

PLAY AGGRESSION

What is play aggression & how can I help manage it?

Single Kitten Syndrome: You might think that a kitten's playful stalking and attacking of your ankles, or biting your hand is cute and endearing, but when that kitten becomes an adult, who has not learned what is acceptable because they did not have another kitty companion, the biting, stalking, and attacking become even rougher, and it's not fun anymore. Sadly, many times these poorly socialized cats end up either being thrown outside to fend for themselves or returned to the shelter where we will have a very hard time finding homes for them due to their behavioral problems.

HOW TO PREVENT AND CORRECT PLAY AGGRESSION ALSO KNOWN AS SINGLE KITTEN SYNDROME

- **Provide a variety of toys for your cat.** Toys that stimulate your cat's natural hunting instinct will be most effective for creating a fun play experience for your cat that also helps her burn off excess energy. Even though there are lots of cute little catnip filled toys on the market, simply placing one in front of your cat and hoping that they'll play with it doesn't work with most cats. Toys such as: fishing pole toys, feather wands, string toys, or anything that satisfies your cats prey drive, work best. Move the toy like prey, alternating between fast and slow motions so it gives your cat time to plan their next move. Here's a tip: movements that go away from or across your cat's visual field will trigger their prey drive. Don't dangle the toy in their face or move it toward them.
- **Structured Playtime.** Play with your cat at regular times every day, at least twice a day for 10-15 minutes each. These play sessions will not only keep your cat happy, they're also a wonderful way to strengthen the bond between cat and human. Make time for one or two play sessions, 10-20 minutes in length, each day. You and your kitty will find that you'll look forward to these sessions every day. In the wild, cats stick to a routine of "hunt, catch, kill, eat, groom, sleep" You can mimic this with toy play then feeding in a home environment.

HOW TO REDIRECT PLAY AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

- **Never play with your cats using your hands.** Cats will come to associate your hand as just another toy, and they won't understand why it's okay to grab and kick the mouse, but not your hands.
- **Distract your cat with an appropriate toy.** If you have an ankle grabber, always carry a toy with you. When you see your cat approaching, toss the toy ahead of you to distract them.
- **Give your cat a time-out.** Stop any play and interaction with your cat the instant they start to play rough, scratch or bite you. Leave the room, or direct your attention elsewhere. Don't pick up your cat to remove them from the area, their energy will already be heightened from playing, and trying to physically interact with them may lead to aggression. Be consistent about this and don't inadvertently reward bad behavior.

Never punish your cat: It goes without saying that you should never yell, hit, chase or squirt your cat. Do not use squirt bottles to correct unwanted behavior. Punishment only ever accomplishes one thing: it will make your cat afraid of you and make them more aggressive. It can also ruin your bond with your cat.