

Aggression Behavior In Cats

Some cats exhibit aggressive behavior from time to time. Cats can become aggressive when they have had enough petting, when they are picked up, when they are frightened, and even when they are playing. This is a natural response and one that may be hard to change. It is important that you learn how to read your cat's moods and body language and know what things cause her to become aggressive so that you can avoid an aggressive attack. In some cases you may be able to use behavior modification to change your cats behavior. Listed below are several types of cat aggression and the recommended treatment.

Never physically punish a cat for showing aggression. This will only make the situation worse. Cats who are physically punished will only become more aggressive.

Fearful or Defensive Aggression - Cats can become defensively aggressive when scared. The best way to deal with defensive aggression is to remove the fearful stimuli. If the fearful stimuli cannot be removed, you can work to slowly change your cat's feelings about it using counter conditioning. To do this, pair an extra special treat (tuna, chicken, etc.) or a fun play session with the presence of the scary thing. Do this over and over until a new association is formed. If it is a dog your cat is afraid of, make sure your dog is never allowed to chase the cat.

Play Aggression - Cats are naturally aggressive in play because their play mimics aspects of the hunt - stalk, chase, attack. Learn to anticipate when your cat becomes playfully aggressive (whenever you walk by the dresser, when you dangle your hand over the side of the chair, or when you move your feet under the covers) so that you can redirect the attack onto a toy. Have a small toy ready and the second before your cat attacks you - toss the toy. Cats have motion sensitive vision - if they see something move fast across their line of vision, they will chase it. If your cat does pounce on your moving body part - simply stop moving it - hold perfectly still so that you are no fun to attack.

Play Therapy - It is important to play with your cat on a regular basis in order to provide her with an outlet for her playful energy. Toss a ball or wadded up piece of paper for her to chase, use a fishing pole type toy like a feather dancer to stimulate her to chase and pounce, or provide interactive toys like round-a-bouts or treat dispensers. If your play session occurs at about the same time every day (cats love routine) your cat will start to anticipate the fun and reserve play for this time.

Redirected Aggression - Cats often redirect their aggressive feelings about one thing (a cat outside the window) onto someone else (you or another pet). A cat can stay agitated for a long time, sometimes up to 24 hours, and in this state they often attack the first thing that comes their way. It is important that you do not interact with your cat when she looks agitated (ears back, huge pupils, hair standing up, twitching or wagging tail). Just leave her alone until she has calmed down. If your cat becomes agitated by cats outside the window try preventing visual access using blinds or shades.

Petting-Induced Aggression - Some cats have a very low threshold for tolerating petting. Your cat may be fine for five pats but on the sixth one she attacks. These types of attacks could be caused by a build up of static electricity, you touched a sensitive body part like the stomach or simply that your cat has a limit for tactile stimulation. The important thing to do to prevent such an attack is to learn your cat's threshold level and don't exceed it. The body signals that tell you that your cat is becoming agitated with petting include: ears back, huge pupils, tail twitching, or skin on the back twitching. When you see these signs - stop petting.

Inter-cat Aggression - This is a common form of aggression because cats are very territorial animals who are very particular about their social partners. Adult cats are less likely to accept new cats into the household and may show aggression to the new comer at first. Aggression between cats can also be status or rank related. They may simply be trying to work out who is the boss. Sometimes resident cats, who usually live peacefully together, will start to attack each other. This breakdown of peaceful coexistence could have been triggered by just about anything. Examples of things that could have occurred are: one cat just came back from the vet's office and smells funny; one cat redirected aggression onto the other after seeing a strange cat outside and they continue to fight; one cat is sick and easily agitated. You may be able to help get the cats back to a peaceful coexistence by providing food treats and fun play sessions only when the cats are in each other's presence.

Pain or Illness - Sometimes aggression is a sign of illness or pain. If your normally loving cat suddenly starts showing aggressive behavior you may want to consult with your veterinarian.

Urine Marking (Spraying) In Cats

Urine marking (spraying) is a normal feline behavior that is quite unacceptable in our homes. Cats urine mark primarily to advertise their presence to other cats and to establish and maintain territories. The most common triggers for urine marking include a new cat in the household, free-roaming cats outside, or social conflict between family cats. However, other events such as a visitor to the home, new furniture, or unfamiliar odors can also trigger urine marking. Sometimes cats urine mark if they are frustrated, such as when they are denied access to outside or haven't gotten enough attention from the owner. Additionally, an anxious or fearful cat may urine mark to surround itself with a familiar scent.

Urine marking is much more common in un-neutered males however females also urine mark. Neutering your male cat is the first thing you should try, however, a certain percentage of neutered cats continue to spray following the surgery.

The following list will give you some suggestions for dealing with urine marking. Many chronic spraying problems however, are difficult to eliminate. Management may be your best bet.

1. Make sure you clean all affected areas well with an enzymatic cleaner that neutralizes the odor. As long as there is an olfactory cue (the smell of the urine) the cat will continue to spray. Anti-Icky-Poo is the best product to use.
2. Restrict access to all sprayed areas until they are properly treated with the neutralizer.
3. Make the area less attractive to the cat using items like aluminum foil, sticky paper, sandpaper, or a carpet runner with the nubby side up.
4. Use aversive smells in the area such as menthol, floral perfumes, oil of wintergreen, or citrus.
5. Change the significance of the area by feeding the cat there or providing catnip, toys and treats.
6. Spray the synthetic facial pheromone FELIWAY in the area. Because cats also mark with their facial glands, providing this olfactory cue may cause the cat to switch to a different marking strategy.

7. Provide a "spray pan" - an L-shaped litterbox configuration to redirect spraying to a more appropriate place.
8. If the spraying is a response to cats outside you should cover the windows and discourage the neighboring cats from coming into the yard.
9. If spraying is a response to social conflict with other cats in the household you need to work on improving the relationship between the cats. Make all of their associations positive using treats, affection and play.
10. Provide an "environment of plenty" by creating multiple feeding areas, multiple elimination areas and multiple sleeping perches at different vertical heights throughout the house.
11. Natural Calming Remedies - Rescue Remedy, Composure calming chews, and Feliway calming pheromone can all help reduce anxiety.
12. Provide daily enrichment for all of the cats but especially the sprayer. Enrichment involves stimulating the cat's brain and encouraging natural behaviors. Placing the cats food inside feeder balls or puzzle feeders works well. Equally stimulating is hiding the cats food around the house for him/her to hunt for. Playing with your cat is also wonderful enrichment. Placing a bird feeder outside the window for your cat to watch can give your cat hours of enrichment.
13. Allowing your cat safe outdoor time can also help prevent spraying in the house. A safe way to do this is building a fenced in area for the cat. The Purrfect Cat fence company sells cat specific fencing that is easy to install.
14. There are medications that may help control urine marking in your cat. The suggestions above should be attempted before considering medication. If you feel that you have tried everything and the problem still persists, consult your veterinarian about drug therapy. It is often the case however, that the cat will cease spraying while on the drug, but will revert to the behavior once the medication is stopped.

Teaching Your Cat To Use A Scratching Post

Cats scratch on things for two reasons - to shed their dead nail sheaths and to mark their territory. To save your furniture from damage you should provide your cat with a scratching post or two and teach him/her how to use it. The requirements for a good scratching post are:

1. The posts should be located in prominent areas in your home, not in the basement. Cats often scratch when they wake up from a nap so put one near the cat's sleeping area.
2. Vertical posts must be sturdy (so they don't fall over when used) and tall enough for the cat to stretch its body. Some cats prefer horizontal marking posts. Try both types to find out what your cat prefers, or offer one of each.
3. There are several types of scratching post. Providing a variety would be best.
 - a. Carpeted posts (beware of the pre-made posts that are covered with loop carpet because their claws can get stuck in the fabric loops and then they will stop using the post).
 - b. Sisal rope posts.
 - c. Real wood posts (you can also just use a tree branch or a log from the wood pile)
 - d. Corrugated cardboard.
4. Attract your cat to the post using catnip. Sprinkle the catnip on the base and into the fabric or hang bags of catnip from the top. Spend time near the post encouraging your cat to interact with it. Play with the cat near the post and incorporate it into your play.
5. Reward your cat every time he/she uses the post. Have yummy food treats nearby and give one to the cat whenever you see him/her scratching the post.

Once your cat is using the scratching post you have provided you can teach him/her that other items are off limits.

1. Texture Aversion - aluminum foil, double-sided tape or clear packing tape can be placed on the furniture - cats don't like to scratch these surfaces
2. Smell Aversion - citronella, floral perfumes, citrus, menthol, and oil of wintergreen are all aversive smells to cats. Soak pieces of cloth or cotton balls in these smelly substances and hang them on the furniture.
3. Sound Aversion: A strategically placed motion detector alarm will keep most cats from getting near the furniture that is off limits for scratching.

Inappropriate Elimination in Cats

There are many reasons why cats eliminate outside of their litterbox. The first thing to consider is a health issue. Take the cat to the veterinarian to rule out any medical problem that may be causing the inappropriate elimination, such as a urinary tract infection. If the veterinarian does not find a medical problem, it is most likely a behavioral problem.

In order to stop inappropriate elimination you will first need to figure out what is causing it. Below are some of the common causes and some suggestions for correcting the problem.

Litter aversions (the cat doesn't like the LITTER itself)

Signs

The cat shakes her paws excessively to remove the litter when she comes out of the box.

The cat does not bury his waste after he eliminates.

The cat balances on the side of the box to eliminate.

The cat won't even go into the box and is eliminating right next to it.

Causes

The litter is unacceptable because of its smell or texture.

The box is consistently dirty.

The litter is too deep.

Treatment -

1. Give the cat a "litter smorgasbord". Set up several boxes each containing a different type of litter so that you can find out your cats preference. Most cats prefer soft clumping unscented litter so make sure that is one of the options.
2. Scoop the box/s daily and change it/them completely every week.
3. Keep the depth of the litter somewhere between 2-3 inches.

Litter BOX aversions

Causes:

The box is too small or the sides are too high (for kitten or older cats).

The cat had a frightening or startling experience when in the box.

The cat has experienced pain or discomfort when eliminating in the box.

The cat was ambushed by another cat or a dog while in the box.

Treatment

1. Make sure the box is the right size for the cat. Most cats prefer extra large boxes that allow them to have room to pick the right location and bury the waste sufficiently. If the cat is old or you have a kitten, make sure the sides of the box are not too high for the cat to get into it.
2. If the cat has developed an aversion due to a scary experience or pain from a medical problem, the litter box may need to be relocated. It is also sometimes necessary to provide a new box that is very different from the old one.
3. Make sure the litter box is in a location where the cat has plenty of visibility to prevent an ambush. Put the box in a place where the cat can get to it but the dog cannot.

Surface preference

Some cats develop a preference for a surface other than their litter such as bedding, carpets or piles of clothes or towels for elimination. This can happen secondarily to some type of litter box aversion.

Treatment

1. Clean all soiled areas well with an enzymatic cleaner (Anti-Icky-Poo, Zero Odor).
2. Deny the cat access to preferred surfaces (close doors, pick up laundry, etc.).
3. Make the soiled area less appealing using smell aversion (air fresheners, perfumes, citrus sprays), or place an aversive texture (plastic, aluminum foil) over the area.
4. Change the substrate in the box so that the texture is more like the soiled areas (make the litter softer -switch to fine grained, clumping litter).
5. Place the preferred substrate (such as an old towel) in the box. Slowly introduce litter on top of it. Gradually make the towel smaller and smaller until the cat is using the litter again.

Location preference

Sometimes cats develop a preference for a location that is different from where their box is. Perhaps there is too much activity or the box is located so that there is only one way out or the cat cannot see all around while eliminating. The box may be too isolated in an out of the way scary place (basement) or it may be located near unpredictable noises (near furnace or other large appliance like the washer and dryer that occasionally make scary noises).

Treatment

Change the location of the litter box to meet the cat's preferences. It may be necessary to put the litter box in the place the cat is eliminating and slowly move it (inches a day) to the new desired location.

Conflicts between family cats

Inappropriate elimination may result from one cat being harassed or threatened by another. The victim cat can become afraid to go to the litter box if she is then vulnerable to attack or harassment there. Additionally, some cats simply will not use a box that another cat has eliminated in.

Treatment

1. Have multiple boxes in multiple locations.
2. In all locations the cat should have several escape routes and good visibility all around the box.
3. Work on improving the relationship between the cats using positive reinforcement (food treats whenever they are together).

Fear and anxiety

If the cat is afraid to move comfortably around the house she may start to eliminate inappropriately. This is often seen in cats who are new to a house and not yet comfortable with the environment.

Use of punishment by the owner could cause the cat to hide whenever the owner is present and thus eliminate close to the hiding place.

Fear of the family dog can also cause the cat to hide and be too afraid to get to the litter box when needed.

Treatment

1. Identify the source of the fear and anxiety and remove it if you can.
2. Stop all punishment.
3. Move to a safe location.
4. Natural calming remedies to reduce anxiety (see below).

Natural calming remedies that may help when anxiety is the cause

Feliway - Synthetic facial pheromone - comes in plug-in diffusers or spray. This product has been shown to calm many cats.

Composure Calming Chews - A calming supplement designed to promote relaxation during stressful situations.

Rescue Remedy - homeopathic remedy (Bach Flower essence) - place a few drops on the cat's fur daily (they will lick it off and get it into their system).

Olfactory cues (odors)

Odors from other animals that have soiled the area may contribute to inappropriate elimination.

Treatment

1. Neutralize the odors with an enzymatic cleaning product (Anti-Icky-Poo or Zero Odor).
2. Restrict the cat's access to soiled areas during the cleaning process.

Correcting Unwanted Behavior In Your Cat

Sometimes cats do things that we don't like such as jumping up on the table or counters, scratching on the furniture, or attacking our feet when we walk by. The first thing we need to learn before we try to "correct" these annoying behaviors is that they are all motivated by natural feline instincts. Cats naturally seek high places to rest and survey their environment, so you should provide your cat with several high perches around the house. Cats also naturally scratch on vertical surfaces to remove dead nail sheaths and mark their territory, so you should provide a proper scratching posts and encourage your cat to use them. And cats love to play, and their play behavior often involves aspects of the hunt - and sometimes the only available prey is a pair of moving feet. Provide your cat with plenty of toys and spend some time everyday throwing a ball or playing with a feather dancer type toy.

Redirecting your cat to perform these natural behaviors where and when you feel is appropriate is the best way to deal with these problems. However, sometimes you may also need to let your cat know that the old place or action is not acceptable. The worse way to try to correct unwanted behavior is to physically or verbally punish your cat. All this does is make your cat afraid of you and teach her that it's only safe to do these things when you aren't around.

A better way to correct a cat is to have the environment do the punishing. Environmental punishment is very effective because an animals' behavior is dictated by the consequences that follow. If doing a certain thing leads to an unpleasant experience then your cat will be less likely to do it again. Letting the environment do the punishing has the added benefit of removing you as the bad guy.

The idea is to connect something slightly unpleasant (but not harmful or frightening) with the behavior you are trying to get rid of. Aversive textures, smells, tastes, or sounds can be used to "booby trap" off-limit areas or interrupt unwanted behaviors. The following are some examples of each:

Textures: sticky paper, aluminum foil, or a plastic carpet runner (knobby side up) can be placed in areas you want to be off limits. Cats hate walking on these surfaces.

Smells: citronella, perfumes, citrus, eucalyptus oil, and oil of wintergreen are all aversive smells to cats. Soak pieces of cloth or cotton balls in these smelly substances and place them where you don't want your cat to go.

Tastes: bitter apple, citrus products, hot sauces, or cayenne pepper can be rubbed on the surface your cat is chewing on. They will associate the bad taste with the item.

Sound: A strategically placed motion detector that sounds an alarm or a product called Ssscat which is a can of compressed air with a motion detector on top that spritzes out a burst of air when the cat comes near can be helpful. These events are designed to simply startle your cat, not terrify her, but this may not be the best method if you have a particularly sensitive cat.

The key to owning a wonderful pet is to reinforce behaviors you like. Don't forget to reward kitty when she is sleeping in an acceptable place, scratching on the scratching post, or playing with the appropriate toy.

Fighting Feline Housemates

Sometimes cats fight. This can occur when you bring a new cat into the home or when the cats have an altercation that triggers fighting. To try to re-introduce cats that have started to fight follow the below recommendations.

Separate the cats for a while. The victim cat should have the choice location in the house. This will help boost her confidence and level of security. The aggressor should not have the run of the house or he may continue to claim this prime territory as his and complicate the reintroduction. If the victim cat feels more secure in a smaller area, however, you can put each cat in its own room with neither having full run of the house.

Each room should contain all the necessities – food, water, litter box, toys, beds & a *Feliway Pheromone Diffuser*. Feliway is a synthetic version of the feline pheromones found in their facial glands. It has been found to have a calming affect on cats. The diffuser emits the pheromone on a constant basis into the room.

While separated:

Both cats should receive natural calming remedies like Rescue Remedy or Composure to help reduce their anxiety about each other and about being separated.

Victim cat –

Interactive play will help build confidence in the victim cat and help her feel safe and relaxed enough to engage in prey drive behavior.

Bully cat –

Play sessions will help him learn acceptable targets for biting (toys) and unacceptable ones (you). If he ever bites or scratches you during play sessions you should end play immediately.

Scent Exchange -

Using a sock on your hand – pet each cat every day with the sock to exchange their scents.

Room Exchange -

Switch the cats once a day for about 20 minutes so they can investigate and smell each other's territory.

Counterconditioning at the door way

Counterconditioning means providing something good in the presence of the trigger (the other cat) so that a new, more positive, association is formed.

Allowing the cats to see each other briefly without actually being able to get to each other is the first step. The best way to do this is to put up baby gates or a screen door on one of the

rooms. That way you can bring the cats into view of each other and provide yummy treats on either side of the door without fear of an altercation.

Short Reintroduction Sessions

When things are going well at the door you can start to conduct short controlled introduction periods. Once or twice a day you should bring the cats together in the same room (a neutral room that neither is staying in) and provide them with something great (play session or extra special food treats). Let them be together for only a few minutes at first - just enough time to eat the treats. As time goes by, increase the amount of time the cats are in the room together.

Preparing for the reintroduction:

Provide an environment of plenty

Multiple feeding stations

Multiple toilet areas

Multiple resting/observational perches

Increased vertical territory

*The aggressor cat should wear a bell on its collar so that the victim cat can know where he is at all times.

If a fight occurs:

Diversion Technique

If you notice the aggressor getting ready to attack, divert his attention onto an interactive toy like a Cat Dancer. This will trigger his prey drive and shift his interest onto something other than his housemate. Have a Cat Dancer in every room so you can easily and quickly grab it when needed.

If you are too late and the attack has already started - make a startling noise. They will most likely run in opposite directions when startled.

There are times when two cats simply cannot live together and no amount of work will change that. You may need to consider re-homing one of your cats if this is the case in your home. It is not fun for anyone to have cats that fight; and the quality of life for the cats (especially the victim cat) is not good. A new home may be the most humane thing to do.

Cats And Their Litterboxes

The best thing about cats is that they don't need to be potty-trained. Relieving themselves in soft, loose material and burying their waste is an innate behavior, so even young kittens know what to do without being shown. All you have to do is provide an acceptable litterbox for the cat to do her business.

Where should you put the litterbox?

The litterbox should be located in a place that provides the cat with some amount of privacy but that is convenient for her to get to. It may be desirable to you to put the litterbox in the basement but your cat may find the basement unacceptable. A small kitten may not be able to climb down the stairs, or the floor may be too cold to walk on. Additionally, basements house a variety of giant noise-making monsters like the furnace, washer, and dryer. If a cat is frightened by the noise of one of these appliances while she is using her litterbox, she may not want to return to that location to eliminate.

What kind of litterbox should you use?

A standard plastic litterbox is preferred by most cats. If you have a kitten, make sure the sides are not too high for her to get into the box. Some cats prefer a super-sized litter box so you can use a sweater box (the kind you put under your bed) as a litterbox. Covered litterboxes can pose problems for some cats because they trap odor. A covered box that is not cleaned very often quickly becomes unacceptable to most cats. Most cats do not like the plastic box liners because they smell funny and their claws can get stuck in them when they bury their waste.

What kind of litter should you use?

Most cats prefer fine-grained, soft substrates for elimination, so the clumping litters or dust-free small grained clay litters are most acceptable. Usually the pellet-type litters or those that are scented are unacceptable to cats. Find the type of litter your cat prefers by giving her a choice of two or three different litterboxes containing different litters. Once you find what type of litter she likes, stick with it. Do not put more than 2-3 inches of litter in the box. Cats do not like to sink into their toilet.

How many litterboxes should you have?

If you have multiple cats, you should have multiple boxes in multiple locations in the house. A good rule of thumb is one box per cat plus one. Do not put them all in the same room, this essentially creates one toilet area, not several.

How often should you clean the litterbox?

You must keep the litterbox consistently clean to meet the needs of most cats. Scoop the feces and clumped urine out every day and totally change the litter at least once a week. Do not use strong smelling cleaning products to wash out the box. The residual smell may cause your cat to avoid the box. It is sufficient to wash out the box with dish soap and water at each changing.

What does it mean if your cat stops using the litterbox?

The first thing to consider is taking the cat to the veterinarian. It may be a medical condition causing your cat to eliminate outside the box. If the veterinarian does not find a medical problem, consider behavioral causes. Did you recently change litter brands? Did you move the box location? Are you cleaning the box often enough? Did something scare the cat when she was using the litterbox? Is there unrest between the family cats? There are many reasons why cats stop using their litterboxes. Do a little detective work to try to figure out what is going on.

Enrichment for the Indoor Cat

Many indoor cats are bored with their life! And when bored, many cats get into trouble as they try to entertain themselves with your furniture, plants and belongings. In addition, bored cats often get fat and lazy because they simply have nothing to do. To insure a healthy cat (behaviorally and medically) providing them with enrichment is critical.

The following strategies can help your indoor cat lead a more fulfilled life.

Food Gathering

Cats are hunters remember. Hiding food around the house for the cat to forage for instead of giving it in a bowl is an excellent form of mental and physical stimulation. You can hide individual kibbles or small piles. The cat's acute sense of smell will allow her to find the food. Vary your hiding places daily.

Place kibble in feeder balls so that your cat has to work for her food. There are commercially available cat feeder balls available but any small ball with a hole cut out can be used.

Water Gathering

Cats like running water so instead of a bowl of water - purchase a cat water fountain so that drinking is more stimulating.

Visual Stimulation

Provide a room with a view - provide your cat with a couple of window seats so that they can observe the outside world.

Place bird feeders outside of the windows so the cat has something interesting to watch.

Auditory Stimulation

Purchase a bird song CD and play it occasionally for a few minutes. The sound of birds is biologically significant and your cat will surely be interested.

Catnip & Silver vine

Only about 60% of cats respond to catnip but if yours is one of them, provide a small pile of catnip several times each week. Silver vine is another stimulant that you can provide to your cat.

Play Stimulation

Provide your cat with a rigorous play session twice a day at roughly the same time (cats like routine). The sessions only have to be about 10 minutes long (longer is okay if both of you are having fun) so you should be able to squeeze it into your day.

Some suggestions for play include:

1. Laser pointers (make sure the end the game by placing the laser beam onto a toy that your cat can "capture").
2. Fishing-pole type toys
3. Feather dancer type toys
4. Balls
5. Pipe cleaners, bottle caps, soda bottle caps, wooden clothes pins, etc.
6. Puzzle toys are great for self-play (Example: Peek-a-price toy box)

Scratching Posts

Scratching is a normal cat behavior that serves many functions for your cat. Providing a variety of interesting scratching posts around the house will give your cat the opportunity to perform this natural behavior without ruining your furniture.

1. Provide both vertical and horizontal scratching posts.
2. Provide posts with a variety of substrates - corrugated cardboard, sisal rope, natural wood and loop-less carpet (their claws get stuck in the looped carpet and they will stop using it).
3. Encourage your cat to use her post with catnip or toys.
4. Reward use with verbal praise of a treat after use.

Cat Grass

You can grow containers of cat grass for your cat to gnaw on.

Rawhide

If your cat is a chewer - provide her with rawhide sticks to chew and carry around.

Clicker Training

Yes, you can train your cat!!! Cats can be trained to do anything a dog can do.

Clicker training is a training technique that is based on the science of how animals learn.

First - pair the sound of the clicker with a food treat. Once you have done this *Pavlovian Conditioning* you can use the sound of the clicker to "mark" the behavior you want to reward.

You can purchase a book entitled "Clicker Training for Cats" through the website www.clickertraining.com where there is plenty of great information on clicker training your cat. There are also You Tube videos showing clicker training for cats.

Outside Time

The outside world is very stimulating for cats but there is risk just letting your cat outside (traffic, dogs, wild animal bites, etc.). You can provide your cat with safe outdoor time by building a screened-in enclosure or by teaching her to walk on a harness and leash and taking her for walks. The Purrfect cat fence is a great option. (www.purrfectfence.com)

Behavioral Adoption Counseling - CATS

1. SETTLE IN TIME

Cats don't really like change so going to a new house can be very stressful for your new cat. The best thing to do to help him settle in is to set up a special room, complete with everything he/she needs (food, water, litter box, toys) making sure there is also a place to hide. Bring the carrier into the room and open the door. Do not force the cat to come out, let him/her take his/her time.

Your new cat needs time to adjust to his/her new surroundings. He/she will most likely hide for the first few days. Don't worry! Hiding is the coping strategy that cats use in a new environment. Do NOT try to pull him/her from the hiding place. Just be patient and as soon as he/she feels comfortable, he/she will start coming out.

Visit your new cat often but don't force any interaction. Simply sit in the room with him/her. Bringing in a dish of tuna fish or other yummy treat can also help lure the cat out and help to form a positive association with you. Once the cat stops hiding and comes out to you when you visit you can let him/her out into the whole house.

2. LITTERBOX

You don't need to teach a cat to use a litter box – just let him/her know where it is. Cats prefer unscented litter and the clumping varieties are preferred by most. Some cats do fine with covered boxes but they trap odor and some cats won't use them. Make sure the litter box is not too small for the cat to “do their business”. And the most important thing is to keep the litter box clean – scoop daily and change completely once a week.

3. SCRATCHING

Cats need to scratch on things for claw maintenance and to mark their territory - this is very normal cat behavior. To safeguard against damage to your furniture, provide your cat with a few scratching posts. Make sure the posts are placed in a prominent area in the house. The post should be tall and stable (though some cats prefer horizontal marking posts instead of the vertical type). The posts covered in sisal rope are preferred but cats also like corrugated cardboard or even natural wood like a log (loop carpeting is not preferred by cats).

4. INTRODUCTION TO RESIDENT CATS

Your new cat and resident cat/s will be able to smell each other from under the door where the new cat is living. Putting treats near the door will help form a positive association between the cats. To help them get to know each other do some ‘scent exchange’ by petting each cat with a washcloth or a sock on your hand several times a day (without washing the cloth in between). If you can't pet the new cat for the first few days, just leave the cloth with your other cat/s scent in the room over night.

After a few days start putting your resident cat/s in the new cat's room and let the new cat explore the house for an hour or so each day. This will allow the resident cat/s to get to know the new cat's scent and will allow the new cat to get the lay of the land in the rest of the house.

Next - set up a baby gate at the door so the cats can see each other for a couple of days before you let them in the same room together (one baby gate on top of another will prevent them from jumping over). Putting treats on either side of the gate will add some positive association. Several short sessions each day of allowing them to see each other is best.

The next step is to set up some short controlled introductions. Bring the cats into the same room and provide them each with a dish of tuna fish. At first the dishes should be at opposite sides of the room. Do this daily, moving the dishes closer each day.

This process can take a few days, several weeks or even a few months. Go at the cats pace. A slow introduction will go a long way to improve the future relationship of the cats.

5. INTRODUCTION TO RESIDENT DOGS

Make sure to have that special room for your new cat. After she is coming out from hiding in that room, you can start to introduce her to the house with the dog outside. When you are ready for the dog and cat to meet, make sure the dog is behind a baby gate and can't get to the cat. Any time you are going to introduce them without the gate, the dog should be on leash so that he/she doesn't learn that chasing the cat is fun. Even after you think the dog and cat are okay together make sure the cat has an escape route should the dog ever trigger to chasing the cat. You can do this using a baby gate in a doorway that the cat can jump over or run under to escape for safe escape. You should also have a few cat trees or other high places for the cat to escape to when in the room with the dog.