

Understanding Cat Behavior

Bringing a cat into your home is an exciting experience, but it also comes with the responsibility of understanding and managing their unique behaviors. By better understanding your new kitty's behaviors and ways of communicating, you can build a better bond, prevent misunderstandings and ensure your feline friend is healthy and happy.

Common Cat Behaviors and What They Mean

Purring: When a cat purrs, it is typically a sign of contentment, indicating they are relaxed, happy, and feel safe in your presence. Occasionally, if the cat is also displaying signs of distress (like hiding or panting), they may be stressed, anxious, or not feeling well, and you should consult a veterinarian.

Kneading: When a cat or kitten kneads with their paws (often on soft surfaces like blankets or your lap), it is usually a positive sign that they feel safe and content. Kittens knead their mother's bellies to stimulate milk production, and this soothing behavior carries over into adulthood. However, if a cat or kitten kneads excessively or aggressively, it may be a sign of overstimulation and kitty needs time to decompress.

Scratching: This is a natural and essential behavior for cats. It helps them mark their territory, sharpen claws, and stretch their muscles. Having plenty of scratching pads and posts will help your cat safely and appropriately satisfy this need. Avoid punishing scratching and use positive reinforcement when they use designated scratching areas instead.

Biting and Nipping: Cats may bite or nip during play or when overstimulated. Kittens especially may play-bite as they explore the world around them and learn boundaries. Biting and nipping in adult cats can also be a sign of irritation, or if they feel threatened.

If your kitten or cat is biting during play, try to redirect with a toy. Avoid using your hands or fingers as toys, as this can encourage biting. If biting is aggressive or excessive, this can be a sign of stress or illness, and you should consult a veterinarian.

Hiding or Retreating: Cats are territorial animals and may hide when feeling stressed, sick, or need to decompress. This behavior is normal when they first arrive in a new home and adjust to a new environment, or when new stressors are introduced (like a new pet or person in the home).

Allow your cat to have a designated safe space where they can retreat when feeling overwhelmed or scared. If they hide for extended periods or there is a sudden change in their hiding behavior, monitor for signs of illness or stress.

Chasing or Hunting: Cats of all sizes have a strong predatory instinct and display behaviors like pouncing, chasing, and hunting. Provide interactive playtime with wand toys, laser pointers (be sure to let kitty "catch" the laser sometimes) and balls to give your cat an outlet for these

instinctual behaviors. This will not only provide entertainment and enrichment, help you and your new cat bond, but will also help them remain fit and healthy.

Communication through Cat Body Language

Cats communicate a lot through their body language, and understanding these signals can help you better respond to their needs.

Tail Position:

- Upright Tail- A sign of confidence and happiness
- Puffy Tail- Indicates fear or aggression. Your cat may be startled or feel threatened
- Twitching or Flicking Tail- Can signify irritation or overstimulation.
- Tucked Tail- Indicates fear or submission

Ear Position:

- Forward Ears- A sign of curiosity or interest
- Flattened Ears- Indicates the cat is frightened, irritated, or feeling threatened

Eyes:

- Slow Blinking- A sign of trust and affection. Cats often “slow blink” at their favorite people as a show of trust.
- Dilated Pupils- Can indicate excitement (as they prepare to pounce a favorite toy), fear or aggression (when they spot another kitty out the window). Use the context of the situation to help indicate which mood is being exhibited.
- Staring- A prolonged stare can be a sign of a challenge or threat. If your cat stares at you, it is often a sign they are attention seeking.