

Cat to Cat Aggression

Cats can form incredibly close bonds to one another, but they are territorial creatures and there can often be initial distrust between two newly introduced cats. Most cats can learn to get along, but it can be a slow process that requires patience, and a little help from their owner.

Indications that cats are not getting along:

- ❖ hissing, swatting, growling, etc
- ❖ eliminating outside of the litter box
- ❖ eating less, hiding more, over grooming
- ❖ actively fighting

What the owner can do:

- ❖ be sure to introduce the cats properly
- ❖ make sure all cats in the home are spayed/neutered
- ❖ provide a litter box for each cat in the home, plus one extra
- ❖ make sure the litter boxes are large, open, and placed in various areas of the home
- ❖ provide plenty of hiding and resting places, as well as lots of vertical space (eg. shelves or boxes on the wall) so the cats feel they have individual space
- ❖ provide plenty of resources (food/water dishes, toys, beds) so that your cats don't feel the need to fight for resources, and be sure to give each cat individual attention and play time
- ❖ work on establishing good relationships amongst the cats (reward them with high value food and treats when they are coexisting peacefully near each other)
- ❖ if all else fails, reintroduce the cats slowly. If the cats get agitated and keep their distance from each other, but otherwise engage in normal activities, this shouldn't be necessary. However, if the agitation continues to worsen and one routinely attacks or injures the other, or one continues to show signs of significant stress, reintroduction may be needed.

How to properly reintroduce cats:

- ❖ isolate the cats from one another. Do this for as long as it takes for both cats to be calm and relaxed in their separate areas. You can alternate their isolation areas so they both have access to various places in the home. Be sure to give them each lots of attention and play time while isolated
- ❖ once the cats are relaxed in their separate areas (this could take days or weeks), start to reintroduce them
- ❖ in the doorway that separates the two cats, secure a barrier (like a baby gate) and cover it with a sheet so the cats don't see each other. Do this while they are hungry and bring in some very high value food or treats. Lift the sheet until the cats see each other, then toss them each a treat and recover the barrier with the sheet. Do this a few times a day for a few days. As the cats become less concerned with one another, and they eat the treats faster, increase the amount of time they can see each other

- ❖ once this is going well, start giving meals on each side of the barrier. Start feeding them far from each other, and steadily decrease the distance between them each time. Never leave them unattended during these meals
- ❖ now you can begin to play with the cats together, using two wand toys – one in each hand and for each cat. Stand by the barrier and play with both cats for a short amount of time, increasing the amount of time at each play session. Reward them with a treat at the end of each session. Once this is going well, you can continue playing with them both at the same time, with the barrier removed.
- ❖ once they are eating and playing near each other without incident, you can give them supervised time together without a barrier. If you see any sign of bullying (stalking or staring hard) you should redirect the cats by bringing out toys or treats. Gradually increase their time together, until they can eventually be together unsupervised

Sometimes, when cats play roughly together, it can be unnerving to owners, and they can have a tough time distinguishing between rough play and actual fighting.

How to tell if your cats are simply playing rough:

- ❖ both cats are friendly and social, but sometimes stalk, chase, or pounce on each other
- ❖ they can cause superficial scratches, but no significant injury
- ❖ they typically exhibit this behaviour during high-energy times of day (morning and evening)
- ❖ the cats have moments of affection with one another. If your cats can sometimes be seeing cuddling or grooming each other, it's unlikely there is any true bullying or aggression happening

Getting two new cats to get along can sometimes be a long process, but it definitely pays off in the end. Having a harmonious environment for yourself and your beloved pets is a great reward.