The Root of "Bad" Cats May be Stress

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Importance of Mental and Emotional Well-being

Easy Ways to Help Keep Your Cat Happy

Many behaviors cat owners deem "problematic" may actually be caused by mental or emotional stress. Cats are intelligent animals, sensitive to their physical and emotional environment. Aggression, elimination problems, or unwanted scratching are just a few examples of "bad" behavior that may be triggered by stress.

Negative Effects of Stress
We are familiar with the negative effects stress has on our behavior and health. We notice changes in our eating and sleeping habits, not to mention our physical and mental well-being. Stress has the same negative effects on our pets. The overall effect of stress manifests itself differently in each cat. Some may "act out" to relieve pent-up stress and others may internalize the stress and develop neurotic behaviors or habits. While we humans are able to find constructive ways to alleviate stress, our pets require our assistance.

Determining the Cause
There are several ways to alleviate stress experienced by your cat, but it is important to visit your veterinarian first to rule out any physiological causes. Changes in your pet's behavior may be a symptom of an underlying physical ailment or illness. Once you have eliminated physiological causes, consider one or all of the following approaches - relaxation, play/exercise, environmental changes, and pheromone therapy - to help alleviate stress and curb your cat's problematic behavior.

Relaxation
Help alleviate pent-up anxiety and stress by including a "relaxation" session as part of the quality time spent with your cat. This is a special time dedicated only to relaxing, so find a comfortable, quiet spot away from noise and distraction. Use a soft, soothing tone to praise and gently stroke or massage your cat. These sessions create periods of deep relaxation that benefit your anxious cat. Don't be surprised if you feel more calm and relaxed as well.

Play/Exercise

If inappropriate behavior is due to pent-up energy, increase playtime and spend lots of quality time with your cat. Play or Exercise therapy differs from regular play since it is structured quality time. Select a time of day when your cat seems to have the most pent-up energy and dedicate that time of day to play. Make it a routine. Bring out a favorite toy just for this purpose, alternating toys every day to prevent boredom. Interactive toys like the Da Bird or FroliCat™ Bolt and Dart Laser Cat Toys are ideal.

Initiate your cat's hunting response by simulating prey-like behavior with stop-and-go, jerky movement of the toy. Don't make the "hunt" too easy, but always allow your cat to successfully capture her "prey" in the end. Reward her success with a small treat like Freeze-Dried LiverSnax or Seafood Cat Treats. When the play session is over, put away the toy to reinforce the "special" nature of this toy.

Environmental Changes
Changes in your cat's environment can be the cause of problematic behavior, as well. Environmental changes include: the addition of a new pet or baby to your home, the move into a new home, and even a rearrangement of your furniture. To help your cat through these changes, make sure your cat has a quiet, safe place to retreat, such as a cat tree, hideaway, or window perch. In multi-cat households, make sure you provide several large litter boxes - at least one more than the total number of cats. Make sure they are easily accessible and well-maintained, but located out of the way of traffic areas in your home.

Pheromone Therapy
Certain chemicals, such as pheromones are able to trigger behavioral responses in cats. Feliway is a synthetic formulation that mimics facial pheromones in cats and has a relaxing, calmative effect to reduce urine spraying, scratching, and anxiety. Use the Comfort Zone Plug-In near your cat's bed or favorite place to rest. Keep in mind that your cat's bed or sleeping area should ideally be away from high-traffic areas and should foster a sense of privacy and security for restful sleep.

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