

## **Aggression**

It is not considered normal for cats to be aggressive toward people – especially if they aren't provoked. However, that doesn't take into consideration the fact that for many cats, too much affection can be a provocation – to which they respond by aggressively lashing out. You need to be prepared for it, understand why it happens and plan ways to avoid provoking it in your cat.

### **Biting Aggression during petting**

Biting is the most common form of cat aggression towards people, and it is a kind of communication: your cat is telling you to back off. Your cat is next to you, purring as you pet her, when without warning she reaches back and bites you. What went wrong?

Cats bite because of a basic incompatibility between human and cat: we like to pet a whole lot longer than they like to be petted, there is a too-much-of-a-good-thing aspect of giving affection to any cat –the animal reaches a saturation point when she just can't take any more.

Another petting aggression is scratching. Same as biting it is a response you may be creating in your cat if you stimulate her physically more than she can handle. Also she might switch from a kitten-like frame of mind (enjoying being coddled) into an adult-mind (which rebels against being hold or stroked in your lap). And so she lashes out to assert her independence.

Another possibility is that she becomes hyper-aroused from affectionate contact, turning the coddling session into a physical wrestling.

### **Signs of mood change in your cat:**

- A direct stare
- Eyes squinting, narrowing
- Ears point flat back against her head
- Growling
- Tail swishing, especially the tip
- Tense body position, rigid
- Leans away from you
- Mouthing your hand or arm
- Pushes your hand away with paw

If you see any of the above signs or latest after the biting or scratching happened, stand up so that the cat falls gently to the floor. Do not try to lift her down. Leave the cat alone for a while until she has gathered herself and is her normal self again.

Sometimes cats, especially kittens, show “aggressive” behavior towards you by “attacking” you feet or hands. In this case be prepared with a squirt bottle or water pistol or clap your hands and say “No!” sharply to interrupt what she was going to do to you. You can also hold her up by the scruff and say “No!” firmly, then put her down and walk away, ignoring her.

When a cat climbs on you, kittens love to climb up your legs, you want to make it a very unpleasant experience by saying “No!” and whirling around as fast as you can, or by jumping up and down to dislodge her. It will take only one or two of these energetic jostling on your part to cure a cat of using you as a climbing post.

Taking size and weight into account, a cat can be a respectable opponent. While dogs have “only” their teeth, cats will use in addition their claws when feeling in need to defend themselves.

As a first advice, never try to pick up an agitated cat in order to calm it down. What you might think is physical comfort, the cat can interpret as dominating behaviour from your side. Or – worse – as encouragement for her behaviour. Leave the upset cat to itself until it calmed down and comes back out of its shell by herself.



Is the **aggression out of hunting instinct**? Many times this shows in a cat attacking you. You pet is and from one moment to the next it starts biting and kicking your hands and your arm really hard. Do you usually use your hands and feet to play with your kitty? You have to stop that immediately. A cat has to know that the human body is taboo for wrestling exercises. Watch the cats body signs while you are petting it. Indications that your cat loses the fun in getting petted are:

- the tail starts twitching and ponders the floor
- the skin ripples in waves
- the body becomes stiff, the head is pulled in
- the cat changes its body position
- the purring stops
- the ears are back
- the pupils are wide
- the whiskers are pointing forward
- the cat takes the petting hand (or foot) gently with the teeth
- the cat starts starring

If you see any of these signs, stop petting immediately and wait for the cat to make the next move. She either will get up and walk away or calms down again and starts rubbing her head against you, asking you to continue. Having established a healthy communication level, where both sides are watching out for signs will build the trust and confidence of your relationship.

If your cat is the only cat, you might need to consider getting a playmate. Your cat is bored and therefore jumps at anything that is moving (including your hands and ankles). If you can't make yourself go for a second cat, you have to offer your bored kitty excitement in form of play with a feather or at least the laser. Although the feather would be more effective, because it satisfies the

cats need for actually catching and “killing”. Spend 10-20 minutes at least twice a day with your cat. Praise her with petting and treats if she targets the toy rather than you.

Have a toy or any kind of distraction ready (ping pong ball, little mouse) that you can throw when the cat is about to jump you. Don’t run when you notice she is pouncing. Same like dogs, it awakes the hunting thrill in her.

If the toy distraction doesn’t work, try withdrawal of attention. Remove yourself from the cat immediately and just leave her behind. That is what mother cats do, when a youngster got over board with its play.

If this doesn’t work, try the water pistol technique. As soon as you see first signs of attacking, give the cat a squirt with the pistol. Not on the face, only on the body. Try to hide that it came from you. Do it before you see the first movement to attack so that it is an effective distraction. Repeat if necessary.

An additional help could be to use Pheromones like FELIWAY. They come as spray or as diffuser. The hormone like content helps the cat to calm down. You get FELIWAY at the vet or via internet.

Catnip can also be quite helpful. Catnip is a herb that you can get in dried form or as spray at the vet. But be warned: Catnip does not work with every cat. If it works, a cat can get used to it quite easily and then it loses its effect.



**Territorial aggression.** Especially in a multi-cat-household, anything can tip the harmony and good old friends all over sudden start fighting like “cats and dogs”. But also, aggression between cats can be very subtle. So subtle in fact, that it can happen right under your nose and you don’t even notice it. E.g. a lot of conflicts are solved through pure staring. The one who blinks or looks away first loses. Watch for these hidden signs and when/where they occur in order to be able to relax the situation.

Hierarchy and territory are closely knit which makes it sometimes really difficult to pin-point the reason or find the origin for the trigger. Here is a list of things you could do in any case to try smoothing the waves:

- add additional cat trees (big ones, which provide different levels and height)
- add additional litter boxes in different places
- add additional food/water bowls at distance from the existing ones
- spend more playtime with your cats

- spray Pheromones like FELIWAY or use FELIWAY diffuser
- create more hiding places
- add more toys as well as scratch pads/poles
- brush all of your kitties with the same brush on head and face