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# Introducing Your New Cat to Your Other Pets

**W**OULD<sup>N'T</sup> IT BE NICE if all it took to introduce a new cat to your resident pet were a brief handshake and a couple of "HELLO, My Name Is..." name-tags? Unfortunately, it's not quite that simple, which means you'll need to have some realistic expectations from the outset.

What are realistic expectations? First, it's recognizing and accepting that your pets may never be best buddies but will usually come to at least tolerate each other. Second, it's understanding the need to move slowly during the introduction process to increase your chances for success.

Some cats are more social than other cats. For example, an eight-year-old cat who has never been around other animals may never learn to share her territory (and her people) with other pets in the household. But an eight-week-old kitten separated from her mom and littermates for the first time might be glad to have a cat or dog companion.

Cats are territorial, and they need to be introduced to other animals very slowly so they can get used to each other before a face-to-face confrontation. Slow introductions help prevent fearful and aggressive problems from developing. Here are guidelines to help make the introductions go smoothly.

## Confinement

Confine your new cat to one medium-sized room with her litter box, food, water, and a bed. Feed your resident pets and the newcomer on each side of the door to this room, so that they associate something enjoyable (eating!) with each other's smells. Gradually move the dishes closer to the door until your pets can eat calmly while standing directly on either side of the door.

## The Old Switcheroo

Swap the sleeping blankets or beds used by all the cats so they each have a chance to become accustomed to the other cats' scents. You can even rub a towel on one animal and put it underneath the food dish of another animal.

Once your new cat is using her litter box and eating regularly while confined, let her have free time in the house while confining your other animals to the new cat's room. This switch provides another way for the animals to experience each other's scents without a face-to-face meeting. It also allows the newcomer to become familiar with her new surroundings without being frightened by the other animals.

Next, after the animals have been returned to their original designated parts of the house, use two doorstops to prop open the dividing door just enough to allow the animals to see each other, and repeat the whole process over a period of days—supervised, of course.

## Slow and Steady Wins the Race

It's better to introduce your pets to each other gradually so that neither animal becomes afraid or aggressive. You can expect a mild protest from either cat from time to time, but don't allow these behaviors to intensify. If either animal becomes fearful or aggressive, separate them, and start the introduction process once again with a series of very small, gradual steps, as outlined above.

Note: When you introduce pets to each other, one of them may send "play" signals which can be misinterpreted by the other pet as signs of aggression. If that's the case, always handle the situation as "aggression" and seek professional help from a veterinarian or animal behaviorist right away.

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# Introducing Your New Cat to the Litter Box

**M**OST OF US KNOW CATS are finicky eaters, but they can also be pretty picky when it comes to the other end of the digestive process—making use of a litter box. Fortunately, the following suggestions should keep your cat from “thinking outside the box.”

## Location, Location, Location

Most people are inclined to place the litter box in an out-of-the-way spot to minimize odor and prevent cat litter from being tracked throughout the house. But if the litter box ends up in the basement—next to an appliance or on a cold cement floor—your cat may be less than pleased for a number of reasons.

A kitten or an older cat may not be able to get down a long flight of stairs in time to get to the litter box. If the litter box is located in an area that she seldom frequents, she may not even remember where it is, especially during the first few weeks she’s welcomed into your home. If a furnace, washing machine, or dryer suddenly comes on and startles your cat while she’s using the litter box, that may be the last time she risks such a frightening experience. And if your cat likes to scratch the surface surrounding her litter box (which some cats do), she may find a cold cement floor unappealing.

So you may have to compromise. The litter box should be kept in a spot that affords your cat some privacy yet is also conveniently located. If you place the litter box in a closet or a bathroom, be sure the door is wedged open from both sides to prevent her from being trapped inside or locked out. Depending on the location, you might consider cutting a hole in a closet door and adding a pet door.

## Pick of the Litter

Research has shown that most cats prefer fine-grained litters, presumably because they have a softer feel. The new scoopable (clumping) litters usually have finer grains than the typical clay litter and are very popular. But high-quality, dust-free, clay litters are relatively small-grained and may be perfectly acceptable to your cat.

If you suspect your cat has spent part of his life outdoors and is likely to eliminate in your houseplants, try mixing some potting soil with your regular litter; pellet-type litters or those made from citrus peels are not recommended. Once you find a litter your cat likes, stick with it. Buying the least expensive litter or the brand that’s on sale any given week could result in your cat not using the litter box.

Many cats are put off by the odor of scented or deodorant litters. For the same reason, it’s not a good idea to place a room deodorizer or air freshener near the litter box. A thin layer of baking soda placed on the bottom of the box will help absorb odors without repelling your cat, and odors shouldn’t really be a problem if you keep the litter box clean. If you find the litter box odor offensive, your cat probably finds it even more offensive and won’t want to eliminate there.

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## What's the Magic Number?

You should have at least as many litter boxes as you have cats. That way, none of them will ever be prevented from eliminating in the litter box because it's already occupied. You might also consider placing litter boxes in several locations around the house, so that no one cat can prevent the other cats from getting access. We also recommend that you place at least one litter box on each level of your house.

It's not possible to designate a personal litter box for each cat in your household, as cats may use any litter box that's available, and that means a cat may occasionally refuse to use a litter box after another cat has used it. In this case, all of the litter boxes will need to be kept extremely clean and additional boxes may be needed.

## An Undercover Operation? Potential Problems of Covered Litter Boxes

Some people prefer to provide their cats with a covered litter box, but doing so may introduce some problems.

You may forget to clean the litter box as frequently as you should because the dirty litter is "out of sight, out of mind." A covered litter box traps odors inside, so it will need to be cleaned more often than an open one. A dirty, covered litter box is to your cat what a portapotty is to you!

A covered litter box may not allow a large cat sufficient room to turn around, scratch, dig, or position herself in the way she wants.

A covered litter box may make it easier for another cat to lay in wait and ambush the user as she exits the box; on the other hand, a covered litter box may feel more private, and timid cats may prefer it.

To discover which type of litter box your cat prefers, you may want to experiment by offering both types at first.

## Keeping It Clean

To meet the needs of the most discriminating cat, feces should be scooped out of the litter box daily. How often you actually change (replace) the litter depends on the number of cats you have, the number of litter boxes, and the type of litter you use. Twice a week is a general guideline for clay litter, but depending on the circumstances, you may

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- Solving Litter Box Problems

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need to replace it every other day or only once a week. If you clean the litter box daily, scoopable litter may only need to be changed every two to three weeks. If you notice an odor or if much of the litter is wet or clumped, it's time for a change. Don't use strong smelling chemicals or cleaning products when washing the litter box, as doing so may cause your cat to avoid the box. Some cleaning products are toxic to cats. Washing with soap and water should be sufficient.

## Liner Notes

Some cats don't mind having a plastic liner in the litter box, while others do. Again, you may want to experiment to see if your cat is bothered by a liner in the box. If you do use a liner, make sure it's anchored in place, so it can't easily catch your cat's claws or be pulled out of place.

## Depth of Litter

Some people think that the more litter they put in the box, the less often they will have to clean it, but that's a mistake. Most cats won't use litter that's more than about two inches deep. In fact, some long-haired cats actually prefer less litter and a smooth, slick surface, such as the bottom of the litter box. The fact is the litter box needs to be cleaned on a regular basis, and adding extra litter is not a way around that chore.

## "Litter-Training" Cats

There's really no such thing as "litter-training" a cat in the same way one would houstrain a dog. A cat doesn't need to be taught what to do with a litter box because instinct will generally take over. The only thing you need to do is provide an acceptable, accessible litter box, using the suggestions above. It's not necessary to take your cat to the litter box and move her paws back and forth in the litter; in fact, we don't recommend it, as such an unpleasant experience is likely to initiate a negative association with the litter box.

## If Problems Develop

If your cat begins to eliminate in areas other than the litter box, your first call should always be to your veterinarian. Many medical conditions can cause a change in a cat's litter box habits. If your veterinarian determines that your cat is healthy, the cause may be a simple behavior problem that can be resolved by using behavior modification techniques. Punishment is not the answer, nor is banishing your cat outdoors. For long-standing or complex situations, contact an animal-behavior specialist who has experience working with cats.

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# Positive Reinforcement

## Training Your Cat

**W**E ALL LIKE TO BE PRAISED rather than punished. The same is true for your cat, and that's the theory behind positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement means giving your pet something pleasant or rewarding immediately after she does something you want her to do. Because your praise or reward makes her more likely to repeat that behavior in the future, it is one of your most powerful tools for shaping or changing your cat's behavior. It's more effective to teach your pet what she should do than try to teach her what she shouldn't.

Correct timing is essential when using positive reinforcement. The reward must occur immediately—within seconds—or your cat may not associate it with the proper action. For example, when your cat uses her scratching post, you can throw a piece of dry cat food for her to chase as a reward. Many cats enjoy chasing (hunting) their food and it's good exercise too. But if you throw the food when she has stopped scratching the post and is walking toward you, she will think she's being rewarded for coming to you.

Consistency is also an important element in training. Everyone in the family should reward the same desired behaviors.

### Using Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement may include food treats, praise, petting, or a favorite toy or game. When your pet is first learning a new behavior, such as clawing the scratching post instead of your couch, she should be rewarded every time you catch her using her scratching post. You may even help shape her behavior of using the scratching post by spraying it with catnip (if she reacts positively to catnip) or enticing her with a toy that you dangle on the post. Taking your cat over to the scratching post,

positioning her paws on the post, and raking them along the post to show her what she's supposed to do will likely have the opposite effect of encouraging her to use the post. She may interpret your actions as frightening and uncomfortable. It's important to look at the world from her point of view.

Once your cat reliably offers the desired behavior, you may reward her with treats intermittently, for example, three out of every four times she does the behavior. Then, over time, reward her about half the time, then about a third of the time, and so on, until you're only rewarding her occasionally with a treat. Continue to praise her every time. Your cat will learn that if she keeps offering desired behaviors, eventually she'll get what she wants—your praise and an occasional treat. You won't be forever bound to carry a pocketful of goodies, but it's fun to surprise your cat from time to time.

### The Pros and Cons of Punishment

Punishment can be verbal, postural, or physical and is meant to make your pet immediately associate something unpleasant when she does something you don't want her

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to do. The punishment makes it less likely that the behavior will occur again. To be effective, punishment must be delivered while your pet is engaged in the undesirable behavior—in other words, “caught in the act.” If the punishment is delivered too late, even seconds later, your pet will not associate the punishment with the undesired behavior. The punishment will seem unpredictable to her.

Remember, cats do not act out of spite or revenge, and they don't have a moral sense of right and wrong. Never use physical punishment that involves discomfort or pain as this may cause her to bite, defend herself, or resort to other undesirable behaviors. Holding your cat's neck skin and shaking her may result in a frightened cat who scratches or bites to defend herself. And punishment might be associated with other stimuli, including people, that are present at the time the punishment occurs. For example, a cat who is punished for getting too close to a new baby may become fearful of, or aggressive toward, that baby—or toward other babies. That's why physical punishment is not only bad for your cat, it's also bad for you and others.

Punishment delivered by you may erode your cat's trust and frighten her. That's why punishment is most effective when it does not come directly from you. For example, if your cat enjoys scratching the couch, you may apply special double-sided tape to those surfaces. Cats rarely like sticky paws. Your cat will perceive the couch, instead of you, as delivering the punishment. In this way, too, your cat is more likely to avoid the undesirable behavior when you're not around. However, it is critical that while discouraging undesirable behaviors, you help your cat understand what you want her to do and provide appropriate outlets for her normal cat behaviors.

One of the reasons that cats are such fun companions is that when they're not sleeping, many of them enjoy playing. Playing helps your cat develop physically and behaviorally. Providing appropriate play outlets for your cat can reduce undesirable behaviors. Be sure your cat has safe toys to play with by herself, and don't underestimate the power of playing with your cat to strengthen the bond between you and enhance the quality of life for both of you.

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# Cat Toys and How to Use Them

**A**LTHOUGH CATS generally have different play styles than their canine counterparts, toys are as much a necessity for cats as they are for dogs. Toys help fight boredom and give cats an outlet for their instinctive prey-chasing behaviors. And when you are the one moving the toy around while your cat fishes for it, chases after it, or jumps in pursuit of it, playtime becomes a bonding experience for you and your cat.

## "Safe" Toys

Our mothers always told us "no playing ball in the house," but cats can usually participate in that forbidden exercise without knocking down a vase or a lamp (and being grounded for two weeks). Still, there are plenty of factors that may contribute to the safety of the toy they're batting around.

Many of those factors are completely dependent upon your cat's size, activity level, and preferences. Another factor to be considered is the environment in which your cat spends her time. Although we can't guarantee your cat's enthusiasm or her safety with any specific toy, we can offer the following guidelines.

## Be Cautious

The things that are usually the most attractive to cats are often the very things that are the most dangerous. Cat-proof your home by removing string, ribbon, yarn, rubber bands, plastic milk jug rings, paper clips, pins, needles, dental floss, and anything else that could be ingested. All of these items are dangerous, no matter how cute your cat may appear when she's playing with them.

Avoid or alter any toys that aren't "cat proof" by removing ribbons, feathers, strings, eyes, or other small parts that could be chewed and ingested.

Soft toys should be machine washable. Look for stuffed toys that are labeled as safe for children under three years of age and that don't contain any dangerous fillings. Problem fillings include things like nutshells and polystyrene beads. Remember that rigid toys are not as attractive to cats.

## Recommended Toys

### Active Toys

- Round plastic shower curtain rings, which are fun either as a single ring to bat around, hide, or carry, or when linked together and hung in an enticing spot.
- Plastic balls, with or without bells inside.
- Ping-Pong balls and plastic practice golf balls with holes to help cats carry them. Try putting one in a dry bathtub, as the captive ball is much more fun than one that escapes under the sofa. You'll probably want to remove the balls from the bathtub before bedtime, or you may lose some sleep, as two o'clock in the morning seems to be a prime time for this game.

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- Paper bags with any handles removed. Paper bags are good for pouncing, hiding, and interactive play. Plastic bags are not a good idea, as many cats like to chew and ingest the plastic.
- Sisal-wrapped toys, which are very attractive to cats who tend to ignore soft toys.
- Empty cardboard tubes from toilet paper and paper towels, made even more fun if you “unwind” a little cardboard to get them started.

### Comfort Toys

- Soft stuffed animals, which are good for several purposes. For some cats, the stuffed animal should be small enough to carry around. For cats who want to wrestle with the toy, the stuffed animal should be about the same size as the cat. Toys with legs and a tail seem to be especially enticing to cats.
- Cardboard boxes, especially those a little too small for your cat to fit into.

### Catnip

- Catnip-filled soft toys, which cats like to kick, carry, and rub. Catnip is not addictive and is perfectly safe for cats to roll in, rub in, or eat.
- Plain catnip can be crushed and sprinkled on the carpet or, for easier cleanup, on a towel placed on the floor. Catnip oils will often stay in the carpet, and although they're not visible to us, your cat will still be able to smell them.
- Catnip sprays rarely have enough power to be attractive to cats.
- Not all cats are affected by catnip. Some cats may become overstimulated to the point of aggressive play and others may become relaxed.
- Kittens under six months old seem to be immune to catnip.

### Get the Most out of Toys!

- Rotate your cat's toys weekly by making only a few available at a time. Keep a variety of types easily accessible. If your cat has a favorite, like a soft “baby” that she loves to cuddle with, you may want to leave that one out all the time.
- Provide toys that offer a variety of uses—at least one toy to carry, one to wrestle with, one to roll, and one to “baby.”
- Hide-and-seek is a fun game for cats. “Found” toys are often much more attractive than a toy which is obviously introduced.
- Many of your cat's toys should be interactive. Interactive play is very important for your cat because she needs active “people time”—and such play also enhances the bond between you and your pet. Cats generally engage in three types of play—“fishing, flying, and chasing”—and all types are much more engaging for cats when you are part of them.

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# Cats: Destructive Scratching

**A**lthough some people think a cat's scratching behavior is a reflection of her distaste for a couch's upholstery, a not-so-subtle hint to open the drapes, or a poorly conceived Zorro impersonation, the fact is that cats scratch objects in their environment for many perfectly normal reasons.

## Why Do Cats Scratch?

Cats scratch for many reasons, including:

- To remove the dead outer layer of their claws.
- To mark their territory by leaving both a visual mark and a scent—they have scent glands on their paws.
- To stretch their bodies and flex their feet and claws.
- To work off energy.

Because scratching is a normal behavior and one that cats are highly motivated to display, it's unrealistic to try to prevent them from scratching. Instead, the goal in resolving scratching problems is to redirect the scratching onto acceptable objects.

## Training Your Cat to Scratch Acceptable Objects

You must provide objects for scratching that are appealing, attractive, and convenient from your cat's point of view. Start by observing the physical features of the objects your cat is scratching. The answers to the following questions will help you understand your cat's scratching preferences:

- Where are they located? Prominent objects, objects close to sleeping areas, and objects near the entrance to a room are often chosen.

- What texture do they have—are they soft or coarse?
- What shape do they have—are they horizontal or vertical?
- How tall are they? At what height does your cat scratch?

Now, considering your cat's demonstrated preferences, substitute similar objects for her to scratch (rope-wrapped posts, corrugated cardboard, or even a log). Place the acceptable object(s) near the inappropriate object(s) that she's already using. Make sure the objects are stable and won't fall over or move around when she uses them.

Cover the inappropriate objects with something your cat will find unappealing, such as double-sided sticky tape, aluminum foil, sheets of sandpaper, or a plastic carpet runner with the pointy side up. Or you may give the objects an aversive odor by attaching cotton balls containing perfume, a muscle rub, or other safe yet unpleasant substances. Be careful with odors, though, because you don't want the nearby acceptable objects to also smell unpleasant.

When your cat is consistently using the appropriate object, it can be moved very gradually (no more than three inches each day) to a location more suitable to you. It's best, however, to keep the appropriate scratching objects as close to your cat's preferred scratching locations as possible.

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Don't remove the unappealing coverings or odors from the inappropriate objects until your cat is consistently using the appropriate objects in their permanent locations for several weeks, or even a month. They should then be removed gradually, not all at once.

### Should I Punish My Cat for Scratching?

NO! Punishment is effective only if you catch your cat in the act of scratching unacceptable objects and have provided her with acceptable scratching objects. Punishment after the fact won't change the behavior, may cause her to be afraid of you or the environment, and may elicit defensive aggression. Used by itself, punishment won't resolve scratching problems because it doesn't teach your cat where to scratch instead. If you do catch your cat in the act of scratching inappropriate objects, punish her in a way that prevents her from associating the punishment with you. Try making a loud noise (using a whistle, shaking a soda can filled with rocks, or slapping the wall) or using a water-filled squirt bottle. If you use other, more interactive techniques, she'll learn to refrain from scratching in your presence but will continue to scratch when you're not around.

### How Do I Trim My Cat's Claws?

To help keep them sharp, cats keep their claws retracted until they're needed. As the claws grow too long and become curved, they can't be retracted completely. You should clip off the sharp tips of your cat's claws on her front feet every two weeks or so. Clipping your cat's claws will also help prevent them from becoming snagged in carpets and fabrics, not to mention your skin!

Before trimming your cat's claws, help her get accustomed to having her paws handled and squeezed. You can do this by gently petting her legs and paws while giving her a treat. This will help to make it a more pleasant experience. Gradually increase the pressure so that petting becomes gentle squeezing, as you'll need to do this to extend the claw. Continue with the treats until your cat tolerates this kind of touching and restraint. It may take a little longer if she's not used to having her legs or paws handled.

Apply a small amount of pressure to her paw—with your thumb on top of her paw and your index finger underneath—until a claw is extended. You should be able to see the pink or "quick," which is a small blood vessel. Don't cut into this pink portion, as it will bleed and be painful for your cat. If you cut off just the sharp tip of the claw, the "hook," it will dull the claw and prevent extensive damage to household objects and to your skin.

There are several types of claw trimmers designed especially for pets. These are better than your own nail clipper because they won't crush the claw. Until you and your cat have become accustomed to the routine, one claw or foot a day is enough of a challenge. Don't push to do all of them at once, or you'll both have only negative memories of claw clippers!

### Should I Declaw My Cat?

Declawing is a procedure whereby a veterinarian amputates the end digit and claw of a cat's paws—similar in scope to cutting off a person's finger at the last joint. The Humane Society of the United States opposes declawing when done solely for the convenience of the owner. Scratching is a natural behavior for cats and can be directed to appropriate items. Declawing can also lead to litter box or aggression problems. However, if you feel that you must either declaw your cat or give her up, we would rather see your cat stay in her home and be your lifelong companion. If you do decide to have your cat declawed, we suggest that you have the surgery done at the same time she's spayed (or neutered, if your cat is a male). Never have rear paws declawed, and be sure to always keep your cat indoors; without claws to defend herself or climb to escape, your cat is in much greater danger outdoors—and the great outdoors is a very unsafe place for cats to begin with.

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# Preparing Pets for a New Baby

**C**ONGRATULATIONS, YOU'RE EXPECTING A BABY! If your family already includes a pet, you'll need to help that first "baby" adjust to the new one you'll soon bring home. You can help your pet cope with this big change in much the same way parents help children understand that a new brother or sister will be joining the family. By following the tips below, you can ease your pet's stress, help her welcome your new baby, and ensure that your pet stays where she belongs—with you and your growing family.

## Can I Keep My Cat?

If you're pregnant, you've probably heard of toxoplasmosis because it can cause serious birth defects. However, toxoplasmosis is a rare disease in the United States and one that can easily be avoided. While the disease-causing parasite can be found in the feces of cats who ingest raw meat, birds, mice, or contaminated soil, toxoplasmosis is more commonly found in uncooked or undercooked meat.

If you're concerned about possible exposure, ask your obstetrician to perform a simple blood test. If the result shows you were exposed to toxoplasmosis during pregnancy, you may be given medication, and your baby may be tested and treated soon after birth. Keep in mind that the odds of contracting toxoplasmosis during pregnancy are extremely low, and even lower for your baby. Being pregnant does not mean you have to give up living with and caring for your beloved cat. Toxoplasmosis is easily avoided by practicing good hygiene and responsible pet care. Just follow these simple steps to reduce the risk:

- Avoid handling or eating uncooked meat.
- Keep your cat safely indoors and away from wildlife.
- Have someone else clean the litter box daily.

- If you must clean the litter box, wear rubber gloves and thoroughly wash your hands afterward.
- Feed cats only commercially prepared cat food.

## How Will My Pet React?

No matter how much you plan ahead, the addition of a new family member may be difficult for your pet. Remember, your dog or cat was your first "baby" and is used to being the center of your attention. So it's understandable that she may experience something akin to sibling rivalry when you introduce a new human baby into your household.

You can minimize this feeling by working with her *before* you bring home your baby. For example, because your new baby will demand a lot of your time and energy, gradually accustom your pet to spending less time with you. Drastically decreasing attention and frequently scolding, ignoring, or isolating your pet *after* the baby comes home will likely make your pet feel stressed. If your pet is particularly attached to the mother-to-be, another family member should develop a closer relationship with the animal. That way, your pet can still feel loved and provided for while mom is busy with the baby.

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## How Can I Prepare My Pet?

Below are several suggestions to make introducing your pet and baby safer and smoother for all. Be sure to carry out these changes months before the baby's arrival to best prepare your pet.

- Take your pet to the veterinarian for a routine health exam and necessary vaccinations.
- Spay or neuter your pet. Not only do sterilized pets typically have fewer health problems associated with their reproductive systems, but they are also calmer and less likely to bite.
- Consult with a veterinarian and pediatrician if the thought of your newborn interacting with the family pet makes you uncomfortable. By working with these experts before your baby is born, you can resolve problems early and put your mind at ease.
- Address any pet training and behavior problems. If your pet exhibits fear and anxiety, now is the time to get help from an animal behavior specialist.
- If your pet's behavior includes gentle nibbling, pouncing, or swatting at you and others, redirect that behavior to appropriate objects.
- Get your pet used to nail trims.
- Train your pet to remain calmly on the floor beside you until you invite him on your lap, which will soon cradle a newborn.
- Consider enrolling in a training class with your dog, and practice training techniques. Training allows you to safely and humanely control your dog's behavior and enhances the bond between you and your pet.
- Encourage friends with infants to visit your home to accustom your pet to babies. Supervise all pet and infant interactions.
- Accustom your pet to baby-related noises months before the baby is expected. For example, play recordings of a baby crying, turn on the mechanical infant swing, and use the rocking chair. Make these positive experiences for your pet by offering a treat or playtime.
- To discourage your pet from jumping on the baby's crib and changing table, apply double-sided carpet tape to the furniture.

- If the baby's room will be off-limits to your pet, install a sturdy barrier such as a removable gate (available at pet or baby supply stores) or, for jumpers, even a screen door. Because these barriers still allow your pet to see and hear what's happening in the room, he'll feel less isolated from the family and more comfortable with the new baby noises.
- Use a baby doll to help your pet get used to the real thing. Carry around a swaddled baby doll, take the doll in the stroller when you walk your dog, and use the doll to get your pet used to routine baby activities, such as bathing and diaper changing.
- Talk to your pet about the baby, using the baby's name if you've selected one.
- Sprinkle baby powder or baby oil on your skin so your pet becomes familiar with the new smells.
- Finally, plan ahead to make sure your pet gets proper care while you're at the birthing center.

## What Do We Do after Our Baby Is Born?

Welcoming a new baby is exciting for your family. Remember when you first brought home your dog or cat? But before you bring your baby home from the hospital, have your partner or friend take home something with the baby's scent (such as a blanket) for your pet to investigate.

When you return from the hospital, your pet may be eager to greet you and receive your attention. Have someone else take the baby into another room while you give your pet a warm, but calm, welcome. Keep some treats handy so you can distract your pet.

After the initial greeting, you can bring your pet with you to sit next to the baby; reward your pet with treats for appropriate behavior. Remember, you want your pet to view associating with the baby as a positive experience. To prevent anxiety or injury, never force your pet to get near the baby, and always supervise any interaction.

Life will no doubt be hectic caring for your new baby, but try to maintain regular routines as much as possible to help your pet adjust. And be sure to spend one-on-one quality time with your pet each day—it may help relax you, too. With proper training, supervision, and adjustments, you, your new baby, and your pet should be able to live together safely and happily as one (now larger) family.

## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- Your Pregnancy and Your Cat

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BEHAVIOR  
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# Solving Aggression Between Family Cats

**I**F THE BATTLES between your feline family members are anything like the struggle between Cain and Abel, there are a few things you can do to prevent the “sibling rivalry” from reaching biblical proportions. Of course, it’s almost impossible to guess how well any particular pair or group of cats will ultimately tolerate each other: Some unusually territorial cats may never adjust to sharing their house and may do best in a one-cat family. But many aggression problems between cats can be successfully resolved, even if the two don’t end up best friends when all is said and done. You’ll need to commit time and effort to solve aggression problems between cats—don’t give up without consulting the appropriate experts.

## Common Types of Aggressive Behaviors Between Cats

### Territorial Aggression

Territorial aggression occurs when a cat feels that his territory has been invaded by an intruder. Cats are very territorial—much more so than dogs—and female cats can be just as territorial as males. The behavior patterns in this type of aggression include chasing and ambushing the intruder, as well as hissing and swatting when contact occurs. Territorial problems often occur when a new cat is brought into a household, when a young kitten reaches maturity, or when a cat sees or encounters neighborhood cats outside. It’s not uncommon for a cat to be territorially aggressive toward one cat in a family yet friendly and tolerant to another.

### Inter-Male Aggression

Adult male cats normally tend to threaten and sometimes fight with other males. These behaviors can occur as sexual challenges over a female or to achieve a relatively high position in the cats’ loosely organized social hierarchy. This type of aggression involves much ritualized body posturing, stalking, staring, yowling, and howling. Attacks are usually avoided if one cat “backs down” and

walks away. If an attack occurs, the attacker will usually jump forward, directing a bite to the nape of the neck, while the opponent falls to the ground on his back and attempts to bite and scratch the attacker’s belly with his hind legs. The cats may roll around biting and screaming, suddenly stop, resume posturing, fight again, or walk away. Cats don’t often injure one another this way, but you should always check for puncture wounds, which are prone to infection. Neutered males are much less likely to fight in this way—yet another great reason for having your animal sterilized.

### Defensive Aggression

Defensive aggression occurs when a cat is attempting to protect himself from an attack he believes he cannot escape. This can occur in response to punishment or the threat of punishment from a person, an attack or attempted attack from another cat, or any incident that makes the animal feel threatened or afraid. Defensive postures include crouching with the legs pulled in under the body, laying the ears back, tucking the tail, and rolling slightly to the side. These responses are not the same as the submissive postures dogs show because they’re not intended to “turn off” an attack from another cat. Continuing to approach a cat in this posture is likely to precipitate an attack.

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## Redirected Aggression

This type of aggression is directed toward another animal, or even a person, who didn't initially provoke the behavior. For example, an indoor cat sitting in the window may see an outdoor cat walk across the front yard. Because he can't attack the outdoor cat, he may instead turn and attack the family cat sitting next to him in the window.

## What You Can Do

- If your cat's behavior changes suddenly, your first step should always be to contact your veterinarian for a thorough health examination. Cats often hide symptoms of illness until they're seriously ill, and any change in behavior may be an early indication of a medical problem.
- Spay or neuter any intact pets in your home. The behavior of one intact animal can affect all of your pets.
- Start the slow introduction process over from the beginning. You may want to talk to an animal-behavior specialist for help implementing these techniques.
- In extreme cases, consult with your veterinarian about medicating your cats while you're working on a behavior-modification program. Your veterinarian is the only person who is licensed and qualified to prescribe medication for your cat, so don't attempt to give your cat any over-the-counter or prescription medication without some guidance. Animals don't respond to drugs the same way people do, and a medication that may be safe for a human could be fatal to an animal. Also keep in mind that medication, by itself, isn't a permanent solution and should only be used in conjunction with behavior modification.

## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- [Introducing Your New Cat to Your Other Pets](#)

## What NOT To Do

- If your cats are fighting, don't allow the fights to continue. Because cats are so territorial, and because they don't establish firm dominance hierarchies, they won't be able to "work things out" as dogs sometimes do. The more often cats fight, the worse the problem is likely to become. To stop a fight in progress, make a loud noise (like blowing a whistle), squirt the cats with water, or throw something soft at them. Don't try to pull them apart.
- Prevent future fights. This may mean keeping the cats totally separated from each other while you're working on the problem, or at least preventing contact between them during situations likely to trigger a fight.
- Don't try to punish the cats involved. Punishment is likely to elicit further aggression and fearful responses, which will only make the problem worse. If you attempt to punish either combatant, you may even become a target for redirected aggression.

Because their social organization is somewhat flexible, some cats are relatively willing to share their house and territory with multiple cats. It's not uncommon for a cat to tolerate some cats, but not get along with others in the house. But the more cats who share the same territory, the more likely it is that some of your cats will begin fighting with each other.

When you introduce cats to each other, one of them may send "play" signals which can be misinterpreted by the other cat. If those signals are interpreted as aggression by one of the cats, then you should handle the situation as "aggression" and seek professional help right away.

There are many factors that determine how well cats will get along with one another, but even animal-behavior experts don't fully understand them. What we do know is that cats who are well socialized (those who had pleasant experiences with other cats during kittenhood) will likely be more sociable than those who haven't been around many other cats.

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# Solving Litter Box Problems

**IF YOU'RE HAVING A HARD TIME** persuading your cat to head for the litter box when it's appropriate, it may be time to draw a line in the sand. Most cats prefer eliminating on a loose, grainy substance, which is why they quickly learn to use a litter box. But when their preferences include the laundry basket, the bed, or the Persian rug, you may find yourself with a difficult problem. By taking a closer look at your cat's environment, you should be able to identify factors that have contributed to the litter box problem and make changes that encourage your cat to head for the litter box once again.

A common reason why cats don't use the litter box is an aversion to the box, such as dislike of a covered box or dissatisfaction with the depth of the litter. Two other common reasons your cat may avoid the litter box are a preference for a particular type of litter not provided in the box or a preference for a particular location where there is no box.

Sometimes the problem is a combination of all three factors. To get to the answer, you'll need to do a little detective work—and remember, the original source of the problem may not be the reason it's continuing. For example, your cat may have stopped using the litter box because of a urinary tract infection, and then developed a surface preference for carpet and a location preference for the bedroom closet. If that's the case, you'll need to address all three of these factors to resolve the problem.

Cats don't stop using their litter boxes because they're upset at their human caregivers and determined to get revenge for something that offended or angered them. Because humans act for these reasons, it's easy for us to assume that our pets do as well. But animals don't act out of spite or revenge, so it won't help to punish your cat or give her special privileges in the hope that she'll start using the litter box again.

## Medical Problems

It's common for cats with medical problems to begin eliminating outside of their litter boxes. For example, a urinary tract infection or crystals in the urine can make urination very painful—and both are serious conditions that require medical attention. Cats often associate this pain with the litter box and begin to avoid it. So if your cat has a house-soiling problem, check with your veterinarian first to rule

out any medical problems as a cause of the behavior. Cats don't always act sick even when they are, and only a trip to the veterinarian for a thorough physical examination can rule out a medical problem.

## Cleaning Soiled Areas

Because animals are highly motivated to continue soiling an area that smells like urine or feces—and because cats' sense of smell is so much stronger than humans'—it's important to thoroughly and properly clean the soiled areas.

## Aversion to the Litter Box

Your cat may have decided that the litter box is an unpleasant place to eliminate if:

- The box is not clean enough for her.
- She has experienced painful urination or defecation in the box due to a medical problem.
- She has been startled by a noise while using the box.
- She has been ambushed while in the box either by another cat, a child, a dog, or by you, if you were attempting to catch her for some reason.
- She associates the box with punishment (for example, someone punished her for eliminating outside the box, then placed her in the box).

## What You Can Do

Keep the litter box extremely clean. Scoop at least once a day and change the litter completely every four to five days. If you use scoopable litter, you may not need to change the litter as frequently, depending on the number of cats in the household, the size of the cats, and the number of litter boxes.

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If you can smell the box, then you can be pretty sure it's offensive to your cat as well.

Add a new box in a different location, and use a different type of litter in the new box. Because your cat has decided that her old litter box is unpleasant, you'll want to make the new one different enough that she doesn't simply apply the old, negative associations to the new box.

Make sure that the litter box isn't near an appliance (such as a furnace) that makes noise, or in an area of the home that your cat doesn't frequent.

If ambushing is a problem, create more than one exit from the litter box, so that if the "ambusher" is waiting by one area, your cat always has an escape route.

If you have multiple cats, provide one litter box for each cat, plus one extra box in a different location.

## Surface Preferences

All animals develop preferences for a particular surface on which they like to eliminate. These preferences may be established early in life, but they may also change overnight for reasons that we don't always understand. Your cat may have a surface preference if:

- She consistently eliminates on a particular texture—for example, soft-textured surfaces such as carpeting, bedding, or clothing, or slick-textured surfaces such as tile, cement, bathtubs, or sinks.
- She frequently scratches on this same texture after elimination, even if she eliminates in the litter box.
- She is or was previously an outdoor cat and prefers to eliminate on grass or soil.

### What You Can Do

If you recently changed the type or brand of your cat's litter, go back to providing the litter that your cat had been using. If your cat is eliminating on soft surfaces, try using a high-quality scoopable litter.

If your cat is eliminating on slick, smooth surfaces, try putting a very thin layer of litter at one end of the box, leaving the other end bare, and put the box on a hard floor.

If your cat has a history of being outdoors, add some soil or sod to the litter box.

To discourage your cat from using a certain area, cover the area with an upside-down carpet runner or aluminum foil, or place citrus-scented cotton balls over the area.

## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- Removing Pet Stains and Odors
- Reducing Urine-Marking Behavior in Dogs and Cats

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## Location Preferences

Your cat may have a location preference if:

- She always eliminates in quiet, protected places, such as under a desk, beneath a staircase, or in a closet.
- She eliminates in an area where the litter box was previously kept or where there are urine odors.
- She eliminates on a different level of the home from where the litter box is located.

### What You Can Do

Put at least one litter box on every level of your home. (Remember, a properly cleaned litter box does not smell.)

To make the area where she has been eliminating less appealing to your cat, cover the area with an upside-down carpet runner or aluminum foil, place citrus-scented cotton balls over the area, or place water bowls in the area (because cats often don't like to eliminate near where they eat or drink) or put a litter box in the location where your cat has been eliminating. When she has consistently used this box for at least one month, you may gradually move it to a more convenient location at the rate of an inch—seriously!—per day.

## Everyone Makes Mistakes

If you catch your cat in the act of eliminating outside the litter box, do something to interrupt her like making a startling noise, but be careful not to scare her. Immediately take her to the litter box and set her on the floor nearby. If she wanders over to the litter box, wait and praise her after she eliminates in the box.

If she takes off in another direction, she may want privacy, so watch from afar until she goes back to the litter box and eliminates, then praise her when she does.

Don't ever punish your cat for eliminating outside of the litter box. By the time you find the soiled area, it's too late to administer a correction. Do nothing but clean it up. Rubbing your cat's nose in it, taking her to the spot and scolding her, or inflicting any other type of punishment will only make her afraid of you or afraid to eliminate in your presence. Animals don't understand punishment after the fact, even if it's only seconds later, and trying to punish them will often make matters worse.

## Other Types of House Soiling Problems

**Marking/Spraying:** To determine if your cat is marking or spraying, consult a veterinarian or animal behaviorist.

**Fears or Phobias:** When animals become frightened, they may lose control of their bladders or bowels. If your cat is afraid of loud noises, strangers, or other animals, she may soil the home when she is exposed to these stimuli.

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