

Socializing and Handling Cats

Socialize

Lack of socialization as a kitten, abuse, or excessive corrections for undesired behavior, often cause a cat to be leery of humans. A socialization program needs to be started in order to help build confidence in the cat and convince her that having humans around is not a bad thing.

1. To avoid fear problems, start socialization early in kittenhood. If you live in a quiet household, invite people over. Have men, children, people in uniforms, all come and go out of your house to help the kitten get used to all sorts of people and noises. This will help prevent the kitten from feeling threatened by people.
2. For adult cats who are fearful of humans, socialization is a little more involved. Never allow a stranger to approach and reach out to a fearful cat.
3. Do not reassure the cat when he is showing fear as this rewards the fearful response.
4. Allow the cat to approach visitors. You can encourage this by feeding the cat next to the visitor by dropping tasty morsels all around the area leaving bigger amounts closer to the visitor.
5. Tell the visitor not to move suddenly or stare at the cat.
6. Once the cat is taking the food from around the visitor, have the visitor toss treats toward the cat. Make sure the visitor does not make big arm movements when doing this.
7. The visitor can work up to having the treats in an extended hand and sitting quietly, looking away from the cat, while the cat investigates and approaches.
8. Repeat these steps with different guests.
9. For extremely fearful cats, it may be necessary to start the cat eating treats from across the room, or perhaps even in the next room depending on the degree of fear.
10. DO NOT RUSH ANY OF THESE STEPS.

Handling

Some cats do not like to be handled or become over stimulated when stroked. The following steps will help these cats learn to be handled for longer periods of time.

1. Start these exercises with a tired cat.
2. Find what the cat will tolerate, i.e. scratching behind the ear or under the chin and start touching the cat in that area all the while praising the cat for any positive reactions.
3. Slowly move to other parts of the cat. Make note of sensitive areas. Start with very gentle touches for sensitive cats and keep the sessions short. For some cats this may be only two strokes and then a treat.
4. Build up to stronger touches and longer sessions, but don't increase the strength of the touch and the duration of the session at the same time.
5. As the cat begins to accept touching, start to look in the cat's ears and examine the paws. Do this quickly and gently at first and build up the length of time spent doing it gradually.
6. REMEMBER: Always praise the cat for appropriate responses. Use food treats to distract a cat from touches on extremely sensitive areas.
7. Make all touch sessions pleasant. Be sure to be in a relaxed mood yourself when attempting these sessions as the cat will pick up on your mood.
8. Soon both of you will look forward to these touching sessions.

See the article entitled *Taking the Pounce and Bite out of Tigger* for more information on biting and scratching problems.