping, fighting and biting. It's believed that through play with each other, young cats learn to inhibit their bites and sheathe their claws when swatting. The degree to which individual cats learn to inhibit their rough play varies, and those who were orphaned or weaned early might never have learned to temper their play behavior. Other factors that can contribute to play aggression are long hours spent alone without opportunities to play, and if pet parents encourage their cats to chase and attack people's hands and feet in play.

Redirected

Redirected aggression is probably the most dangerous type of cat aggression, because the bites are uninhibited and the attacks can be frightening and damaging. Unfortunately, it's a very common type of feline aggression. Redirected aggression occurs when a cat is aggressively aroused and agitated by an animal or person they can't

get at (because there's a window to turn and lashes out at someone—) considerable delay between the initial trigger (for example, a occurs only if an agitated



le to get to the trigger of their agitation, they or who approaches them. There can be aggression, as long as hours. This is why cats r "out of the blue." They weren't even aware utes before the attack). A redirected attack

cat is approached or there's someone close by. The cat won't go looking for someone to attack! It's not a malicious or even intentional type of aggression. It's almost like a reflex, done automatically without thought. This is why it's never a good idea to break up a cat fight or approach an agitated cat showing defensive or offensive aggression postures. Some common triggers for redirected aggression are:

- Watching another cat through a door or window
- Watching or stalking birds, squirrels or other prey animals
- Smelling another cat's odor on a family member, a visitor or clothing
- Coming indoors after getting outside if the cat usually lives only indoors
- Hearing high-pitched noises
- Being frightened or harassed by a dog
- Having a person intervene in a cat fight
- Being in an animal shelter, surrounded by other cats

Petting-Induced

Some cats enjoy being petted, held, carried and even hugged. Some merely tolerate these activities with their owners, or they like being petted but not carried. And a few don't like being petted at all. Petting-induced aggression occurs when a cat suddenly feels irritated by being petted, nips or lightly bites the person petting him, and then jumps up and runs off. This type of aggression isn't well understood, but behaviorists think that physical contact, like stroking, can quickly become unpleasant if it's repeated over and over. Repetitive contact can cause arousal, excitement, pain and even static electricity in a cat's fur. Imagine if someone rubbed your back but, instead of moving his hand all over your back, he rubbed in just one spot, over and over. That could quickly become unpleasant. Your cat might feel the same way: what started out feeling good is now irritating, and they want you to stop. This type of aggression is more common in males than females. When your cat signals you to stop petting, the best response is simply to stop. With careful observation of your cat's communication signals, you'll usually see warning signs, such as:

- Quickly turning their head toward a person's hand
- Twitching or flipping their tail
- Flattening their ears or rotating them forward and back
- Restlessness
- Dilating pupils

Pain-Induced and Irritable

Pain-induced and irritable aggression are triggered by pain, frustration or deprivation, and they can be directed toward people, animals and objects. Any animal—including humans—can aggress when in pain. So even a well-socialized, normally docile cat can lash out when they're hurt, when someone tries to touch a painful part of them (for example, to medicate their infected ears), or when they're in pain and they anticipate being handled because someone is approaching them. Cats with aggression problems should always be examined for underlying medical problems, especially painful diseases such as arthritis, dental pain and abscesses from fighting. Painful punishment is not only ineffective for changing cat behavior, it can also trigger pain-induced aggression and worsen other types of aggression, like fear and territorial aggression. Body postures will usually be defensive.

Maternal

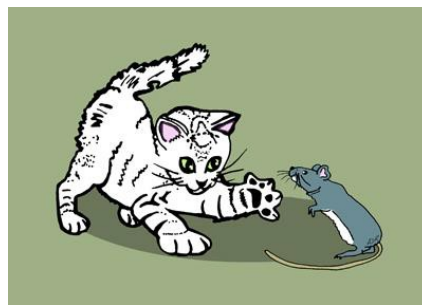
All mothers have instincts to protect their offspring from potential danger. Maternal aggression can occur when a mother cat (called the queen) with her kittens is approached by people or other animals whom she perceives as a threat. It's more often directed at other cats, but it can be directed toward people, too. Queens can be quite aggressive when defending their young, especially in the first few days after birth. For this reason, it's a good idea to avoid handling kittens during the first few days of their lives.

Idiopathic

The classification of idiopathic aggression includes any type of aggression whose cause can't be determined or explained through behavior history or medical exam. Cats with this type of aggression can attack their owners violently. They may bite repeatedly and remain in an aroused state for long periods of time. Redirected aggression must be closely considered and ruled out as a possible cause before a diagnosis of idiopathic aggression is made. These cats are dangerous, and pet parents of such cats should carefully assess their quality of life, as well as the safety of those around them.

Predatory

Cats are predators, and predatory behaviors are completely natural and highly motivated behaviors for them. Many experts don't classify predation as aggression because its purpose is to obtain food—unlike other types of aggression, which are responses to conflict. Cats are superb hunters. They use their acute vision and sensitivity to high-pitched sounds to locate their prey. They hunt insects, reptiles, rodents, young rabbits and birds. Most cats specialize in rodents, such as mice and voles, but a few become good at killing birds. When a cat detects potential prey, their predatory sequence of behaviors starts with silent stalking, watching and waiting for the perfect moment to strike (their rear end might wobble from side to side and their tail might twitch). Then they'll finally sprint toward the prey and strike it with their front paws. If successful, they'll deliver a killing bite that all cat species use—he'll bite the prey at the back of the neck to sever the spinal cord. If your cat likes to watch out the windows, you may have seen them become focused, twitch the end of their tail and move their mouth to make a strange chattering sound. When cats do this, it's because they've detected prey that they'd like to hunt.



Always Work with Your Veterinarian

A medical workup is essential for all aggressive cats. Some cats behave aggressively because of a medical condition or complication. In addition to acute painful conditions, cats with orthopedic problems, thyroid abnormality, adrenal dysfunction, cognitive dysfunction, neurological disorders and sensory deficits can show increased irritability and aggression. Geriatric cats can suffer from confusion and insecurity, which could prompt aggressive behavior. Certain medications can alter mood and affect your cat's susceptibility to aggression. Even diet has been implicated as a potential contributing factor. If a medical problem is detected, it's crucial to work closely with your veterinarian to give your cat the best chance at improving.

Always Work with a Professional

Aggression can be a dangerous behavior problem. It is complex to diagnose and can be tricky to treat. Many behavior modification techniques have detrimental effects if misapplied. Even highly experienced professionals get bitten from time to time, so living with and treating an aggressive cat is inherently risky. A qualified professional can take a complete behavior history, develop a treatment plan customized for your cat and coach you through its implementation. They can monitor your cat's progress and make alterations to the plan as required. If appropriate, they can also help you decide when your cat's quality of life is too poor or when the risks of living with your cat are too high and euthanasia is warranted.

DAMAGING THE FURNITURE (AND OTHER HOUSEHOLD ITEMS)

Scratching is natural for a cat, and rather than trying to stop it, it's best to redirect the scratching to an acceptable place. Declawing is not a humane solution. Many declawed cats develop behavior problems ranging from fearfulness to severe biting. You can use a two-fold approach to solve the problem:

1. Deter the cat from the currently selected spot(s).

Things to try:

- Put double-sided sticky tape on the spot where the cat is scratching.
- Cover the surface with a loose-fitting drape or fabric cover that will move when scratched.
- Tape aluminum foil in place over the surface.
- Spraying perfume or citrus scents can be a deterrent. There are also some indoor cat repellents sold at most pet stores
- Spray the cat with water from a squirt gun or a plant mister when you catch them in the act.



2. Provide a desirable scratching post for the cat to use. It should be sturdy and not prone to tipping over. Most cats prefer rope, sisal-covered or natural wood scratching posts. Some cats prefer carpeted posts. The post needs to be tall enough for the cat to stretch out (taller than the full length of the cat when stretched out). Fluffy carpeting material is not good for cats to scratch on and so is rejected by some cats in favor of the tighter-weave fabric that may be on the sofa. You can cover an existing scratching post with carpeting material put on reverse side out or you can wrap the post tightly with sisal rope. Even a large natural wood log, secured so that it will not roll or tip, can be an inexpensive - and effective scratching post. Catnip can be rubbed onto the post to encourage use. You can dangle a toy enticingly on the post. You can scratch your fingers on the rough surface in front of the cat so that they'll get the idea, but do not hold them and force their paws against the post, since this will only cause them to avoid the post. Give positive reinforcement when they use the post, i.e., petting and verbal praise. The scratching post should be located in a prominent place, not hidden away. One reason a cat scratches is to mark their territory.

Trimming the cat's nails regularly can minimize damage to furnishings. Declawing is NOT recommended because of the detrimental effect it has on the cat, both physically and psychologically. In some cases, people report success with Soft Paws, a product that can be used to prevent damage to furniture while retaining the cat's claws. Soft Paws are plastic claw-shaped caps that are glued onto the cat's claws.

The best tactic when dealing with scratching is not to try to stop your cat from scratching, but instead to teach them where and what to scratch. An excellent approach is to provide them with appropriate, cat-attractive surfaces and objects to scratch, such as scratching posts. The following steps will help you encourage your cat to scratch where you want them to.

- Provide a variety of scratching posts with different qualities and surfaces. Try giving your cat posts made of cardboard, carpeting, wood, sisal and upholstery. Some cats prefer horizontal posts. Others like vertical posts or slanted posts. Some prefer a vertical grain for raking, while others favor a horizontal grain for picking. Once you figure out your cat's preference for scratching, provide additional posts of that kind in various locations. Keep in mind that all cats want a sturdy post that won't shift or collapse when used. Most cats also like a post that's tall enough that they can stretch fully. (This may be why cats seem to like drapes so much!)
- Encourage your cat to investigate the posts by scenting them with catnip, hanging toys on them and placing them in areas where they'll be inclined to climb on them.
- Discourage inappropriate scratching by removing or covering other desirable objects. Turn speakers toward the wall. Put plastic, double-sided sticky tape, sandpaper or upside-down vinyl carpet runner (knobby parts up) on

furniture or on the floor where your cat would stand to scratch your furniture. Place scratching posts next to these objects, as "legal" alternatives.

- Clip your cat's nails regularly.
- Consider putting plastic caps on your cat's claws (Soft Claws®) so that they'll do no damage if they scratch on something in your home. These special caps attach to claws with an adhesive. They're temporary, lasting four to six weeks.
- If you catch your cat in the act of scratching an inappropriate object, you can try startling them by clapping your hands or squirting them with water. Use this procedure only as a last resort, because your cat may associate you with the startling event (clapping or squirting) and learn to fear you.
- If you need help, don't hesitate to call in the experts.

What NOT to Do

- Do not hold your cat by the scratching post and force them to drag their claws on it. This practice could seriously frighten your cat and teach them to avoid the scratching post completely. (They might decide to avoid you, too!)
- Do not throw away a favorite scratching post when it becomes unsightly. Cats prefer shredded and torn objects because they can really get their claws into the material. Used posts will also appeal to your cat because they smell and look familiar to them.

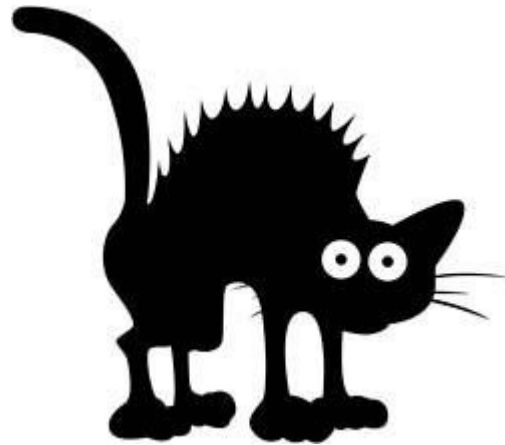
Should You Declaw Your Cat?

Some people declaw their cats to prevent or resolve a scratching problem. The term "declaw" is a misnomer. It implies that declawing only involves the removal of a cat's claws. In reality, declawing involves amputating the end of a cat's toes. Cats suffer significant pain while recovering from declawing. An alternative surgery, a tendonectomy, severs the tendons in a cat's toes so that they're unable to extend their nails to scratch. This procedure may or may not cause less pain. However, if you choose this type of surgery, you must clip your cat's nails regularly because they'll be unable to maintain them.

We discourage declawing and tendonectomies because of the extreme pain that these surgeries inevitably cause. Both procedures are illegal in some European countries because they're considered cruel to animals. We only recommend such surgeries if a cat caretaker has unsuccessfully tried everything else to resolve scratching behavior and is considering euthanasia.

FEARFULNESS

Fight, Flee, or Freeze are the three "F's" that dictate a cat's actions when scared. When cats perceive a threat from an object, person, or situation, a cat will try one of these at first and, if that doesn't work, they may be forced to try a different tactic. For instance, a cat fearful of dogs, may puff out their fur to look big, then hiss and spit when a dog is present. If the dog doesn't retreat, they may flee the situation, find a hiding spot, and freeze until they deem the situation safe. Although some fearful behaviors are acceptable, overly anxious or fearful cats may need a little help in the form of training, patience, and love.



Behaviors cats may exhibit when frightened:

- Fleeing
- Hiding
- Aggression (which includes spitting, hissing, growling, swatting, biting, scratching, puffing fur and tail, arching back, swishing tail, and flattening ears)
- Loss of control over bladder and/or bowels
- Freezing in place

It's normal to want to help and comfort your cat when they're frightened. However, that isn't necessarily the best thing to do from a cat's point of view. It's normal for a cat to feel insecure or frightened in a new environment and

often will hide a few days. More traumatic events like going to the vet, or taking a ride in the car may send a cat hiding for many days.

List of possible causes:

- A particular person
- A stranger
- Another animal
- A child
- Loud noises

Here are some suggestions:

Get a medical checkup. Be sure to take the cat to the vet to rule out any medical issues. Any sudden change in your cat's behavior could mean that they're ill.

Behavior Modification. If nothing is found during a health checkup, you might want to leave the cat alone for a while. Forcing a cat to come out of their hiding spot will only aggravate the problem. Make sure the cat has easy access to food, water, and a litter box. Cleaning the litter box and changing the food and water every day is the best way to tell whether the cat is eating and drinking.

Keep any contact with the fear stimulus to minimum.

Keep the cat's routine as consistent as possible. Cats feel more confident if they know when to expect daily feeding, playing, cuddling, and grooming.

Steps to desensitizing:

1. Determine what distance the cat can be from the fear stimulus without responding fearfully.
2. Introduce the fear stimulus at this distance while feeding the cat tasty treats and praising them.
3. Slowly move the fear stimulus closer as you continue to praise your cat and offer treats.

If at any time during this process the cat shows fearful behavior, you've proceeded too quickly and will need to start over from the beginning. This is the most common mistake people make when desensitizing an animal, and it can be avoided by working in short sessions, paying careful attention to the animal so that they don't progress too rapidly for the cat.

What not to do. Do not punish the cat for their fearful behavior. Animals associate punishment with what they're doing at the time they're punished, so the cat is likely to associate any punishment you give with you. This will only cause the cat to become fearful of you and they still won't understand why they're being punished.

Do not force your cat to experience the object or situation that is causing them fear. For example, if they are afraid of a certain person, don't let that person try to pick them up and hold them; this will only make them more fearful of that person.

Be cautious in handling your cat when they're frightened. They may accidentally direct their aggression to you.



NEIGHBOR COMPLAINTS FOR OUTDOOR CATS

Nuisance behaviors, such as urinating and defecating in someone's yard or garden, digging in someone's yard or garden, jumping on someone's car, and upsetting an owned cat, are the greatest concerns that the general public has about outdoor cats.

Overpopulation is a serious concern, as well. In the United States, approximately 2 percent of the 30 to 40 million community (feral and stray) cats have been spayed or neutered. These cats produce around 80 percent of the kittens born in the U.S. each year. Although 85 percent of the estimated 75 to 80 million pet cats in the U.S. are

already spayed or neutered, many have kittens before they are spayed or neutered. Those kittens, especially if they are allowed outdoors, add to the number of outdoor cats and the problems associated with them.

Shelters in a community with a large population of outdoor cats who aren't spayed or neutered may experience these problems:

- More cats entering shelters as a result of trapping feral kittens young enough to be socialized (tamed) and feral adults
- A rise in euthanasia rates for all cats because adult feral cats can't be adopted
- Euthanasia of adoptable cats when cage space runs out
- Costs associated with trapping and/or caring for and euthanizing feral cats

In addition, shelters receive many nuisance complaints about outdoor cats, including:

- Frequent, loud noises that are part of the fighting and mating behavior of unneutered/unspayed cats
- Strong, foul odors left by unneutered male cats spraying urine to mark their territory
- Flea infestations
- Visible suffering from dying kittens and injured adults
- The death of wild animals who are cats' prey



USING CATTERIES AS A SOLUTION FOR INDOOR/OUTDOOR CATS

For stray and pet cats living outdoors, there are many potential threats to their safety that should be considered. Some of these dangers include traffic; other free-roaming cats; wildlife such as predatory birds, coyote, and even alligators; disease; a loose neighborhood dog; poison; animal abusers; and others. It is important to understand these threats to your pet's safety at all times, as this is part of being a pet guardian. For house cats that wish to spend time outdoors, there are safe alternatives, such as catteries. Here are a few links to plans and photos for building or purchasing a safe cattery for installing on/near your home. They can be as fancy or plain jane as you prefer – the important thing is safety.

[Catteries and Cattios](#)
[Cat Terrace Window Cages](#)
[Cat Condos](#)
[Catio Spaces](#)

What are catteries and cattios?

They are outdoor enclosures for cats. Cats love to spend time in the fresh air and watch birds, bugs, and other animals. A cattery/catio provides a way for a cat to enjoy the outdoors without danger of being attacked by another animal, struck by a car, lost or stolen. They can be made with a variety of materials and constructed in a range of shapes and sizes. They can be free-standing or attached to a house or garage, inexpensive or higher end, plain or fancy, bought or built.

What you to know about catteries/cattios

There are a number of things to consider when building or buying a cattery or catio:

- Although you can build a cattery that is low to the ground, cleaning and spending time in the cattery yourself will be much easier if the cattery is built to human height. Plus, most cats love being up high, so you can provide structures for your cat to climb and perch on.

- If your cat enters the cattery through a window, the cattery will need to have a door to the outside so you can access it for cleaning, maintenance, and possible emergency care of your pet.
- The cattery will need a top — not necessarily a roof, but something to keep the cats in and everything else out. Chain link, hardware cloth, or even strong shade cloth, securely attached to the sides, should suffice.
- The cattery will need a firm base (hardware cloth at least) on the floor, to keep the right animals in and the wrong animals out.



- Provide a litter box. This isn't always necessary if the cat has access to a box in the house, but even so, many cats prefer to use the great outdoors. Even if your cat doesn't consistently use the litter box, make sure one is available for them. The box will need to be sheltered, either with a hood or with some boards or shelves, so it doesn't get wet in inclement weather.
- Provide enough food and water. Again, you'll need to shelter the food and water area. If you have ant or bug problems, look into bug-proof food dishes. If your cat spends a lot of time in the cattery, keep in mind that an outdoor cat needs more food to keep warm during chilly weather.
- Allow for extremes in the weather. Make sure the cattery has a shady area so your kitty doesn't get too hot in the summer. If your winters are cold, provide access to a heated room or garage; don't leave your cat out in a stand-alone structure in very cold weather.
- You can enrich the cattery environment by providing logs or posts for scratching. Hang bird feeders nearby (but not in the cattery), or plant a tray of grass for your kitty to frolic in. Be creative! You can make the cattery a nice place for your cat to hang out, and a pleasant place for you to visit.

Where can I get more information about catteries/catios?

In addition to the resources and links provided above, you can search the Internet for “cat enclosures” or “catios” to find out what other people have done. [Catio Showcase](#) and [Catio Designs](#) have lots of photos and helpful information about different kinds of cat enclosures. Building plans are available from [Just4Cats](#). If you want to build from a kit, you can order a kit for a cattery from [C&D Pet Products](#).

Are there any alternatives to catteries?

If you have a fenced yard, you might also consider “cat fencing” — netting that attaches to standard fences to prevent escapes and intrusions. Here are a couple of potential resources online: [Cat Fence In](#) and [Purrfect Fence](#).

KITTEN TRAINING



Most people believe that cats can't be trained because cats don't seem to respond to many of the methods used to train dogs. But cats do respond to training! In fact one of the first scientific studies highlighting the importance of reinforcement in animal behavior was done with cats.

The first step to training your cat is to understand them. Cats aren't as social as dogs. Dogs have been bred specifically to work together with people, whereas the primary reason cats were domesticated was to kill vermin on their own. So they're independent, and they aren't as naturally inclined to work for praise and attention as dogs are. They're also not as easy to motivate. You have to use really special treats that your cat finds

irresistible. Training a cat requires some creativity and patience.

Training your cat has important benefits. You're stimulating their body and mind, which helps keep them healthy. And spending time together means you're strengthening the bond you share. In addition to teaching fun tricks like wave and fetch, you can also teach a range of useful behaviors like sit, stay and to come when called. You could even teach your cat to pee in the toilet and flush afterwards!

Use Tasty Treats

The first step is to find a treat that your cat goes crazy for. Fresh chicken diced in tiny cubes, bits of tuna, meat-flavored baby food, and commercial cat treats are all good choices. Once you've identified treats your cat likes, follow the basic steps of positive reinforcement training (reward-based training) to teach them the behavior you want. Suppose you'd like your cat to sit and stay on a stool while you prepare their dinner. You'll first need to start with teaching them to sit when asked:

- First, make sure you have your cat's attention. Hold the tasty treat in your fingers right at your cat's nose. When your cat begins to sniff the treat, slowly move it in an arc from their nose up just over the head between their ears. (Don't raise it straight up, or you'll be teaching your cat to stand on their rear legs rather than sit!) Many cats will follow this arc motion with their eyes and nose, and as their chin raises up and back, their butt will go down.
- Second, the instant your cat's bottom hits the floor, praise them and offer the treat. If their rear doesn't go all the way down on the first try, give them the treat anyway. Over several repetitions of practice, give them a treat each time their rear gets slightly closer, until they get into a complete sit with their rear all the way on the floor.

Cats don't see things well that are still and close-up, so if your cat has difficulty taking the treat from your fingers, try offering it to them in your flat palm or tossing it on the floor. They'll see the movement when you toss it and know where the treat is.

Use a Clicker

A clicker can make training easier and faster. If you don't have a clicker, you can use a pen that makes a clicking sound. The instant your cat does the correct behavior, click and then offer a treat. The click lets your cat know the instant they do the right thing, so it helps them catch on faster. Just make sure you click at the exact moment they do the behavior you want, and then give them a treat. Cats learn through repetition, just like we do, so you'll need to practice a few times in a row. Keep your training sessions short though—just a few minutes at a time. Most cats get bored if you try to drill the same thing over and over.

No Punishment!

While training your cat, keep in mind that cats respond very poorly to punishment! Rather than learning what behavior not to do, a punished cat usually just learns to run away. Depending on your cat's temperament, punishment can frighten your cat to the point where he may hide from you and your family members. Punishment creates stress, and stress is one of the most common causes for problem behaviors in cats, including eliminating outside of the litter box and compulsive grooming. Stress also compromises the immune system, making your cat more vulnerable to disease, including feline idiopathic cystitis (inflammation of the bladder).

It's much easier to train your cat when you reward behaviors you want and offer them more attractive alternatives for behaviors you don't want. Persuasion, not punishment, is the key to training your cat. If you patiently practice and reward your cat with treats, you'll soon have a cat who's sitting on cue and purring contentedly.

Finding Help and More Information

If you'd like to learn how to train your cat, or if your cat has a behavior problem you'd like to resolve, don't hesitate to seek help from a qualified behaviorist. Many Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists (CAABs or ACAABs) offer telephone consultations, in-home private consultations and training sessions, and some Certified Professional Dog Trainers also offer group classes for kitten socialization and basic training.

First and foremost, we recommend that all pet owners consult with their veterinarian. The information contained herein is meant to be a resource. It is not exhaustive, nor does it indicate an endorsement of recommendation from Greenville County Animal Care. Please use your own due diligence in researching these sources and making the best choice for your pet(s).

We'd like to give thanks and credit to the following organizations, whose published resources were utilized in addition to staff research for this compilation:

HSUS www.animalsheltering.org
Nevada Humane Society www.nevadahumanesociety.org
ASPCA www.aspca.org
Best Friends Animal Society www.bestfriends.org