



HOW TO PREVENT ROUGH PLAY IN CATS

Play is a very important activity for all animals, but when normal play turns into rough play, there is a chance it can escalate into aggression. Remember, normal play helps maintain and strengthen a cat's social, and problem solving abilities. Normal play activities also provide an enriching outlet for natural behaviors such as chasing, stalking, swatting, pouncing and biting.

This guide will help you recognize the tipping point from normal play to rough play, and teach you ways to prevent your cat from developing negative behaviors.

Using the following guide, start by determining if the behaviors you observe are play, or if they have escalated to aggression. If you are unsure, you should contact our behavior and training department.

Normal Cat Play Behavior and Body Language:

Pouncing, stalking, and rolling onto back
Ears are forward, relaxed and their body is loose (mouth slightly open)
Cat may chirp, but otherwise will not vocalize
Caution: Hands can easily become the target of play; provide a toy to redirect.

Rough Cat Play Behavior and Body Language:

Gnawing on your hand, grabbing your hand with his/her paws, nipping
Swatting repeatedly at your hand or body and ignoring toy
Pupils become more dilated and tip of tail will flick quickly
Body movement is side-to-side or rolling around. Still loose.

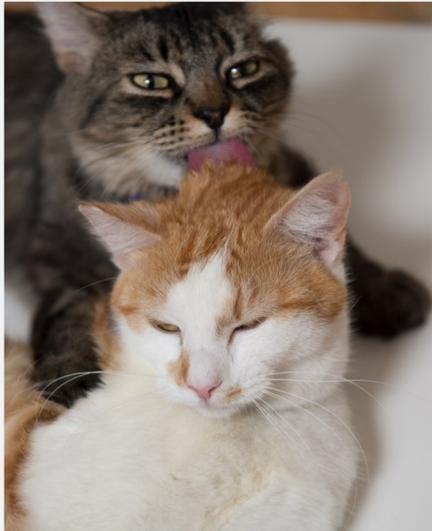
Aggressive Cat Behavior and Body Language:

Cat becomes tense and focuses intently on you/your hands or body parts
Ears will flatten back or to side, and head will be pulled back
Bites or scratches quickly, leaving injury
Pupils can be extremely dilated or tiny slits
Cat will growl, hiss, or spit

IF YOU DETERMINE YOUR CAT IS PLAYING ROUGH rather than acting aggressively, continue reading to learn ways to prevent play that is too rough.



BEHAVIOR & TRAINING



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Start by providing a variety of toys to your cat. Next, observe what he or she is naturally attracted to. Does he or she prefer to chase a feather at the end of a wand, or bat around a ball? Here are a few items to try: The Cat Dancer, Wand or Fishing Pole toys, wine corks, paper bags, ping-pong or sponge balls, Twist 'n Treat, or Tricky Treat Ball.

Once you know your cat's favorite toys, create a collection and store them in a safe place. Start by rotating your cat's toys during each play session. For example, in the morning play with your cat using the wand toy and in the afternoon, toss your cat a ball. Keeping the toys fresh and novel will help stimulate your cat.

Schedule two play sessions with your cat daily. These play sessions should be scheduled when your cat is most active. You may want to take a few days to observe his/her routine and schedule accordingly. A good time to play is before feeding, providing an outlet for your cat's natural hunting instinct.

If your cat tries to play with your feet or hands, use a toy to redirect your cat away from your body. If your cat will not stop, retrieve a different toy from the collection. If your cat still doesn't stop, move away and end the game.

During your cat's mealtime, feed him or her from a Kong or Busy Buddy. This form of feeding will make your cat "work" for his/her food, helping him or her to use both mind and body. Remember, a mentally and physically stimulated cat is usually a happy cat!

End the game if it gets too rough. Provide clear consequences when your cat interacts in a way that you do not like. For example, the instant he or she starts to scratch or place his/her mouth on you, stand up and leave the room. The cat will learn that when he acts a certain way, the game ends.