

Appendix 15

First Aid Advice for Common Feline Behaviour Problems

The following advice is designed to do no more than help manage the cat's behaviour problem in the short term and to help prevent the current problem from getting any worse. Specific advice aimed at resolving the problem cannot be given until a good understanding has been reached as to *why* the cat is behaving as he is, which can only be achieved through a combination of both behavioural and veterinary investigation.

General Advice for all Problems

Do not attempt to physically punish or reprimand the cat. This includes actions such as squirting the cat with water or shouting at the cat. A cat will not understand why you are angry and attempting to punish him is unlikely to be successful and more likely to make him frightened of you. If the attempt at punishment or reprimand causes the cat pain or fear the problem may escalate, or other more serious behaviour problems may develop (Fig. A15.1).

Behaviour problems can often be linked to medical disorders, so it is important that the cat is given a veterinary examination to rule out or treat any possible underlying physical cause or contributory factor. If problem behaviours persist or are severe it is important to seek professional help via your veterinary surgery from a suitably qualified feline behaviourist.

House Soiling

Is your cat going to the toilet (eliminating) in the wrong place or is he scent marking?

If your cat is going to the toilet in the wrong place:

- He will squat down to either urinate or defecate.
- You will find urine in puddles on horizontal surfaces, usually on the floor.

If he is eliminating, what are the first things to do?

- Make sure that the cat has access to at least one litter tray.
- Try placing a litter tray where the cat is currently going to the toilet. If the cat uses it, it can be moved to a more appropriate place later.
- Try providing additional litter trays – many cats prefer one area to urinate and a separate area to defecate so also make sure that there is sufficient distance between the litter trays.
- If you have recently changed to a different cat litter, go back to the old type.



Fig. A15.1. Do not attempt to punish the cat. It is unlikely to be successful and if the attempt at punishment causes the cat pain or fear, then the problem may become worse, or other behaviour problems may develop.

- Make sure that the litter trays are cleaned frequently and thoroughly:
 - Remove soiled and wet patches 2–3 times daily or as soon as they appear.
 - Clean and refresh the tray at least 1–2 times a week.
- Make sure litter trays are positioned well away from the cat's food, water, doors, windows or any place where the cat is likely to be disturbed.
- Make sure that the litter tray(s) are big enough to be comfortable for the cat, and that they contain enough litter for the cat to dig into and bury its waste.
- Clean soiled areas in the house with a 10% solution of biological detergent, rinse and then dab or spray lightly with surgical spirit (always test a small area first).
- Try to keep the cat away from areas where he normally soils; shut doors, block access with furniture or cover with a strong, impermeable and easy to clean covering (see Appendix 11).

If your cat is scent marking:

- Your cat will stand up and squirt urine backwards onto a vertical surface.
- You will find urine marks on walls and other vertical surfaces, plus sometimes a puddle underneath where it has run down the wall.

If he is scent marking (spraying), what are the first things to do?

- If the cat is unneutered, and is not to be used for breeding, arrange neutering as soon as possible. Urine marking is a normal behaviour and a part of sexual advertising in entire (uncastrated) male cats. Entire females may also scent mark this way when they are in season.
- Deny the cat access to the areas that are most often targeted unless this results in increased urine marking in other areas.
- Clean marked areas with a 10% solution of biological detergent or odour elimination product, rinse well and then dab or spray lightly with surgical spirit (always test a small area first).
- The use of a fraction 3 synthetic feline facial pheromone spray may help by altering the message conveyed in the scent mark. For this to be effective:
 1. Rinse the area really well after using the biological detergent or odour elimination product, or don't use any at all as these chemicals can also deactivate the pheromone.
 2. Spray the area well with the pheromone spray (4–5 sprays) every day for 3–4 weeks. Clean the area as before if the cat marks the same area again.
- Stress is most likely the underlying cause. Products designed to reduce or manage feline stress suggested by your vet or nurse/technician may help.
- Keep a diary to help identify possible sources of stress.

Aggression to People

Misdirected play

Not all biting and scratching is aggressive. When cats and kittens play, it is practice of predatory or defence skills, which means that teeth and claws are involved, so if play is directed towards us it can easily be mistaken for aggression.

How to tell if it is misdirected play:

- The cat is most likely to pounce on and bite moving hands and feet.
- There is unlikely to be any vocalization.
- The cat's body posture is likely to be forward and alert ([Fig. A15.2](#)).



Fig. A15.2. Typical 'play' body posture more likely to be seen if attacks on people are due to misdirected play.

What should you do?

- If the cat attacks you keep still. Movement can trigger further biting and scratching. When the cat releases his grip, withdraw your hand or foot very slowly.
- Try to re-direct the cat onto a moving toy.
- Do not encourage the cat or kitten to play with hands or feet.
- Increase play in general with toys that keep the hands well away from the part of the toy with which the cat is playing, such as wand toys (Fig. A15.3), motorized toys and ‘bat and chase’ toys.

How to tell if it is aggression:

- The cat is likely to become aggressive when approached or touched.
- The cat is likely to hiss, spit, growl or shriek.
- The cat’s body posture is likely to be back and lowered, with ears flattened sideways or back (Fig. A15.4).

What should you do?

- Stop any interactions immediately, or do not attempt to approach your cat if he is showing signs of feeling frightened, agitated, or angry and likely to become aggressive, e.g. ears flattened backwards or to the sides; swishing tail; staring with dilated pupils; low growling and/or hissing; ‘fluffed up’ coat and/or tail (piloerection).
- Keep yourself and any other people or other animals safe by leaving the room but be careful not to block any potential escape routes for the cat.
- Try to keep calm, do not shout, lash out at the cat, or make any sudden movements which might cause the cat to attack.
- If the cat becomes aggressive during petting, keep petting times very short.
- Seek veterinary advice, and referral to a qualified behaviourist as soon as possible.
- In the meantime, try to avoid situations that might result in aggression, and wear ‘tough’ clothing for protection.



Fig. A15.3. Encouraging the cat to play with toys that do not involve human interaction, or keeping hands well away from the cat’s teeth and claws can help to limit ‘playful’ predatory attacks on people. These toys can also be used to redirect the cat.



Fig. A15.4. A typical body posture of a fearful and defensively aggressive cat.

If someone is badly bitten or scratched:

- Wash the area well with soap and running water and seek medical attention immediately, especially if a child, elderly person, or an immune-suppressed individual has been bitten. Immediate medical attention is also essential if the individual experiences pain, swelling or redness around the wound, fever or headache after being bitten or scratched.

Fighting in a Multi-cat Household

Is it play or fighting?

If it is play:

- The cats are more likely to chase each other equally and swap roles.
- Claws remain retracted and bites are inhibited.
- There is no or very little vocalization.
- Following play the cats will want to remain near to each other, groom each other or rest very close or touching each other.

What should you do?

- Allow them to play and only intervene if it escalates into fighting.

If it is fighting:

- One cat is more likely to chase or 'pick on' the other.
- Claws are more likely to be extended.
- There is likely to be hissing, growling and/or 'shrieking'.

- They will generally try to avoid each other at other times or, if one cat is the victim, it will avoid or run away from the other cat.

What should you do?

- If the cats are fighting frequently and/or severely, separate them for 24–48 hours then attempt to reintroduce in the same way as you would introduce a new cat to the household (see Appendix 5). If fighting continues, separate them again until professional help is obtained.
- Feed the cats with a distance between them.
- Increase resource locations such as feeding areas, resting areas and litter trays (see Appendix 3).
- If fighting appears imminent place a physical barrier in between them.
- Be aware that cats sometimes re-direct aggression, so avoid handling or approaching cats that are highly aroused and aggressive.

Furniture Scratching

Cats need to scratch, both to help condition their claws by removing the outer ‘dead’ sheath, and as a way of both scent and visual marking. It is important therefore that cats are provided with suitable surfaces that they can scratch.

- Position a scratch post or pad near to the area that is currently being scratched.
- Pre-prepare the scratch post to encourage the cat to use it:
 - Transfer the scent from the currently scratched area by rubbing the post or pad over the area, or by rubbing a clean dry cloth over the area and then over the post or pad.
 - Pre-scratch the post with the tip of a screw.
 - Catnip or specially prepared feline synthetic interdigital pheromone with catnip can help to attract some cats to using the post or pad.
- Make the furniture less attractive for the cat to scratch (but do not do this until a viable alternative has been provided), by covering the area you do not want your cat to scratch with cling film, or a few short strips of double-sided sticky tape. If using tape test a small area first to ensure that it will not damage the furniture, and reduce the ‘stickiness’ so that it is unpleasant rather than uncomfortable for the cat when he touches it. A loose throw draped over a chair or sofa can also make it more difficult for a cat to get to and scratch the furniture.
- If scratching indoors is excessive it could be anxiety or stress related. The most common cause of feline stress is competition for resources with other cats. Following the advice contained in Appendix 3 may help if this is the case.

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