

Taking the Pounce and Bite out of Tigger

Many cats bite in play and others bite out of fear. It is your responsibility to teach the cat what is appropriate and inappropriate. The following suggestions may help with cats who like to use their teeth and claws. ***Please contact an animal behaviorist for help with an aggressive animal.***

- 1) **Spaying/Neutering:** If the cat sharing your home is not spayed or neutered, you may want to consider starting with this. Spaying and neutering is not a cure-all, but many behaviors are driven by hormones which spaying and neutering help remove. Male cats are ruled by testosterone; the female cat ovulates frequently and stays in heat up to two or three weeks. The male cat courts with caterwauling catcalls as does the female in heat. Spaying and neutering will help take away some of the disturbances that normal mating instincts cause and the aggression that sometimes accompanies it.
- 2) **Temptations:** Avoid loose pants, flowing skirts, and loose shoe laces that will entice a cat to chase, bite and/or claw. Teach children not to run around animals.
- 3) **Training:** Yes, cats can be trained. Teach the cat to come by calling his name and giving him a treat when he comes to you. Many cats come when they hear the can opener; they too can learn to come when called. This will help you to control the cat in different situations. When you see the cat getting ready to pounce on Grandma as she shuffles by, you can interrupt the behavior by calling her to you. If you see the cat getting ready to pounce, interrupt her behavior with tin foil balls that you can have conveniently placed around the house. This way you will teach the cat to chase after more appropriate objects than the humans in the house.
- 4) **Playing:** Have kitty cat play sessions a few times a day. This will entertain the cat and make her more tired. Cats often follow the same sequence in play that they would use in a hunt. They stalk, pounce, kill, and eat their prey, so be sure to have play times fulfill all those needs. Often humans tire of the game and then leave a cat in a heightened state of arousal causing the cat to bite the nearest thing—the human they were playing with. If using a laser light to play, be sure to allow the cat plenty of time to chase the light, then throw a catnip mouse where the light is and allow the cat to play with the mouse. Put a morsel of food on the floor at the end of play to simulate eating the kill. If you are tired at the end of a busy day, all this can take place right from your armchair during commercial breaks if necessary, but usually the cat will be much more entertaining than the television!
- 5) **Bite and Claw Inhibition in Play:** Teach the cat appropriate use of claws and teeth by shouting “Ouch” every time a cat bites or claws hard during a play session. Get up and walk away. After a few minutes, call the cat to you and start the play session again. Soon the cat will realize that biting and scratching hard ends fun games and the cat will learn to modify her behavior in order to keep the game going. Use the phrase “No claws” and “Stop biting” so the cat learns to associate this phrase with the action. Then if the cat jumps on your lap and begins to knead excessively, you can use the phrase “No claws” to get the cat to stop without having to reprimand the cat and remove her from your lap. If the cat is an affectionate nibbler, you can say “Stop biting” before the nibbles begin to hurt so you don’t have to reprimand the cat for what she thinks is affection.
- 6) **Rule making:** Set limits in the household. Cats pounce, bite, and scratch in the middle of the night if they are allowed to. Decide what the rules are and enforce them. If you don’t want the cat pouncing on your feet in the middle of the night, then teach him to get off with a hiss and a quick squirt of water. Don’t get up and play with the cat thinking he is lonely. This only rewards the cat’s behavior and before you know it you will be getting up several times a night. Have quiet play toys for the cat. At night, put the cat in a separate room with lots of climbing apparatuses and toys.
- 7) **Socialization and Handling:** Cats who were not socialized early in life or those who experienced excessive or inappropriate reprimands or handling by humans often have a great fear of being near people. These cats need to be taught that having humans around can be quite rewarding. Please see the article entitled *Socializing the Fearful Cat* for more information on how to help build confidence in the fearful cat.