

KITTY DISCIPLINE

Cats evolved to live on their own, not in packs. Consequently, they don't automatically submit to or even understand overt signs of authority, such as physical punishment. What does this mean to you as a cat owner?

NEVER SPANK A CAT!

All it learns if you do is:

- 1) Don't do the offending behavior around you (which makes it difficult to teach it not to do), and
- 2) Humans are totally irrational creatures that get suddenly violent for no reason (which makes them want to avoid you--so much for cuddling...)

Training a cat involves some basic principles:

UNTIL YOU TRAIN A CAT WHAT TO DO, IT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT NOT TO DO

Always combine correction with guidance toward the proper behavior! For example, kitty shows signs of wanting to use the carpet for *You Know What*. This is normal--after all, instinct says to bury the waste; it doesn't say anything about clay litter. **DO NOT PUNISH THE KITTY!** Distract kitty (don't yell or spank) if it hasn't already started, pick it up and carry it to the litter box. Place it inside, and praise it briefly. If kitty jumps out, OK. If kitty uses the box, wait until done, then praise profusely (an edible treat is never refused or wasted at this point).

Of course, sometimes you won't notice in time, and kitty will already have started, well, You Know What. Too late, buckaroo. It's beyond your control now. You will have to wait till kitty is done, take it to the box as above, and later clean up the area with an enzyme product. And next time, keep a closer eye on the kitty--having a new kid in the house is work, you know!

MAKE DOING THE RIGHT THING EASY, CONVENIENT AND REWARDING AFTER ALL, CATS ARE JUST LIKE US

In short, don't put the litter box somewhere hectic, or where kitty has to dodge kids and dogs to get to it. Don't let the litter box get dirty, or use too small a box. Don't leave meat thawing on the counter, or bread either (thawing or otherwise). Don't put kitty's post in a back room or a corner. Make the cat's instincts work for you.

NEVER GIVE A CAT THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO THE WRONG THING, UNTIL IT HAS BEEN TRAINED TO DO THE RIGHT THING

This means keeping kitty in a relatively "water" proof and scratchproof room when you aren't there to supervise (kind of like a kitty crib). When you are there, watch kitty *every minute!* They are like 2-yr-old kids: it only takes 10 seconds for trouble to happen. Cheer up, though--a kitty learns its lessons in a relatively short time (a few days to a week).

BE CONSISTENT!

For behavior requiring negative consequences (see “Squirt Bottle” below), EVERY TIME kitty does it, the negative consequences must occur! If it only happens sometimes, kitty won’t have a very strong reason to stop the behavior, being optimists at heart (“oh, it won’t happen this time....”)

For behavior meriting rewards, the rewards must happen EVERY TIME during the initial training. Later on, rewards can happen whenever the mood strikes you.

BE ON TIME!

Both positive (petting, praise, treats) and negative consequences must happen DURING the appropriate behavior in order to do any good. One second after the behavior ends is TOO LATE!

NEVER PHYSICALLY FORCE A KITTY TO DO THE RIGHT THING

Kitties hate being physically manipulated (part of that independence thing...). Try to get kitty to do the right thing on his own. Ex: To scratch a post, drag a string up the side. Any kitty worth his salt will grab at it. Half the time, once they are in scratching position, they will scratch!

And a special section on:

THE SQUIRT BOTTLE (MOMMY’S LITTLE HELPER)

- 1) Always have it handy, until initial training is over
- 2) Set it for long stream spray
- 3) Remember you are the kitty’s “mommy” now (guys, you too) so he will look to you for clues as to how to act when something unexpected happens.

Keeping this in mind:

NEVER LOOK AT KITTY WHEN SQUIRTING HIM

NEVER GIVE KITTY ADVANCE WARNING (shouting at him, for instance)

NEVER SQUIRT MORE THAN TWICE (cats’ hearing is good enough to figure out who is doing it by the third squirt)

NEVER LOOK AT KITTY IMMEDIATELY AFTER THIS DEVASTATING THING HAPPENS (you want him to think you are unaware anything happened)

The idea is to convince the kitty that the sofa/counter is dumping water on him when he touches it, with absolutely no connection to you, his mommy. Remember to keep him confined away from the “bad” places when you aren’t there to give the sofa/counter a hand...

Since most kitties hate water, they will soon stop doing the things that make water happen.

And an extra special note about biting & scratching:

Kitties get rough for three reasons:

- 1) Fear
- 2) Anger (very uncommon)
- 3) Playfulness

When dealing with your biting kitty, remember:

IT IS NOT HUMAN

(Much as we might like it to be)

You cannot assign it human motives, nor react to it as you would to a human. Cats rarely ever bite or scratch out of pure anger, and kittens never do. Physical punishment can make the situation worse if used improperly.

If your cat gets rough when afraid, **DO NOT PUNISH IT!** A frightened cat is not a logical creature, willing to calm down. Unless in a very dangerous situation, **DO NOT TRY TO RESTRAIN IT.** Restraint makes the cat more frightened. If possible, let the cat go until it calms down. If in a dangerous situation (outside, for example), quickly move the cat to a safe area and let it go. Don't delay: a frightened cat is stronger and faster than any human. No matter how good you are, you CANNOT hang onto a panicked cat.

If your kitty gets rough when playing, shame on you for getting a cutesy-wutesy 6 to 8-wk-old kitten, instead of an older one that had already learned its lesson from its littermates!! That said, you will have to take over for its momcat and littermates. You can correct kitten the way mom does: when it hurts, give kitten a tap on the forehead--hard enough to not be play, but not hard enough to hurt--and immediately end the play sessions.

Give kitty a few minutes to absorb what happened before starting playtime again. Repeat until kitty figures out what is going on.

Another trick that frequently works is to utter a high-pitched "ow" when kitty bites. This causes kitty to instinctively freeze for a second (this is how his littermates do it) but you must extricate your hand gently but quickly during that one second, and don't resume playtime for a few minutes.

Stick with it--a persistent kitty can take a while to train.

And last, a special note about destructive behavior:

**IT IS ALMOST ALWAYS CAUSED BY BOREDOM
IT IS EASIER TO PREVENT THAN TO CORRECT**

To prevent:

- 1) Don't get a single kitty--get two. The extra food and shots are far cheaper than your entire houseful of furnishings and souvenirs. (Additionally, they will be more affectionate, now that they have to compete for your attention....)
- 2) Confine kitty when not supervised.
- 3) Get kitty fixed at the earliest possible age--this keeps the energy level within manageable bounds. For most kitties, 6-mos-old is the appropriate age.