



Maricopa County Animal Care & Control

Curbing Cat Aggression Toward People

Felines are born to hunt. Their quick reflexes and sharp claws and teeth are made for catching and tearing prey, not for biting and scratching their human caretakers. There are several reasons that a cat may show aggression toward people.

Nipping Ankles

Cat got your ankle? It's not unusual to receive a few scratches and nips as your cat pounces, stalks and jumps her way through kittenhood. Your animal companion is simply honing her hunting skills. While most cats grow out of this predatory aggression as they mature, it is often seen in adult cats who do not receive enough exercise.

Adopting another cat or kitten of the same sex and approximately the same age and activity level will give your cat another outlet for his excess energy. If getting another cat is not possible, try creating artificial prey. Purchase or make some interactive toys and schedule daily play sessions with your super-frisky feline. Cats love anything that can be wiggled, dangled, or otherwise made to look alive.

If your cat does nip you, do not attempt to pull away. This can actually make the injury worse and may also be interpreted as your willingness to play the game!

Instead, let out a loud and shrill "Eek", at the moment of the attack, followed by a sharp "No!" The next step is to ignore the cat for the next ten minutes. With consistency and patience, your cat will eventually learn that if he wants to extend the play session (which he always wants to do), he will have to be more gentle.

Fear biting

Some cats may use their claws and teeth, and have even been known to climb up the nearest person's body-if they feel intense fear. This kind of aggressive behavior might be prompted by a loud noise, and is more likely to occur in cats who are already on edge, stressed by a move, for example, or a new person or animal in the house. If your cat suddenly goes into attack mode, it's best to simply close the door and leave her alone. Do not enter the room for four to six hours.

Aggression toward strangers

Although most cats who are uncomfortable with strangers usually hide or leave the room, some felines may bite and scratch. When your cat is exhibiting defensive behavior toward strangers (hissing, hair standing on end), it is important to avoid the cat until he calms down. To prevent this behavior, Maricopa Animal Care & Control recommends that

For more information on animal care, behavior or AC&C programs, contact
(602) 506-PETS or visit pets.maricopa.gov
Excerpts from the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Cats International.

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you get your cat used to other people when she is young, at about seven to 12 weeks. Have three or four different people regularly handle her for no more than five minutes at a time.

If your adult cat is undersocialized, recruit cat-loving friends to come over on a regular basis. Give them your cat's favorite food treats or a toy attached to a long fishing pole. When Kitty begins to connect good times and good food with people who come through the door, the hissing will be replaced with purring. If the problem is serious, you may need to work with a professional trainer or animal behaviorist.

Redirected Aggression

Consider this scenario: Fluffy is sitting by the window as usual. You pass by and gently stroke her back. Suddenly your affectionate and gentle pet has her teeth in your arm. This phenomena is called redirected aggression. It occurs when a cat is highly aroused and in an aggressive state (for instance, by the sight of an outside cat, or by a loud, disturbing noise), and the cat attacks a person or another animal within reach.

If a cat is in an aggressive state or mood, it can be very dangerous for you to approach him, or try to pick him up. Wait until the cat has changed its mood before interacting with him. The state of arousal can last two hours or more, but in most cases is over within 30 minutes. After

the cat has engaged in another behavior, such as grooming, playing, or eating, it is usually safe to approach him.

To treat this type of aggression, the arousing stimulus must be identified so that it can be eliminated. For example, if the cat is upset by looking at other cats through the window, the resident cat's view should be obstructed by pulling a shade or keeping the cat out of the room with the windows.

Many bites and scratches can be avoided simply by understanding, and respecting, your cat. Some companion cats do not like to be held or touched in certain places, and a show of claws may be their way of telling you not to go there. Learn to read feline body language; if you see your cat's ears go back, or if she leans on her hips with her claws exposed and mouth open, it's best to back off.