



### CAT AGGRESSION

There are two major categories of cat aggression—aggression against people and aggression against other cats.

#### **Aggression with People**

Cats may demonstrate aggression toward people for a couple of reasons. One reason is poor socialization. If they are afraid of being handled and touched, they may react out of fear by hissing and scratching. When a person backs off, the cat learns this behavior works to keep people away. This reinforces the behavior and makes it more likely for the cat to behave aggressively in the future.

Related to this is aggression from overstimulation—this is the cat that is sitting on its owner's lap being petted, and suddenly starts to bite or scratch. At a certain point the petting becomes an annoyance to the cat, who is saying "stop it!" Learn how much personal contact your cat can tolerate without getting to the aggression stage.

Cats are predatory animals and will often take it to an extreme when playing—hiding under furniture or behind doors and then leaping out at people. This is the cat's predatory and stalking mode. Kittens should be corrected (a gentle shake holding the scruff of the neck will work—it's how mother cats tell kittens this action is unacceptable) and given toys to play with to discourage the behavior.

#### **Aggression with Other Cats**

**Territorial aggression:** Cats are actually more territorial than dogs, and may not tolerate a newcomer into their household or neighborhood. It is not uncommon for an established family cat to tolerate one new cat to the house, but completely dislike another. Cats do not get over territorial aggression or accept the newcomers they do not like. Territorial aggression can also develop when a kitten reaches sexual maturity, and older cats then see it as a threat.

**Defensive aggression:** This happens when a cat perceives he cannot escape from the attack he believes is coming. Usually this is a reaction to another cat in the household, and an attack may precipitate if the approaching cat does not turn away.

**Displaced or redirected aggression:** This behavior happens when the animal or person attacked is not the animal who provoked the attack. For example, if a household cat is territorial and sees another cat outside through a window, he may turn around and attack another household cat member because he cannot get outside to the cat provoking the behavior.

**DO NOT** allow fighting to continue between cats. Separate them. They will not work things out or develop a hierarchy like dogs will. **DO NOT** try to punish a cat—it will likely make aggression worse. **DO** seek veterinary advice to rule out physical problems, and seek a referral to an animal behaviorist.