

HOW TO HANDLE INAPPROPRIATE PLAY WITH CATS & KITTENS

Cats and kittens are natural hunters. When they stalk, grab, and bite, they're practicing instincts—not trying to be “bad.” The key is teaching them what is appropriate to hunt and bite (*toys*) and what isn't (*your hands*).

WHY YOU SHOULD NEVER USE YOUR HANDS AS TOYS

When you wiggle your fingers like prey or let a kitten wrestle your hands, you teach them:

- Hands = prey
- Skin = OK to bite
- Grabbing and bunny-kicking people is acceptable

This might seem harmless when they're small—but kittens grow into adults with stronger jaws and sharper claws.

Why this becomes a problem:

- Adult bites hurt and can break skin
- Rough play escalates over time
- Cats don't understand “It was cute when you were little”
- Visitors, children, and seniors are at risk
- **Rule:** Hands are for petting and care — toys are for hunting.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CAT PLAYS WITH YOUR HANDS LIKE A WAND TOY

If your cat stalks, pounces, or grabs your hands as if they're prey:

Immediately Stop Movement: Freeze your hand. Prey moves—so don't.

Calmly Withdraw: Gently remove your hand without jerking (*jerking increases prey drive*).

Redirect to a Toy: Offer wand toys, kicker toys, plush mice, ball tracks etc. Move the toy like prey instead.

End the Interaction if Needed: If your cat continues: Stand up, walk away calmly and ignore for 1-2 minutes. This teaches the cat that rough play makes the fun stop.

Avoid: Yelling, Flicking their nose, Tapping them, Spraying water, Rough “dominance” corrections.

Punishment damages trust and can increase aggression.

TEACHING BETTER PLAY HABITS (Especially for Kittens)

Kittens need **structured play** to burn energy.

Daily Play Routine:

- 2-3 sessions per day
- 10-15 minutes each
- Use interactive toys (wand toys are ideal)
- End with a small treat or meal (simulates hunt > catch > eat)

If Teeth Touch Skin:

- Say a high-pitched “Ouch!” (like a littermate would)
- Immediately stop interaction
- Withdraw attention briefly

Consistency is everything.



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WHAT ABOUT “LOVE BITES” OR “LOVE NIPS”?

“Love bites” are usually:

- Overstimulation
- A signal to stop petting
- A way to control the interaction
- A learned behavior (biting gets attention)

Some cats also grab your hand with their paws and gently bite to say “Don’t stop petting me.”

What To Do: Learn Their Petting Limit

Many cats only tolerate 5–20 seconds of petting in specific areas (*head, cheeks, chin*)

Watch for Warning Signs:

- Tail flicking
- Skin twitching
- Ears turning sideways
- Head turning toward your hand
- Tensing body

Stop before the bite happens.

If They Grab and Nip:

- Freeze
- Do not pull away suddenly
- Calmly disengage
- Stand up and end interaction briefly

Do not reward grabbing by continuing to pet.

Reward Gentle Behavior

Pet when:

- They are relaxed
- They are not gripping
- They are calm

Withdraw attention immediately if teeth appear.

IF YOUR CAT GRABS YOUR HAND TO DEMAND MORE PETTING

Some cats learn:

“If I grab and bite gently, the human continues.”

To fix this:

1. The moment teeth touch skin > stop petting.
2. Slowly remove your hand.
3. Wait 10–30 seconds before interacting again.
4. Resume only if they are calm.

This teaches:

- Calm behavior = attention
- Biting = attention ends