



## Feline Aggression: Types and Suggestions

Cat aggression is threatening behavior that is directed towards people or other animals. If your cat is aggressive or becoming aggressive, take time to evaluate the situation, the people present and the circumstances that caused the aggression. We need to understand the aggression in order to help the cat. Please read the following and determine which category your cat's aggression falls under:

### Play Aggression

#### What is it?

- Play aggression is a common symptom displayed by cats lacking physical stimulation.

#### How can I recognize it?

- Cats displaying this type of aggression are typically overly rambunctious, grabbing, stalking, pouncing, nipping or biting at animals or people and their clothing. Although it is a normal behaviour it can lead to injuries. If handled incorrectly it could lead to more serious forms of aggression.

#### What can I do about it?

- Identify *when* during the day the cat is most likely to show play aggression and engage the cat in a 10–15-minute interactive play session around this time. The cat should have at least two interactive play sessions a day. Feeding the cat a meal following each play session will make the cat relaxed and likely to sleep following the play session and meal.
- Provide the cat with other types of environmental enrichment to keep him occupied. This can include window perches, cardboard boxes or paper bags to explore and a rotation of solo toys to play with. You can also utilize puzzle feeders to help keep the cat mentally stimulated.
- If the cat tends to pounce on feet or legs when a person walks by, get the cat out of this habit by tossing treats or toys when walking by the cat, or distract the cat with an interactive toy before the cat shows any initial reaction.



## Petting Induced Aggression

### What is it?

- Petting induced aggression is when a cat becomes intolerant of petting or touch this can be the result of overstimulation or agitation causing the cat to swat or bite.

### How can I recognize it?

- Your cat is normally friendly and social, and sometimes likes to be touched or patted but sometimes swats or bites at the person's hands or arms while being pet.

### What can I do about it?

- Pay attention to **where** the cat likes and does not like to be pet on her body and only pet her where she is comfortable. Most cats are comfortable with the tops of their heads, backs of their necks and chins being pet. Some cats are also comfortable with their backs being pet. Most cats do not like having their bellies or chests pet and some cats are sensitive around their tail.
- Pay attention to **how** the cat likes to be pet and only pet her in ways with which she is comfortable. Some cats like to be pet with quick, short strokes and others with slower, longer strokes.
- Pay attention to **warning signs** that the cat is becoming agitated. Warning signs include tail swishing, hair on the back rising, skin twitching, the cat looking back at the person doing the petting, sudden vocalization and shifting of position. Once you have this information, stop the petting well before the cat shows these warning signs. For example, if the cat starts swishing her tail after two minutes of petting on her back, stop the petting at 90 seconds. Over time, the length of the petting can be gradually increased so the cat slowly becomes more comfortable petting for longer periods of time. If the cat can only tolerate petting for a short time, it is important to respect this.



- Provide the cat with twice-daily interactive play and other types of environmental enrichment to keep him occupied. Cats who are under-stimulated are sometimes more likely to show petting-induced aggression.
- Some cats will learn to bite when the petting STOPS as a method to get your attention. If this is occurring, ensure you are only providing pets when the cat is calm. Do not punish the cat for the nip, instead end the petting session so they can learn that biting does not get them attention.

## Pain Induced Aggression

### What is it?

- Pain induced aggression is a cat's defensive reaction to pain caused by medical issues.

### How can I recognize it?

- Pain induced aggression is usually elicited following handling or contact that causes the cat pain resulting in an attempt to flee, to hiss, swat, or bite.
- Behaviour is uncommon for the cat.

### What can I do about it?

- Make an appointment to see your veterinarian.
- Keep the cat in a safe space until it can be seen by your veterinarian.
- Insert link for "Creating a Safe Room" here.

## Learned Aggression

### What is it?

- Learned aggression results from a cat having learned to remove a stressful stimulus by using aggressive behaviours.
- In some cases, this stems from fear, so evaluate your home and your interactions with the cat for potential stressors.



### How can I recognize it?

- Body Language
- Aggressive behaviours exhibited as rough play that has gotten out of control,
- Misplaced or excessively aggressive behaviours causing injury or harm to your or other animals.

### What can I do about it?

- Never physically punish your cat - aggression gets aggression
- Never reward or try to soothe your cat after an aggressive incident. Your cat will see this as a successful tactic for dealing with one or more situations.
- Try not to react at all. Again, if your cat gets any reaction then the behaviour will continue.
- Try to identify what initially caused your cat to react aggressively.
- **Seek help.** Aggression of all kinds can quickly get out of control. The sooner you get help the better chance you have of resolving the issue.

## Booking a consultation for Aggressive Behaviours

Aggression is a serious and dangerous behaviour problem for cat owners. Not all aggressive behaviours can, or should, be addressed without the help of an experienced professional. There are many different types of aggression and in some cases medical conditions may be a contributing factor. As such, before scheduling a behaviour consultation your cat must have had a thorough physical examination by a veterinarian who may recommend diagnostics to rule out any underlying medical conditions. Keeping a diary can also be a useful tool to help identify any patterns in behaviour. To correct aggression issues, behaviour modification techniques or changes to the pet's environment will likely be necessary.

If you find you are struggling to resolve your cat's aggressive behaviour, you can always call our behaviour helpline at 403-723-6019 or book a consultation via the <https://www.calgaryhumane.ca/what-we-do/animal-training/private-consultations/>