



ALLEY CAT RESCUE

AN ALLIANCE FOR CAT PROTECTION

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Preventing and Resolving Common Cat Behavioral Issues

Studies show that behavioral problems with cats is a common reason for pet relinquishment (Salman, M.D. et al., 1998; Salman, et al., 2000). Therefore, a further understanding of the causes and solutions for behavioral problems should lead to decreased rates of surrender. “Problem” cat behaviors can be a clue that something is wrong—sometimes medically—so guardians should pay close attention to behavioral changes.

Litter Box Issues

Problem: This is probably the most common cat behavioral issue leading to owner relinquishment (Herron, 2010). Cats will urinate and defecate outside of the litter box which creates a mess and hassle. Cats are very easy to litter box train, usually just showing them the litter box is enough. Therefore, if a cat is relieving themselves outside of the box there is likely an issue occurring beyond litter box training. If you’ve eliminated any environmental factors that could be causing your cat to not use the litter box and she continues to have issues, please have your cat examined by your vet immediately; it may be a medical issue.

Causes & Solutions:

- Environmental:
 - Dirty box. If the litter box is dirty, the solution may be as simple as scooping it everyday.
 - Preferred type of litter. Try switching litter. The brand, texture, smell of litter may be irritating your cat.
 - Preferred type of litter box. Some cats like more privacy, so a box with a lid is great; some don’t. Think about the size of the box and the height of the walls.
 - Preferred placement of the litter box(es). Make sure the litter box is not in a high traffic area and if you have more than one, place them in different areas of the house. For example, one upstairs and one downstairs.
 - If you have multiple cats make sure there are enough litter boxes. The go-to rule is to have one litter box for each of your cats plus one extra.
 - Stress. Evaluate if any large changes occurred in the home. Cats can relieve themselves out of the litter box due to stress.
- Medical:
 - Urinary Tract Infection
 - Feline Interstitial Cystitis
 - Kidney Stones
 - Endocrine diseases

- Declawing. If a cat was declawed, she will often stop using the litter box. The coarse texture of the litter is painful for their sensitive paws post-surgery.

Destructive Scratching

Problem: Scratching is a natural behavior for cats. It helps them remove the dead layer of their claws, stretch their bodies, and mark their territory. Cat parents should be aware that scratching in moderation is normal and necessary for cats and [declawing](#) is not an appropriate or humane solution.

Causes & Solutions:

- Nowhere for cat to scratch non-destructively. Provide your cat with scratching posts and show her how to use them to redirect her behavior.
- Preferred types of scratching posts/pads. Provide your cat with lots of scratching options. Consider the material (cardboard, carpet, rope, wood). Consider the shape, size, height, placement.
- Objects are desirable for cats. Cats may like the feeling of materials such as cloth for scratching. These surfaces can be covered by double sided sticky tape, sandpaper or carpet runner to discourage inappropriate scratching. You can also use non-toxic sprays that contain ingredients cats dislike.
- Long nails. Regularly trim the cat's nails and buy plastic caps (Soft Paws) to be put on the nails.
- Calming additives. Try plug-in diffusers or sprays that simulate a cat's natural pheromones.

Aggression

Problem: Cats may act aggressively towards their guardians or other cats (and dogs) in the house. When a cat behaves aggressively towards another cat it can lead to problem behaviors from the "victim" cat as well. A certain amount of aggression is normal for cats because aggression can be used in play behaviors.

Causes & Solutions:

- Boredom. Cats, especially indoor cats, are prone to boredom and act out as a result. Guardians can provide toys for the cat to channel aggression in a healthy way.
- Training as a kitten. Humans may have inadvertently become too aggressive with a cat when she was a kitten and taught the cat aggressive behaviors.
- Illness. If a cat is in pain, she can become agitated and act out aggressively. If your cat suddenly becomes aggressive, take her to the vet to get a check-up.
- Cat is intact. Intact male cats are prone to aggression due to increased testosterone levels. Both male and female intact cats may also behave aggressively to defend their territory. It is best to spay/neuter a cat when they are kittens.
- Redirected aggression. Cats can act out aggressively when they become scared or upset. Guardians should be careful when handling cats during difficult situations. Learn common signs your cat is getting upset: swishing of the tail, dilated eyes, and bristling of the hair. Agitated cats should be given some space to calm down.

Over-Activity at Night

Problem : In the wild, cats are most active at dawn and dusk. Domestic cats will often have this instinct even when living in a home. This behavior can also occur when cats are inactive during the day while their guardians work all day.

Causes & Solutions:

- Sleep all day and play all night. Increase your cat's activity level during the day. Make sure to play with your cat before bedtime and let the cat get some exercise. Provide toys that move when activated by motion.
- Install a window perch. This will provide your cat entertainment throughout the day, preventing boredom and hyperactive at night.
- Adopt a companion. If you only have one cat, a companion can keep her occupied and active while you're gone during the day and while you sleep. This helps keep the cat active and entertained and provides a home for another cat!

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