



Feisty Feline Training Guide

Name _____

Animal # _____

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Feisty Felines – Understanding and Supporting Them

WHAT ARE THEY?

A *Feisty Feline* is a cat who displays heightened arousal and intense energy, especially during play or social interactions. These cats often shift quickly from seeking attention to biting, scratching, or swatting. They may overreact to petting, become frustrated when bored, or struggle to settle down after excitement.

Common behaviors seen in feisty felines include sudden pouncing, grabbing, or biting during play, along with dilated pupils, twitching tails, and quick, reactive movements. These cats often escalate rapidly during interactions, may swat or mouth at hands, and can have difficulty calming down once aroused. They may also engage in boundary-testing behaviors, such as “drive-by” ankle attacks. Importantly, this feistiness is not aggression meant to harm—it is typically the result of misdirected play, overstimulation, or unchanneled energy.

WHY ARE THEY LIKE THIS?

Most feisty behaviors stem from normal feline instincts combined with the challenges of modern indoor living. *High-energy cats and younger animals* naturally have strong predatory drives and excess energy. Without enough structured outlets, that energy often gets redirected toward inappropriate targets. *Arousal sensitivity* also plays a role; some cats have a low threshold for excitement and once triggered, escalate quickly and take longer to settle down. *Overstimulation* is another common factor—petting or handling may start out pleasant but can become overwhelming, and if early warning signs like tail flicks, skin twitching, or sudden tension go unnoticed, the cat may react defensively to regain control. *Play aggression* often emerges in environments that do not offer enough prey-like activity, leading cats to “hunt” hands, feet, or anything that moves. Finally, *inconsistent human responses*—such as sometimes engaging with or reacting to these aroused behaviors—can unintentionally reinforce the pattern, making the behavior more persistent over time.

HOW TO SUPPORT THEM

Feisty cats thrive when we **reduce frustration, increase enrichment, and create predictable routines** that prevent rehearsal of unwanted behavior.

1. **Provide appropriate outlets-** Daily interactive play using wand toys that mimic prey, multiple sessions of short- high intensity play, and solo toys that allow hunting behaviors (kick toys (simulate fighting and prey takedown), puzzle feeders (simulate foraging), small plush fur and leather based toys (simulate prey and hunting)).
2. **Reduced triggers-** Limit rough-housing, avoid touching sensitive areas if the cat is easily overstimulated, keep petting sessions brief and cat-led, identify early signs of arousal and disengage before the cat escalates.
3. **Increases environmental enrichment-** Vertical spaces (cat trees, shelves), hiding spots and resting areas, scratching posts, and a regular rotation of toys to prevent boredom.

Feisty Felines – Understanding and Supporting Them (Cont.)

4. **Predicable routine-** Consistent feeding, play, and rest times help regulate arousal levels.
5. **Provide safe alternatives-** Redirect biting or grabbing to a kick toy or wand toy, engage the cat in problem-solving (puzzle feeders and snuffle mats), give “jobs” such as hunting for scattered kibble.
6. **Provide outdoor access-** such as a catio, enclosed yard, or supervised leash walks—offers valuable mental and physical enrichment.

TRAINING TIPS

Training is especially helpful for feisty cats because it channels mental energy and creates clarity around acceptable interactions.

- **Use Clicker or marker training-** clicket training provides structure and gives a feisty feline something to focus on.
 - **Skills To Teach:** Sit, target training, go to mat, name recognition.
 - **For more information visit:** youtube.com/catschool
- **Teach calming and boundary skills-** Helping a feisty cat learn calm behaviors and understand boundaries gives them a clear framework for how to interact appropriately.
 - Four paws on the floor earns rewards.
 - Station training like go to a mat or perch.
 - Reinforce gentle paw touches instead of grabbing or clawing.
- **Use play as reinforcement-** End a short training session with a chase game. This pairs learning with an appropriate energy outlet.
- **Interrupt and redirect-** When you see arousal building:
 - Freeze momentarily and avoid rapid movement.
 - Gently toss a toy away to redirect the cat’s focus.
 - Use scheduled play to prevent pent-up frustration that leads to ambush behaviors.
- **Avoid punishment-** Punishment increases arousal, anxiety, and defensive behavior. Instead:
 - Manage environment.
 - Redirect.
 - Reinforce desired behaviors.

Positive Reinforcement vs. Aversive Punishment

WHAT IS POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT?

Positive reinforcement involves rewarding your cats for behavior you'd like them to repeat. Rewards can come in many forms, including play, petting, food, and treats. The most important thing is that your cat enjoys it!

WHAT IS AVERSIVE PUNISHMENT?

Aversive punishment means adding something painful, frightening, or unpleasant with the goal of stopping behavior. Examples include startling noises (like clapping, shaking a can of pennies, using compressed air, blowing, or hissing at the cat), physical corrections (such as scruffing, pushing, swatting, hitting, or spraying with water).

WHAT NOT CORRECT UNWANTED BEHAVIOR?

Cats are sensitive animals, and punishment can easily damage their trust. While corrections may interrupt an unwanted behavior in the moment, they do not teach the cat what to do instead. Punishment also fails to increase a cat's motivation or desire to perform preferred behaviors. As a result, many cats resume the behavior once the correction ends, while also learning to avoid—or even fear—the person delivering the punishment.

HOW TO TRAIN POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

1. Using a treat or toy, lure your cat from one place to another or into a desired position.
2. Give your cat plenty of daily mental and physical exercise. A tired cat is a good cat!
3. Prevent unwanted behaviors using environmental management.
 - a. Use gates, or visual barriers so that your cat can't practice the unwanted behaviors.
4. Teach your cat new behaviors to replace the unwanted ones.
5. For more information, see the handout titled "Teaching Alternative Behaviors".
6. Ignore unwanted behaviors when they occur and calmly direct your cat toward a more desirable behavior.

Enrichment for Cats

WHAT IS IT?

Enrichment means creating a home environment that is fun, intriguing, and engaging while also supporting their natural instincts. This can be accomplished with simple adjustments to your living space that give your cat opportunities to explore, climb, jump, hide, scratch, and perch up high to observe their surroundings. Providing a variety of activities, including options that keep them entertained when they are alone, helps prevent boredom and encourages a happy, healthy, and well-adjusted cat.

WHY DO IT?

Enriching your cat's space is essential because cats and kittens of all ages need both mental and physical stimulation to thrive. A thoughtfully enriched environment can help prevent boredom, reduce destructive scratching, and minimize excessive or nighttime vocalizations. It also eases stress and fear during changes in routine or environment and provides healthy outlets for playful aggression or overstimulation in energetic cats. In multi-cat households, enrichment can reduce tension and encourage positive interactions. For cats who are eager to explore outdoors, a rich and engaging indoor environment offers safe alternatives that satisfy their natural instincts and curiosity.

HOW TO ENRICH

1. **Vertical Spaces:** Cats naturally seek out high places because climbing, perching, and surveying from above gives them a sense of safety and control over their surroundings. Provide ample spots like shelves, cat trees, and window perches.
2. **Safe Spaces:** Cats need places to withdraw from home activity and relax uninterrupted. Offer both low and high covered locations to nestle.
3. **Explorative Spaces:** Tunnels, boxes, and even paper bags can all be fun, novel places for cats to explore. Sprinkle some catnip in them for a little added spunk!
4. **Scratching Posts:** All cats need appropriate surfaces for scratching, as it helps them maintain healthy claws, stretch their muscles, and leave their scent. To meet this need, offer a variety of scratching options in different textures—like cardboard, sisal rope, or carpet—and in different layouts, such as vertical posts, horizontal pads, or wall-mounted scratchers. This variety keeps scratching enriching and ensures your cat always has an appealing alternative to furniture.
5. **Interactive and Automated Toys:** Try out battery operated cat toys or a motion-sensor toys that provide opportunities for play even when you are away.
6. **Interactive Feeders and Puzzle Toys:** Instead of free feeding, try out a puzzle toy or feeder that makes kitty work for their food!
7. **Audio/Visual Feast:** TV or music left on can provide visual and auditory enrichment (apps, YouTube channels, and music exist specifically for cats!).

Enrichment for Cats (Cont.)

8. **Safe Outdoor Exposure:** Catios, secured outdoor enclosures, harness training, backpack carrier training, and bird feeders seen through a window can all be ways of letting your cat enjoy the sights and sounds of the outdoors without the major risks.
9. **Training:** Reward-based training helps shy, fearful cats by creating predictable, positive experiences that build confidence and a sense of control. It encourages choice without pressure, reduces fear, and helps cats feel safer in their environment.

TRAINING TIPS

- **Share the love:** In a multi-cat home, make sure there are enough resources and enrichment listed above for every animal to reap the benefits. For example, one high spot is not enough for three cats to share.
- **Mix It up:** Cats can get bored with the same toy, same tunnel, same treat so be sure to rotate a couple of things in and out of their routine every few days.
- **Make time:** An engaging environment is a lovely way to enrich the lives of your feline companions, but don't forget it is only part of a healthy routine. All cats still benefit from daily interactive play sessions and cuddle time with their people, so move that wand toy around for them and give them plenty of attention to provide a well-balanced life!

For more enrichment ideas:

- *Catification: Designing a Happy and Stylish Home for Your Cat (and You!)* by Jackson Galaxy and Kate Benjamin
- *Indoor Cat: How to Enrich Their Lives and Expand Their World* by Laura J. Moss and Lynn Bahr

Clicker Training

WHAT IS CLICKER TRAINING?

Clicker training is a type of positive reinforcement training that uses a small device—called a clicker—to make a consistent clicking sound. The click marks the exact moment the cat performs a desired behavior. Because the sound is always followed by a treat or reward, the cat quickly learns that **click = “you did the right thing.”**

This method gives cats clear communication and helps them understand which behaviors earn rewards.

WHY TEACH CLICKER TRAINING?

Clicker training is valuable because it provides clear communication, marking the exact behavior you want and eliminating confusion. It builds confidence by teaching cats that their choices lead to rewards, making them more willing to try new behaviors. It also helps reduce unwanted actions by reinforcing appropriate alternatives, supports a stronger bond through positive, predictable interactions, and offers mental enrichment that reduces boredom, frustration, and play aggression. In addition, clicker training can be used for cooperative care, helping cats learn practical skills such as entering a carrier, going to a mat, or allowing gentle handling.

HOW TO TEACH IT

Step 1. Charge the clicker

- Click → immediately give a small treat.
- Repeat 10–15 times.
- This teaches the cat that the click means something good is coming.

Step 2. Capture a simple behavior

- Start with behaviors the cat already offers, such as:
 - Sitting
 - Touching your hand or a target stick
 - Looking at you
 - Going to a mat or perch
- As soon as the cat performs the behavior—click, then give a treat.

Clicker Training (Cont.)

Step 3. Add a cue (optional)

- Once the cat reliably offers the behavior after the clicker marks it, you can add a cue like “sit” or “touch.”
 - Say the cue before the behavior happens.
 - Click and treat when they do the behavior after the cue.
 - Repeat until the cue predicts the behavior.

TRAINING TIPS

- **Keep distractions low-** Start by practicing in a space with little to no distractions.
- **Set yourself up for success-** Use one hand to click and one hand to treat. Use a treat pouch to prevent you from fiddling with treats. Try having a “home base” position that you return to in between clicks, such as standing with your hands at your side or behind your back. This helps your cat pay attention to the sound, not what you are doing with your body.
- **Use tiny treats-** so the cat doesn’t fill up quickly—single kibble pieces or pea-sized soft treats work well. Even small dollops of lickables like Churu can be used!
- **Rotate reward types-** Try this game out with a variety of treats to see which ones your cat prefers. Petting and play can also be used as rewards!
- **Consider your marker-** If your cat is fearful of the sound of the click, switch to a verbal “click.” You can use the word “Yes” in place of the click, a soft kissy sound, or switch to a pen that has a click.
- **Practice in short, fun sessions-** Keep sessions brief (1–3 minutes) and end on a success to strengthen the association.

Overstimulation

WHAT IS IT?

Overstimulation occurs when a cat becomes overwhelmed by petting, handling, or interaction that initially felt enjoyable. As their sensory system becomes overloaded, they can shift suddenly from tolerating or even enjoying attention to reacting with swatting, biting, or fleeing. This response is not anger or true aggression, it is a defensive attempt to end the interaction when they can no longer cope with additional input. Early signs of overstimulation include tail twitching or lashing, skin rippling along the back, ears rotating or flattening, sudden muscle tension, quick head turns toward the hand, and dilated pupils. If these cues go unnoticed and the interaction continues, the cat may escalate to a bite or swat to create distance and stop the interaction.

WHY ARE THEY LIKE THAT?

Cats have individual thresholds for touch and interaction, and several factors can influence how quickly they become overstimulated. Some cats have *heightened sensory sensitivity*, meaning their nervous system reaches its limit faster, causing them to react with a reflexive “stop” response. *Petting preferences* also play a significant role—most cats enjoy brief, predictable contact around the head and neck, while long strokes or repeated touches in sensitive areas may feel irritating. *Past experiences* with inconsistent or rough handling can make a cat more defensive or hyper-aware during touch. *Age or underlying medical issues*, such as arthritis or skin sensitivity, can also make normal touch uncomfortable, reducing their tolerance even further. Additionally, a cat that is already excited, stressed, or frustrated will reach their threshold more quickly.

HOW TO SUPPORT THEM

Supporting an overstimulated cat means respecting their communication and creating conditions where interaction stays positive.

1. **Keep petting session short-** Offer brief, cat-led interactions and stop while the cat is still in a relaxed state.
2. **Follow their body language-** Watch for early signs of tension- tail movement, skin twitching, ear movement, and end the interaction at the first cue.
3. **Offer predictable low intensity touch-** Stick to petting preferred areas such as cheeks, chin, head, and neck. Avoid long strokes down the back unless the cat clearly enjoys it.
4. **Use environmental enrichment-** Increase play, provide climbing opportunities, and use foraging activities so the cat releases energy in healthy ways.
5. **Let the cat initiate and end contact-** Allowing the cat to control the interaction reduces stress and prevents them from feeling trapped.
6. **Provide space to decompress-** Quiet resting spots, vertical refuges, and safe hideouts help lower overall arousal, making overstimulation less likely.

Overstimulation (Cont.)

TRAINING TIPS

Training helps overstimulated cats learn alternative behaviors and builds trust through predictable interactions.

- **Teach a “touch” or target behavior-** This gives the cat a way to engage gently and voluntarily, and it helps shift focus away from petting when arousal increases.
- **Use positive reinforcement for calm behaviors-** Reward soft body language, relaxed posture, and gentle engagement. Reinforcement teaches the cat that calmness is valuable.
- **Condition a consent cue-** Train the cat to provide a signal—such as leaning in, head bunting, or stepping onto a mat—that indicates they are open to petting. When they move away, stop immediately.
- **Practice handling in micro-sessions-** Reward tiny steps (example: one chin stroke) and build up slowly over time. Ending before the cat becomes tense prevents negative associations.
- **Channel energy through play-** Before petting, offer a short play session with a wand toy to reduce arousal and satisfy the predatory drive. Allow a “cool down” period before moving into petting and handling.

Threshold Training for Treating Overstimulation

WHAT IS THRESHOLD TRAINING?

Threshold training is a key approach for managing overstimulation in cats. Overstimulation occurs when a cat has a low tolerance for petting or handling and may use claws or teeth to communicate, “I’ve had enough!” Threshold training helps by gradually teaching the cat to give clearer, earlier warning signs before reaching that point, while also slowly increasing the amount of handling they can tolerate. By working just below the cat’s irritation threshold and rewarding calm responses, this method strengthens communication between cat and handler and reduces the likelihood of sudden swats or bites.

WHY TEACH THRESHOLD TRAINING?

Overstimulation is a normal cat behavior, but it can be challenging for some adopters, especially first-time cat owners. Cats that react with little warning often have a history of having their earlier cues ignored, and over time they learn that the only way to stop an uncomfortable interaction is by using their teeth or claws. Through consistent handling that respects their signals, cats can learn to communicate discomfort in more appropriate ways and may gradually tolerate longer periods of petting or interaction before becoming irritated.

HOW TO TEACH IT

1. Identify The Cat’s Threshold

- Watch the cat’s body language carefully—tail flicks, skin ripples, ear movements, or subtle tension indicate the beginning of overstimulation.
- Stop interactions before the cat escalates to swatting or biting. This is the cat’s current “threshold.”

2. Start Just Below the Threshold

- Pet or handle the cat in short, low-intensity sessions, stopping before any signs of discomfort appear.
- Use areas the cat prefers, usually the head, cheeks, or chin. Avoid sensitive spots at first.
- Example: If your cat begins tail flicking after 10 seconds of petting or handling, begin your threshold training with 5 seconds of petting or handling- stopping before the tail begins to flick.

3. Reward Calm Behavior

- Use treats, praise, or gentle play immediately after each calm interaction.
- This teaches the cat that calm responses and signaling early are beneficial.

Threshold Training for Treating Overstimulation (Cont.)

4. **Gradually Increase Tolerance**

- Slowly extend the duration or intensity of petting in small, incremental steps.
- Always stop before the cat becomes overstimulated; consistency is key.

5. **Encourage Clear Signals**

- Reinforce early warning signs by responding appropriately: if the cat flicks its tail or shifts its ears, pause or stop petting.
- This helps the cat develop clear communication instead of jumping straight to swatting or biting.

TRAINING TIPS

- **Short, frequent sessions**

- Keep training sessions brief but regular to prevent fatigue or stress.
- Multiple short sessions throughout the day are more effective than one long session.

- **Pair with enrichment and play**

- Engage the cat in interactive play to expend excess energy and reduce arousal before handling. Allow a “cool down” period before moving into petting and handling.
- Puzzle feeders, wand toys, and climbing structures complement threshold training by keeping the cat mentally and physically satisfied.

Play Aggression

WHAT IS PLAY AGGRESSION?

Play aggression occurs when a cat uses claws, teeth, or intense physical behaviors during play or interactions. Unlike true aggression, the cat is not trying to harm but is expressing natural predatory instincts. Common behaviors include biting or grabbing hands, feet, or clothing during play, pouncing on moving objects such as toys or other pets, swatting with claws extended, chasing and ambushing, and exhibiting high-energy bursts followed by brief calm periods. This type of play often escalates quickly if the cat's energy is not appropriately channeled.

WHY ARE THEY LIKE THIS?

Several factors contribute to play aggression in cats. *Predatory instincts* play a major role, as even well-fed indoor cats retain a natural drive to stalk, chase, pounce, and capture “prey,” which can sometimes be redirected toward human hands, feet, or other moving objects. *High energy levels*, especially in young cats or high-energy breeds, can also contribute, as excess physical energy needs frequent outlets and may otherwise manifest as rough play. *A lack of appropriate play opportunities*—such as prey-like toys, climbing structures, or interactive play sessions—can leave natural hunting instincts unfulfilled, prompting cats to target hands or feet. *Learned behavior* can further reinforce play aggression; if rough play is accidentally rewarded through attention, movement, or engagement, the behavior may continue or escalate over time.

HOW TO SUPPORT THEM

Supporting a cat with play aggression focuses on providing appropriate outlets and reducing triggers.

1. **Interactive play-** Use wand toys, feathers, laser pointers to mimic prey. Allow the cat to **stalk, chase, pounce, and capture safely.**
2. **Scheduled play sessions-** Offer short, high-energy play sessions multiple times per day to expend excess energy.
3. **Environmental enrichment-** Provide climbing structures, scratching posts, puzzle feeders, and hiding spots to satisfy natural behaviors.
4. **Safe toys-** Encourage solo play with plush prey toys or balls rather than hands or feet.
5. **Observe and redirect-** Learn the cat's body language to anticipate escalation and redirect attention before biting or scratching occurs.

Play Aggression (Cont.)

TRAINING TIPS

Training for play aggression involves teaching alternative behaviors and reinforcing calm interactions.

- **Clicker training and marker training-** Use clicker training to reinforce gentle interactions and reward calm engagement.
- **Use positive reinforcement-** Treats, praise, or playtime after calm or appropriate play teaches acceptable behaviors.
- **Capture “gentle play”-** Reward the cat for interacting with toys rather than hands or feet.
- **Interrupt and redirect-** If the cat escalates, pause play and redirect to a toy or puzzle. Never punish; it increases arousal and stress.
- **Scheduled energy release-** A short, intense play session before handling or petting helps reduce impulsive attacks. Provide a “cool down” period after play before moving into petting and handling.

Play Therapy

WHAT IS PLAY THERAPY?

Play therapy for cats is a structured approach to managing play aggression by providing safe, controlled outlets for a cat's natural predatory instincts. Instead of allowing cats to redirect their hunting behaviors toward human hands or feet, play therapy uses interactive toys—such as wand toys, feather teasers, or laser pointers—to mimic prey. This allows the cat to stalk, chase, pounce, swat, kick, scratch, and “capture” in a safe and appropriate way, satisfying their instinctual drives while reducing unwanted biting or swatting.

WHY TEACH PLAY THERAPY?

Play therapy also helps *manage arousal levels*: short, frequent sessions give high-energy cats a chance to expend excess energy, lowering the likelihood of sudden escalation during human interactions. Over time, consistent play therapy can teach cats that toys—not hands or feet—are the acceptable targets for predatory behavior, while strengthening the bond between cat and handler through positive, structured interactions. It is especially effective when combined with other strategies, such as threshold training or environmental enrichment, to create a comprehensive plan for reducing play aggression.

HOW TO PRACTICE PLAY THERAPY:

1. **Use the right toys-** Choose interactive, prey-like toys such as wand toys, feather teasers, or fabric lures to give the cat an appropriate outlet for chasing and pouncing. Real fur and leather based toys can be especially appealing to cats.
2. **Move the toy like real prey-** Use natural, prey-style movements—slithering, darting, hiding, or peeking out from behind objects—to trigger the cat's instinct to stalk and chase.
3. **Let the cat go through the full predatory sequence-** Encourage a full cycle of *stalk* → *chase* → *pounce* → *grab* → *bunny kick* → “*kill*.” Completing this sequence helps satisfy their predatory drive and reduces rough play later.
4. **Allow successful “captures”-** Let the cat catch the toy frequently so the session feels rewarding and complete rather than frustrating.
5. **Keep sessions short but frequent-** Aim for 5–10 minute sessions, 1–3 times per day, to match a cat's natural bursts of activity without overstimulating them.
6. **End with a calm down routine-** Gradually slow the toy's movement until it “dies,” then offer a small treat or meal to mimic the end of a natural hunt and help the cat settle.
7. **Avoid using hands or feet as toys-** Never involve your hands or feet in play, as this reinforces the idea that people are acceptable play targets.
8. **Redirect appropriately-** If the cat grabs or bites outside of play sessions, pause and toss a toy away from your body to redirect their energy appropriately. Use “Time Outs” as needed.

Play Therapy (Cont.)

9. **Combine with enrichment-** Use puzzle feeders, climbing structures, scratching posts, and window perches to keep the cat mentally and physically fulfilled between sessions.

TRAINING TIPS

- **Use marker or clicker training-** Clicker training can help reinforce moments when the cat redirects to the toy, plays gently, or disengages appropriately.
- **Reinforce appropriate play targets-** Reward the cat for interacting with toys instead of hands or feet. Praise, treats, or brief play can mark desirable behavior.
- **Teach an “end of play” cue-** Use a consistent routine—slowing the toy, stillness, a treat—to help the cat learn when play is ending, reducing frustration.
- **Redirect early signs of escalation-** If you notice dilated pupils, tail twitching, or sudden tension, redirect to a toy before the cat targets you.
- **Maintain predictable play routines-** Consistent play times help reduce impulsive bursts of play aggression and support calmer behavior throughout the day.

Time Outs

WHAT ARE TIME OUTS?

Time Outs are like a trip to the penalty box in hockey. When you do something naughty, you lose out on your chance to play the game (and score goals) for a short period of time. Did you ever have a “naughty step” as a child? Sitting on the naughty step meant you lost out on your privilege to play with your friends, watch TV or other fun activities. Time Outs mean the fun stops. It’s the same for cats.

WHY USE TIME OUTS?

We use Time Outs when we want unwanted behaviors to happen less often. Time Outs teach the cat: when I use my mouth or claws on clothes or skin, I don’t get to play; when I grab at you, the interaction stops. Since the cat wants to play and interact, biting, scratching, and grabbing will decrease. If naughty behaviors don’t “work”, the cats won’t do them!

So, when enforcing a time out, it’s important to teach the cat what does work. Reinforce (with food, play, or affection) those behaviors you want, such as sniffing a finger to greet, calmly accepting petting, or playing with a toy.

HOW TO ENFORCE TIME OUTS

1. When the cat bites, scratches, or grabs at you, give a high pitched “Ow!”
2. Stop interacting with the cat.
 - Move away and ignore the cat for a moment.
 - Or leave the room entirely.
3. After approximately 15 seconds, return to the cat and calmly say “try again.”
 - Offer the cat a chance to engage with appropriate toys.
 - Reward and praise when they engage!
4. Repeat as necessary. Add 15 additional seconds to each time out.

THREE STRIKES, YOU’RE OUT

After three time-outs, the cat loses their buddy.

Leave the room for 5-10 minutes.

The Name Game

WHY PLAY THE NAME GAME?

Playing the name game with your pet teaches them to LOVE responding to their name right away, because they expect it to be a super fun game!

HOW TO TEACH IT

Reinforce the pattern:

1. Grab a few of your pet's favorite treats, in small pieces.
2. Get their attention (kissy noises are usually great!)
3. Give them a treat, but toss it or set it down instead of hand feeding
4. When your pet turns back after eating, give them another treat

Use their name:

5. Just before your pet turns toward you, say their name
6. When they look, toss their treat away, or place it behind them
7. Repeat

TRAINING TIPS

- Keep treats handy at home and on walks so you can call your pets name at random and reward them for looking at you!
- Reward with non-food rewards, too! Call their name and toss their favorite toy when they look, or offer them some affection.
- If your pet is doing something naughty, don't use their name. If their name is associated with scolding, they can learn to run away when called!

Target Training

WHAT IS IT?

Target training teaches your cat to touch a specific object—often a target stick, your hand, or even a post—with their nose or paw. The “target” becomes a tool you can use to guide your cat’s movement and focus. It’s usually taught with a clicker or marker-word and followed by a reward.

WHY TEACH IT?

Target training is a great first skill for cats because it builds confidence and makes learning other behaviors easier. It allows you to guide your cat without picking them up, which reduces stress, and has many practical uses—like helping them enter a carrier, get into position for nail trims, or shift attention away from unwanted behaviors. Plus, once they know how to target, you can use it to teach fun tricks like spins, jumps, or weaving, keeping training both useful and enjoyable.

HOW TO TEACH IT

1. **Nose Target or Paw Target**

- Before you begin your training session, decide if you want your cat to target with their nose, or with their paw.
- Work on these behaviors in separate training sessions when first learning.

2. **Choose Your Target**

- For a nose target you may use a chopstick, wooden spoon, or a commercial target stick. Your finger or open hand works too!
- For teaching a paw target, using your open hand or a post-it note can work like a charm!

3. **Introduce The Target**

- Present the target just a few inches from your cat’s nose or paw.
- When they sniff or touch it, immediately use your marker (click or “yes”) and treat.

4. **Build Repetition**

- Repeat till your cat deliberately moves toward the target to touch it.
- Keep the target close at first, then gradually increase the distance.

5. **Add Movement**

- Begin moving the target slightly so your cat must step or stretch to reach it.

6. **Introduce a Cue**

- Say “touch” just before your cat reaches the target.
- Plan to use different cues for nose and paw targets so your cat doesn’t get confused!

7. **Expand Applications**

- Guide your cat onto a scale, into a carrier, or onto a perch.
- Use the target to teach spins, jumps, or recall.

Target Training (Cont.)

TRAINING TIPS

- **Start easy:** hold the target close enough that success is a guarantee.
- **Use small steps:** don't move the target too far too soon- gradual progress prevents frustration.
- **Short sessions:** 2-5 minutes is plenty. Stop before your cat loses interest.
- **High-value rewards:** use treats your cat loves to keep motivation high.
- **Consistency matters:** Always mark (click or “yes”) the moment of touch to keep communication clear.
- **Trouble shooting:** If your cat ignores the target, try placing a small amount of tuna juice on it, or holding it closer. If they get distracted, reset by making the target easier to reach.
- **End on a good note:** End on a successful repetition so they'll look forward to the next session.

Station Training

WHAT IS STATION TRAINING?

Station training teaches a cat to go to a specific spot—such as a mat, bed, perch, or designated platform—and remain there calmly until released. The “station” becomes a predictable, safe place where the cat can settle, observe, or wait for guidance.

WHY TEACH STATION TRAINING?

Station training is useful because it gives cats a structured way to relax and stay calm during busy or overstimulating moments, helping them settle instead of becoming reactive. It also prevents unwanted behaviors by teaching the cat what to do instead of counter surfing, weaving underfoot, or pestering other pets. Station training supports cooperative care by providing a predictable, comfortable place for nail trims, grooming, medication, or vet-related handling. In multi-pet homes, it helps reduce conflict by giving each animal a designated spot, preventing crowding or resource guarding. Overall, it provides a sense of security, as cats appreciate predictable routines and familiar places where they can feel safe and in control.

HOW TO TEACH IT

1. **Choose the station-** Pick a mat, bed, or perch that is comfortable and easy for the cat to recognize.
2. **Introduce the station-** Place the mat on the floor and click + treat whenever the cat looks at it, approaches it, or steps onto it. Reward generously to build a positive association. If using a perch, use prompts like patting the surface to get their attention.
3. **Reinforce being on the station-** Gradually reward the cat only when all four paws are on the station. Click and treat frequently at first.
4. **Add duration-** Once the cat goes to the station consistently, delay the click by a second or two. Slowly build up longer periods of staying on the station.
5. **Add a cue-** When the cat is reliably offering the behavior, say the cue (“Mat,” “Place,” “Go to bed”) just before the cat steps onto the station. Click + treat to reinforce.
6. **Add distance and distractions-** Step a little farther away from the station or introduce mild distractions, rewarding the cat for staying. Increase difficulty gradually.

TRAINING TIPS

- **Keep sessions short and positive-** 1–3 minutes is plenty; stop before the cat gets frustrated.
- **Use high-value rewards-** Treats the cat loves help build strong associations.
- **Practice in calm moments first-** Teach the skill before using it during exciting or stressful times.

Station Training (Cont.)

- **Teach a release cue-** Use a clear cue like “All done!” to let the cat know when training is over.
- **Don’t punish leaving the station-** Instead, reset and reward when the cat returns—punishment increases stress and breaks trust.
- **Make the station appealing-** Use soft textures, familiar scents, or elevated perches to increase the cat’s comfort.

Teaching Alternative Behaviors

WHY TEACH IT?

Pet parents frequently ask, “how do I get my pet to stop doing *that*?” The most effective way to get your cat to stop doing unwanted behavior is to focus on what you want your cat to do instead. Deciding what you want your cat to do gives you something to train, instead of complain about.

Choose an alternative behavior that your cat cannot do at the same time as the unwanted behavior. Teach the alternative behavior using positive reinforcement. Consistently reward the alternative behavior (what you want your cat to do) and prevent or ignore the unwanted behavior. Your cat will always choose the most rewarding behavior they have learned. Over time, the alternative behavior replaces the unwanted behavior.

HOW TO TEACH IT

1. Define the unwanted behavior.
2. Define what you would like your cat to do instead.
3. Prevent the unwanted behavior from happening through proactive management.
4. Teach the behavior using positive reinforcement and put it on cue.
5. Once learned, practice the new behavior in the problem scenario.

TRAINING EXAMPLE

- **Unwanted behavior:** “My cat jumps up on the counter when I feed them.”
- **Alternative behavior:** “I would prefer that my cat sits politely on the floor and wait for food.”
- **Manage the unwanted behavior:** Arrange the counter so the cat cannot jump up.
- **Teach the alternative behavior:** Use your clicker to teach the cat to sit reliably.
- **Practice it in the problem scenario:** Approach your counter and wait for the cat to sit, click and treat when they sit. Pull out their bowl- if they remain sitting- click and treat. If they move, wait for them to sit again. If they jump up, gently place them back on the floor. If they have remained sitting for taking out the bowl, now take out their food, and the same process applies.

Teaching Alternative Behaviors (Cont.)

TRAINING TIPS

- **Use life rewards!** - Treats go a long way, but you can also use other experiences that are rewarding to your cat. *Examples:* petting, attention, play etc.
- **Be consistent!** - Once your cat knows the alternative behavior, ask for it in every problem scenario and reward it every time. Avoid rewarding the unwanted behavior if it arises again.
- **Manage your environment-** set your cat up to succeed! In the example scenario, it is up to you to arrange the environment so they cannot practice the behavior.
- **Be proactive about training!** - There are a lot of useful skills you can teach your cat, which will prevent most common problem behaviors. *Examples:* settle on a mat, eagerly entering and staying in their crate, or stationing outside of the kitchen.