



Learning to Play Nice

Play is really about learning how to hunt, capture and kill. Normally these are skills practiced and learned from mothers and littermates. However, if a kitten is removed from its siblings or mother at too young an age it may not have learned appropriate bite inhibition. Alternatively, if a kitten was handled roughly by humans in the form of play it may see the hands or feet as acceptable objects to attack. Either way kittens or cats must be taught and encouraged to play with acceptable objects both when interacting with humans or when on their own.

Consistency is Key

Play times

- Set up three or four consistent times during the day to initiate play. This will help your kitten understand that she doesn't have to be the one to initiate play by pouncing on you.
- Kittens have a lot of energy! It is important when getting a kitten that you can commit to active play time with them to help them burn off some of that energy as well as be mentally and physically enriched.

Encourage acceptable behaviour

- NEVER use your hands as a toy. While kittens hunting/nibbling on fingers may be cute, this behaviour will cause issues as an adult when it is no longer acceptable.
- Direct your kitten's behaviour onto acceptable objects.
- Choose interactive toys that mimic prey behaviour like a fishing rod, wand or laser/mouse combination. Use a stuffed toy in place of your hand to allow your cat to really sink its teeth and claws into, and kick it with its back legs.
- For self-play, provide your kitten with objects they can bat around, like a ping pong ball.



- Leave paper bags or cardboard boxes around for your kitten to explore during the day. Remove any handles or potentially dangerous attachments like plastic, staples or tape.
- Rotate the toys you leave out for your kitten during the day. Kittens and cats tend to become bored of their toys in about three days. Do not leave interactive toys like wand toys for cats or kittens to access during the day as they can be dangerous if not supervised.

Discourage unacceptable behaviour

- When play becomes too rough, stop, get up and walk away.
- Block access to your legs with a blanket, towel or pillow.
- Reacting to your kitten's aggression only rewards the kitten with more of a challenge.

Feed your little hunter

- Follow play sessions with a small food reward or meal.
- Now that your kitten has been allowed to hunt and capture its prey, give it time to eat. Giving your kitten a food reward at the end of a play session lets him know that it was a successful hunting experience.
- Feeding your cat post-play also signals to your cat that it is time to wind down, groom and then sleep.

Avoid At All Costs

- **Physical touch.** Even picking up your cat to move it mid-play or when it is getting overexcited will only serve to perpetuate aggressive behaviours.
- **Never** physically or verbally punish your kitten or cat. I will only strain the relationship between you and your kitten leading to fear and aggression.

The idea is to train your kittens to be good little hunters who are safe for human interaction. Providing your kitten with consistent play times and ways to play also help to ensure their energy burning needs are being met on a daily basis.



If you find you are struggling to manage your kitten or cat's rough play, you can always call our behaviour outreach line at 403-723-6019 or book a consultation via our website <https://www.calgaryhumane.ca/what-we-do/animal-training/private-consultations/>