

WORKING WITH FELINE PLAY AGGRESSION

- Learn to recognize early signs of play aggression—such as dilated pupils, hiding around corners, and crouching. Correct the cat at the first sign of these behaviors. Sometimes a loud clap works to startle the cat; other cats need a stronger stimulus such as a water pistol, or compressed air canister.
- **Do not** use any type of physical punishment (including nose-tapping or bottom-swatting). This only teaches the cat that you will play back roughly, and the cat will respond with intensified violence.
- Any play with hands or other human body parts should be strictly avoided. This includes wrestling with the cat or moving your hand so the cat chases it. Whenever you play with the cat you must use toys. If you do not use toys, the cat will not learn to distinguish your body parts from items of play.
- Play-aggressive cats need consistent handling. If the cat directs its playful behavior towards body parts such as hands and feet, use a verbal correction as the aggressive action is taking place and then stop the interaction or play session.
- Try verbal corrections such as “no” in a deep voice, or “ouch” in a high-pitched voice. If the cat does not respond to verbal correction, you can try blowing lightly on her face, clapping, hissing, or as a last resort, gently scruffing (always supporting the cat from underneath) and removing the cat from you. The latter method usually requires that you withdraw from the cat’s company for a while, as they are liable to repeat the attack.
- No one should let the cat get away with biting hands or any body part. You should only use the most minimal amount of correction needed to obtain the desired response. The point is to interrupt the aggressive event so the cat learns from that experience, but to not be so traumatic that the cat begins to fear you. If done consistently, this action will decrease the probability of the cat exhibiting the inappropriate behavior in the future.
- The cat should be given appropriate outlets for play and plenty of exercise. Provide interactive play at least once per day, preferably 2-3 times. Good toys include cat-dancers, fishing pole toys or string toys. The play-session should include a “cool-down” period at the end where the toy is moving much slower so the cat is not left feeling more frustrated.
- Leave toys that the cat can play with when alone, such as balls. Try to vary them daily to ease boredom.

Considerations

- Other cats may be OK, but they should have similar energy levels and temperaments.
- You *must* be willing to set and stick to a regular play routine and continue with consistent handling and gentle correction. Without a regular outlet, the cat’s behavior will deteriorate.
- Any type of “rough-housing” with the cat can cause its behavior to escalate into a neurotic-type aggression and/or reinforce and intensify the play-aggressive behavior.
- Environment considerations: This type of cat generally needs room to romp.

For more information about cat behavior

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