

BEHAVIOR Training

Kentucky Humane Society

APPROPRIATE PLAY WITH CATS

Play time with kitty can be a great bonding experience for all involved. Watching a kitten play with a new toy is one of the great joys in life. However if the cat doesn't play nice, it is not so much fun. Knowing how to play appropriately with your cats can save your arms, legs, hands and feet from being bitten or scratched when play time gets too exciting for your cat.

What is appropriate play with cats?

Cats use play time as practice for hunting prey. They like to chase, catch and "kill" their toys. A good play session will have them chasing a toy, allowing them to catch it and then they get to play with their "food." Appropriate play can be dragging a string across the floor or through the air, throwing mice or little balls for your cat to chase or getting a toy that they can hold with the front paws and kick with the back paws. This way of playing best mimics how kittens play with each other. Kittens also have a lot of energy in general, and if you have a breed that is known for being extra energetic, like the Sphinx, you will need to allow for extra play sessions throughout the day. Setting up a schedule for play time as well as meal time will help you cat be more balanced and can avoid the "midnight crazies" or other bursts of energy at inappropriate times.

What is inappropriate play with cats?

Hands, feet, arms, legs or body parts of any type should not be used as play toys. Cats don't like to "play rough" except when they are killing prey. If you allow your cat to play rough with you, expect to be scratched and bitten to the point of breaking skin. If your cat starts to play inappropriately with you, remove your attention. Try to get up and walk away as opposed to picking her up and removing her, as that becomes reinforcing attention for the behavior.

What not to do:

Never strike, tap, flick, bop, slap or perform any other physical punishment to your cat. Best case scenario, your cat sees this as play time and the unwanted behaviors get more consistent or worse. Worst case, your cat becomes afraid of you and will hiss, scratch, bite, or hide in fear. Cats are also not receptive to a timeout or punishment room. If you have to pick them up to put them there that could become encouraging to them as they are getting attention and being in time out could cause boredom destruction.

If you need additional advice, please contact the Kentucky Humane Society's free pet HELP line at **(502) 509-4PET (4738)** to discuss your cat's behavior issues with a trained volunteer.

