

Teaching Your Cat Good Manners

Establishing the relationship between you and your cat can either fall in place smoothly or take patience and time.

This article is not about how to train your kitten to rollover or sit. It's about setting boundaries, such as him not jumping on the table or swinging of the curtains, using a scratching post as opposed to your speakers or that beautiful sofa you have. It's about getting him to use the litter box instead of the inside of your closet or your best cosy comforter!

Our job as owners is to make the cat understand what we will and won't accept. With setting your boundaries you are showing him that you rank #1 when it comes to hierarchy.

So how are you going to do that? It is common sense really... Make all experiences rewarding for your cat when he does something you want him to do, however it should not be such a pleasant experience if he's doing something he shouldn't be doing.

Here are some basic troubleshooting tips:

LITTER BOX TRAINING

When the majority of people see a wet spot on the floor, carpet or wherever it may be, their initial reaction is to go and get their cat, take him to the litter box and hold him down. Some people even rub the cat's nose in it! This is by any means not acceptable, and most likely will have a bad impact on the cat's psyche. If punished like this, he will associate the punishment with his litter box and avoid using it altogether. He also could get angry or anxious and lash out in some erratic behaviour.

The best way to deal with litter box training is containing him to a space where it is large enough for him as well as his litter box. Just until he gets the idea that this is where he needs to do his business! It is best to put him in his litter box about 10 - 20 minutes after he eats. You may want to shuffle the litter around for him a bit, in clean litter of course! This gives him something to mimic. Although this usually comes naturally to most cats, there are the occasional few that need a bit of help.

If he simply jumps out of the box, that's OK. It's just a reminder to let him know it's there. When you see him using the litter box, praise him by petting him a lot, talking to him and a little piece of his favourite treat could only be beneficial. On the other hand, if he has an accident on your carpet, don't yell at him just ignore him. Clean it up thoroughly to remove any remnants of urine or faeces odour that would attract him to do it there again. With little patience and reward system it won't take him long to master the concept of using his litter box.

SCRATCHING FURNITURE

For cats, scratching is a natural thing to do, and necessary too. It not only feels good on their claws, it helps to keep them filed down and marks the territory with their scent. You should always provide your cat with an outlet for scratching.

Sometimes your cat will favour an object such as and to no surprise your couch, speakers or a favourite rug. Usually, it's just one or two objects he will get his claws at. It's up to you then to make his favourite scratching object unappealing to him.

All cats are different, some do not like the feel of two-sided sticky tape, and a citrus or menthol scent repels others. You could also try covering his selected scratching spot with some sort of netting or loosely knitted fabric. Although this may not be the most attractive decor in your house, remember that it's only temporary. Cats do not like to get their nails snagged on anything and this could detour him.

If you are trying to get your cat to use that scratching post you bought him, make it attractive for him. Place it in a location where he feels comfortable, rub it down with some catnip, or you could buy a catnip spray to make it more appealing.

AGGRESSION

It may be cute when you and your new kitten are playing and at 8 weeks old he's biting and scratching your hand and tearing up anything he can get his little claws on. As time goes by though, and your cute little kitten turns into a 10-pound cat, things could seem a whole lot different! So, it is important to detour any bad behaviour as early as possible.

When it comes to cat aggression, there is most definitely a difference between normal behaviour and behaviour that you want to curb. For example, it is perfectly normal and acceptable that a cat will bite and scratch out of self-defence, when attacked or forced to do something he fears.

However, when you're walking through the comfort of your own home and all of a sudden your cat leaps out from behind a door and scratches or bites your ankles hard, this is not acceptable. This kind of attacks can have a number of reasons. The cat could be playing out his predatory hunting instincts, or is frustrated and angry because of something as simple as having no food in his dish. He may simply be feeling bored or left out and this is his way to ask for your attention. Never allow your cat to play with you in an aggressive way!

While pouncing and biting softly are normal actions when a cat is playing, vicious attacks are not. They are the kind of attacks that could send somebody to an emergency room. In some cases, vicious outbursts can be seen in cats that haven't been socialized properly while they were kittens. Your cat could also have a painful condition you may be unaware of, or an undetected neurological problem, so if your cat suddenly starts to exhibit unexplained outburst of aggression, it is important that you have him examined by a vet to make sure there's actually nothing physically wrong with him.

In the majority of healthy cats, biting is an action that is developed by miscommunication, or a learned habit. With a little persistence and patience though, this habit can easily be broken over time.

Cats are intelligent animals and can learn fast. Remember, they learn by praise and reward - stick to this law and the two of you will have many years of happiness together.