

Feline Social Behaviors

If you've noticed a sudden change in your cat's behavior that includes changes toward your other cat(s), it's important to make an appointment with your vet. Any change in an animal's behavior could indicate a medical problem that only a veterinarian can diagnose and treat.

It's impossible to estimate how well any particular pair or group of cats will ultimately tolerate each other. Some cats are unusually territorial, may never adjust to sharing their house, and may do best in a one-cat family. However, some conflict behavior between cats can be successfully resolved. To do this, you might need help, both from your veterinarian and an animal behavior specialist who is knowledgeable in cat behavior. Working with difficult problems between family cats will take time; think in terms of months not weeks, and commitment from you. Don't give up without consulting the appropriate experts. You may have to keep the cats totally separated from each other while you're working on the problems or at least preventing contact between them in situations that may lead to a fight.

Common Types of unsocial Behaviors between Cats

Territorial: Cats are very territorial, much more so than dogs. Territorial behavior occurs when a cat feels that his territory has been invaded by an intruder. Depending on where your cat spends his time, he may view your whole neighborhood as his territory. Female cats can be just as territorial as males. The behavior patterns include chasing and ambushing the intruder, as well as hissing and swatting when contact occurs. Territorial problems often occur when a new cat is brought into a household, when a young kitten reaches maturity, or when a cat encounters neighborhood cats outside. It's not uncommon for a cat to be territorial toward one cat in the family, and friendly and tolerant to another.

Inter-male: Adult male cats normally tend to threaten, and sometimes fight with, other males. These behaviors can occur as sexual challenges over a female, or to achieve a relatively high position in the cats' loosely organized social hierarchy. This type of behavior involves much ritualized body posturing, stalking, staring, yowling and howling. If one cat is injuring another, completely separate and seek professional help. *Intact males appear more likely to fight in this way than are neutered males.*

Defensive: Defensive behavior occurs when a cat is attempting to protect himself from a scary situation he believes he cannot escape. Defensive postures include crouching with the legs pulled in under the body, laying the ears back, tucking the tail, and possibly rolling slightly to the side. The eyes are often dilated. This posture allows a cat to have all weapons, his claws, ready to defend himself if the need arises. Continuing to approach a cat that's in this posture is not appropriate. A cat showing these postures should be given space.

Redirected: This type of behavior is directed toward another animal, or person, who didn't initially provoke the behavior. For example, a cat sitting in the window may see an outdoor cat walk across the front yard. Because he can't respond directly to the outdoor cat, and he is becoming more agitated he may instead swat at, or bite the other family cat who is sitting next to him in the window. It can sometimes take a while to recover and become relaxed again so keeping the cats apart until the one cat is calm is best.

What You Can Do

- If your cat's behavior changes suddenly, your first step should always be to contact your veterinarian for a thorough health examination. Cats often hide symptoms of illness until they're seriously ill. Any change in behavior may be an early indication of a medical problem.
- Spay or neuter any intact pets in your home.
- Start the slow introduction process over from the beginning. You may want to talk to an animal behavior specialist to help you successfully reintroduce a cat to your home.
- Maintain a calm environment and increase the resources you have for your cats. Add another litter box, add an additional bowl of food in a second spot, and add a cat tree if possible. The more resources available, the happier cats are.
- In extreme cases, consult your veterinarian for a referral to a specialist.
- If your cats are fighting, prevent future fights by keeping the cats totally separated from each other while you're working on the problem, or at least preventing contact between them in situations likely to trigger a fight.

What Not To Do

- Don't allow any fighting to continue. The more often cats fight, the worse the problem is likely to become. To stop a fight in progress, make a loud noise, such as blowing a whistle, squirting the cats with water, or throwing something soft at them. Don't try to pull them apart.
- Punishment is more likely to make the problem worse than resolve the issue

Because their social organization is somewhat flexible, some cats are relatively tolerant of sharing their house and territory with multiple cats. It's not uncommon for a cat to tolerate some cats, but not get along with others in the house. Having an enriched environment is essential for any cat, but even more so if you have multiple.

The factors that determine how well cats will get along together are not fully understood. Cats who are well-socialized (they had pleasant experiences with other cats during their early development) will likely be more sociable than those who haven't been around many other cats but it's not a guarantee. Sometimes siblings or Mother and offspring get along well but anything is possible with cats and that's why we are here to help.

**Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions about your cat's behavior.
Call our free pet behavior help line at (503) 416-2983.**