

There Are No Bad Calico Cats



**A guide for cat owners and cat volunteers
Who believes in the well-behaved cat?
By Bonnie the Calico Cat**

(As told to Mary Louise deManbey)

Published by:
Our Companions Domestic Animal Sanctuary
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Dear Friends of the Animals,

Our Companions is a nonprofit organization that believes no pet should ever be homeless. Every pet is a beautiful, blessed creature that deserves life and love.

Yet, in Connecticut, healthy pets are destroyed every day. Some animals facing euthanasia have behavior problems that are easily corrected. Others have health issues that can be resolved in a caring home. Most just need the right treatment and a loving human companion.

Our Companions has rescued hundreds of cats who were once facing euthanasia. In a perfect world, our work would stop there. Every cat would immediately fall into perfect harmony with its new owner and surroundings. However, we know that this is not always the case. Cats are sensitive and intelligent creatures that sometimes require special behavioral care to help them feel loved and secure in their homes.

This guide has been created to help cat owners identify and correct behavioral issues. The guide is loaded with practical advice on topics ranging from scratching and litter box habits to aggressiveness, shyness and eating disorders.

We wish to extend a heartfelt thanks to Bonnie the Calico Cat for sharing her wisdom and expertise, and to her faithful secretary, Mary Louise deManbey, for documenting every fantastically feline bit of it.

As always, I'd love to hear from you. Let me know about the success that you had with your cat after applying the techniques featured in the guide. You may contact me at (860) 242-9999 or at SusanL@OurCompanions.org.

Gratefully,

Susan Linker
Chief Executive Officer

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Bonnie's Bon Mots

Introduction

Dear Feline Lovers and Others (are there any others?),

Okay. It's true. We Calico cats have a reputation for being temperamental. (It must be because humans think we're Scottish or something like that.) And yes, it's true that in my day I have been known to snarl at a hand that gets too close. But I'm here to tell you that there's a reason for those snarls and misbehaviors. We're not all that bad. We're just misunderstood.

So before you think about leaving Miss Kitty behind because she's missed the litter box, or she hasn't come out from under the bed in a month, or she's scratched up your new grand piano, think about where she's coming from. And you'll be pleasantly surprised that with a little bit of work and understanding, you can create a joyful bond that you never dreamed could have happened.

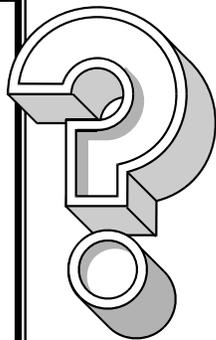
As a cat obviously intellectually advanced for my age, I have taken it upon myself to reveal the inner secrets of feline misbehaviors and ways that you can help eliminate these behaviors. My person has agreed to take down my notes as I recently had a manicure and my paws simply can't take the abuse of a computer keyboard right now. In writing this guide, I found resource information and inspiration from the book "Is Your Cat Crazy" by John C. Wright and Judi Wright. Their thoughts give credibility to what I have thought all along about cat behavior.

Finally, I am writing this guidebook for the dedicated volunteers from Our Companions Domestic Animal Sanctuary, who uses their spare time working with cat owners to help them with their feline "misunderstandings." These folks are dedicated to saving every last one of us because they know at heart there really are no bad Calicos.

Responsibly yours,

Bonnie the Calico Cat

(As told to Mary Louise deManbey)



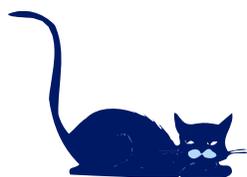
SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Every year, literally millions of my feline cousins are abandoned and abused. Too many others are euthanized, and not just because they are in ill health or have reached senior cat-hood. Often it's because little Fluffy or Tigger has just plain misbehaved. What most people don't know is that we see you humans as often misbehaving and we are simply reacting to how we are being treated (or ignored).

So what would turn an otherwise loving, caring person into persons who misbehave toward us cats? What I have read, experienced and been told is that these are the common reasons:

(Starting from the biggest faux paw, if you'll pardon the French pun...)

- **Litter Box Problems**
- **Spraying**
- **Aggressiveness**
- **Shyness**
- **Scratching and other Misdemeanors**
- **Multi-cat Household Problems**
- **Eating Disorders and other Peculiar Behaviors**



We're Not Human – We're Cats!

The very first bit of advice I would give a person who was ready to give up on his or her cat is to take a deep breath, don't react right away, never use physical punishment in any way, and for heaven's sake don't think that we think the way you do. We are, after all, cats. We're not human. Of course we have feelings – we feel anger, sadness, jealousy, contentment, love, just like you. BUT, we don't calculate our feelings. We aren't plotting to get back at you for your squirting us with a water bottle (although we will avoid you). We're not harboring a grudge toward you because you gave Fluffy your lap more often.

We are simply who we are. We react and live in the present. We are the original Buddha. By nature, we are sensitive creatures, feeling every breath around us, sensing even the slightest of moods directed toward us. We invented stress. Stress is the dark shadow in us that waits to come out under the right circumstances. That often means the wrong environment.



Environmental stressors can cause a lot of unwanted behavior – stressors like people yelling at each other, small children grabbing at our tails, and chaotic, messy rooms. We can be claustrophobic in the wrong setting. We need space, just like you do. (I cringe at the thought of one of us being confined to a bathroom for long periods of time because of misbehavior.) And we like things orderly and clean. (I for one absolutely hate it when my person puts too many shoes under OUR bed....making it just too crowded and too prone to dust bunnies, tsk tsk.)

I personally believe we, as a species, have the intelligence and perseverance to be independent and take care of our own emotional needs. But any astute cat owner will know that beneath our Greta Garbo facades lurk cravings to be petted and scratched under the chin until the cows come home (whatever that means). In that regard, we aren't unlike our human companions. But unlike humans, we don't question our motives for needing attention. We just want it when we want it, and consider it our inevitable feline rights. (Let's face it – we can be VERY cute.)



One of my “cute” moments



Positive Reinforcement vs. Negative Reinforcement

I will admit that I have engaged in all of the major misbehaviors that make people want to get rid of us. I'm not ashamed of it. (I was obviously misunderstood at the time) I will tell you, though, that my person had a lot to learn about how to stop my misbehaviors. A good parent will tell you that you can't stop bad behavior with bad behavior. Any kind of physical punishment, whether it's hitting, squirting water, or shaking, will only reinforce the bad behavior. Most misbehavior has an underlying reason, and physical punishment will only serve to make us afraid of you, or stress us out to the point where we will misbehave again.

I can remember once my person coming home to see that I had sprayed on her couch, basically making it a candidate for the town dump. Well, of course I did. A new cat in the household was invading my territory. Couldn't she see that? NO. Instead, she shook me so hard I thought my eyeballs would roll onto the floor. I couldn't figure out what she was doing, because I couldn't remember what I had done. (It had been an early morning event, way too long ago for my short attention span). So what did I do? Well, I was so stressed out over the incident that I, shall we say, left a present for her in the bedroom.

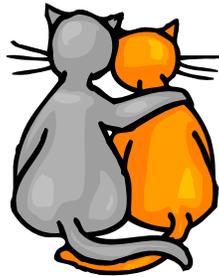


*Cats get mad when
misunderstood*

Things escalated to the point where I was sure I would have to get a divorce lawyer. I mean she didn't even check me out at the vet to see if there was really something physically wrong with me, for heaven sake, which would be the first thing to look for

when spraying occurs. Luckily she came to her senses and realized that there was a reason for my behavior and that the best way to stop the behavior was rewarding me for good behavior.

Take for instance this situation. My person recently welcomed a new addition to our household. Tigger, with the baseball mitts for paws, came to us when my person's aunt passed away. I was not too pleased, mind you, being the alpha cat in a formerly two-cat household. I had my moments of terror over this monstrous cat, so much so that I lashed out at him to let him know who was boss (while hiding my own fear of him). Instead of yelling at me, my person would observe the times when we actually eyed each other and were within nose touching distance without any major disturbances. My person would stroke me and tell me how good I was being (which I already knew, but I was glad she recognized that too). It's taken some time, but I now tolerate the beast among us. The other day, when my person wasn't looking of course, we actually touched noses.

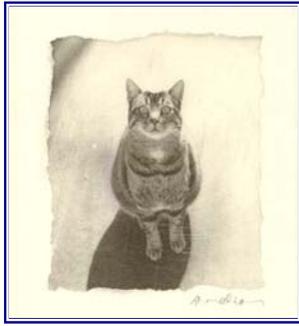


Secret Pals (don't tell Mom)

Although we aren't human, like humans we respond much more favorably to positive reinforcement. Negative reinforcement, on the other hand, can do just the opposite. It can make us afraid of you. If your cat is biting your leg and you instinctively kick him away, your cat is going to think you are an aggressor and will continue to bite you out of fear. Something as simple as squirting us with water to stop the behavior can make us associate that discomfort with you, because your hand is doing the squirting. It's a temporary solution that will widen the chasm of misunderstanding between you and your kitty. It can make us want to attack you as a means of self-defense because we perceive, rightly or wrongly, that you are going to do us harm. So don't do it!

Reward us when you observe us doing the right thing and then we'll keep doing the right thing, just to get your attention. (But don't let the whole world know that we crave that attention. We really do like affection, but we like to keep that under wraps. It's part of our mystique). We do respond as humans would, more favorably to positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement works. Try it the next time you want to grab that squirt bottle. There are other ways to stop bad behavior.

The next few pages will hopefully help you stop those behaviors in a healthy way. Speaking as a cat that has been there, done that, experienced that and survived to tell the story, here are my thoughts.



The Big LBP – Missed Again (Litter Box Problems)

Veterinarians and animal behaviorists alike will tell you that the biggest complaints and concerns they receive from cat owners is that their cat has not used the litter box correctly. Of course I will admit this can be very distasteful for any cat owner (I, myself, even though I have been in the past a perpetrator of this behavior, like cleanliness and pleasant aromas.) But the first thing you have to get out of your mind is that your cat is trying to get back at you for something you've done to her. This may or may not be true, but there are other explanations that need to be considered as well. Here are some of them:

- **Marking:** Even though cats are highly domesticated, some of us like to keep in touch with our more instinctual sides, particularly when we are trying to let you know that we are stressed. Yes, I'm talking about marking territory. This behavior is normal but can be reduced and often eliminated by neutering. Some breeds such as Abyssinians enjoy maintaining their "wild ties" and may be more prone to marking. Breeds such as Persians and Himalayans are very sensitive to stressors and may also exhibit stronger tendencies toward marking. It's important to always do your homework on various breeds before buying or adopting. This increases the chances that you will pick a compatible life partner.
- **An underlying illness:** Yes, sometimes your kitty may have a urinary tract infection that makes it difficult for him to make it to the box on time. It's always a good idea to bring your kitty to the vet to check out any physical problems that can be treated with the right medication and change of diet.
- **Stress:** Since we are by nature sensitive creatures, we are easily stressed out by situations that you might not otherwise consider stressful. Cats can be stressed out by any changes in their routine (We invented steady habits). It could be as simple as moving the litter box to a different place or as complex as adding a new member to the family, either a new baby, a new animal or new spouse. Sometimes if a cat is alone for long periods of time, or ignored by his person who he looks for affection, he can also feel abandoned, which creates even more stress. It's always important to look for any stressors that might be causing the problem, before you can get rid of the problem.

- **Unclean Litter box**: One of our endearing charms (among many) is that we are very tidy creatures. A messy litter box is an invitation for us to do our business elsewhere. A multi-cat household presents even more problems. Who wants to share a litter box? Each cat should have his own litter box with litter that is scooped out on a daily basis.
- **Location of the litter box**: Cats need to know that they have an escape route. If a litter box is placed in an inconspicuous place (for the sake of the owner who doesn't want to have to look at it) it may be fine and dandy for the owner, but not okay for your cat. She needs to know that she can run away if some one, either human or animal, is lurking in the shadows (It's that sensitivity thing again). If the litter box is placed in such a way that your cat can't see anything (like an enclosed litter box facing a wall, for instance), your cat may try to find better places to do her business.

Sometimes, too, a litter box placed in a hard-to-get-to place like a cellar can create an obstacle for your cat as well. This is especially true for senior cats that may have trouble climbing stairs.

- **Wrong Litter**: Being the sensitive creatures that we are, we have particular sensitivities to the feel of litter under our paws. Some litter feels just too darn gravelly for our precious paws. Or, if you suddenly change the litter that your cat is used to using, don't be surprised if he turns his nose up at it.
- **Forcing the use of the litter box**: We are clean by our very natures. It is our instinct to use a litter box. If we've missed the litter box there's a reason. Don't get so mad at us that you pick us up and rub our noses in the litter the way that some people do with dogs. It doesn't work with dogs and it certainly doesn't work with us. It's that negative reinforcement again, and only serves to make us more stressed out, more afraid of you, and more likely to miss the litter box yet again. In essence, you're creating a cycle of bad behavior when it comes to using the litter box.
- **Competing Actions** (or having to decide to do two actions at the same time). It's not a good idea to place food dishes near litter boxes. Let's face it we are not multi-taskers. Forcing us to make a decision to do two things at the same time is just too stressful for us. We don't do it. So we will find some other place to do our business if it comes down to having to eat first. What can I tell you? Our stomachs rule.



BONNIE'S BON MOTS– Litter Box Solutions

Here's what you can do to discourage your kitty from choosing sites other than the litter box.

- **Redirect your kitty** from those places that he views as more interesting than the litter box. This may be as simple as restricting access by closing a bedroom door.
- **Manage the environment** to help create boundaries for our behavior. We like to keep our spaces neat. When you don't help us in this endeavor, sometimes we get annoyed. That's why you may discover that your kitty has decided to use the pile of dirty clothes on the floor as a litter box. Lead by example. Keep clothing, shoes, and other clutter put away. We don't want to see it and you certainly don't want to smell it.
- **The lure of tubs and sinks** is just too much for some cats to resist. You can easily discourage your cat from littering here by leaving a small amount of water in the tub or sink. Remember, we hate getting our feet wet.
- **Other methods of redirecting** include covering off-limit furniture and surfaces with things that we hate such as tin foil or plastic carpet runners (bottom side up). Carpet runners have small "spikes" on the bottom that can't hurt us but will definitely deter us. And don't forget, you can always use competing actions to your advantage. Place food bowls in areas where you don't want your cat littering.

Here's what you can do to get your kitty to use the litter box correctly.

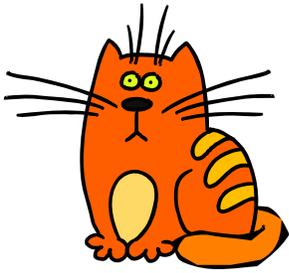
- **Never use force** to get your kitty to use the litter box. You'll only make it worse because he'll associate you with a painful situation and he will only get more stressed out. Cats instinctively know how to use the litter box. If the problem is a persistent one, make an appointment with your veterinarian to make sure your kitty doesn't have a urinary infection or some physical cause for litter box misses.



Check with your vet to rule out any physical problems.

- **Check for physical problems.** Sometimes kitty can develop a urinary tract infection, especially if your kitty is a male. Going properly in the litter box, then, become a challenge. Be sure to rule out any physical problems by going to your vet before you accuse your kitty of bad behaviors.
- **Assess your environment to see if there could be a stressor** that is causing your fluff ball to miss the box and then find ways to reduce the stress. For instance, if kitty is contending with a new cat in the household, make sure that you give your kitty lots of attention and affection and his own litter box, to offset any territorial tension he might be feeling. And remember to use positive reinforcement (not negative reinforcement). If the problem is persistent and if a physical cause is ruled out, then you might want to think about a medication that your veterinarian can prescribe at least temporarily.
- **Keep a clean litter box.** Yes, I know the thought of scooping out litter every day may be distasteful, but isn't it worse if you have to scoop out other kinds of things in locations OTHER THAN the litter box? With the new "scoopable" litters now, it's really easy to scoop out the box on a daily basis. It's also advisable to change the litter at least once every two weeks. I mean, how often do you clean your bathroom? (Don't answer that if you are prone to housecleaning phobias...)
- **Make sure you have the right litter for your kitty.** Again, cats don't like change too often, and they develop a certain fondness and familiarity with certain litters. If you are going to change the litter you use, make it a gradual change by mixing the old with the new. And realize that you're taking a chance that there may be a few litter box misses in the interim.
- **Make sure your litter box is located in a place** where your kitty can escape if necessary (in his eyes). And if you have a senior cat that has trouble climbing stairs, make sure you have a box accessible to her. You may want to consider having a litter box on each floor of your house.





Oh Oh, Miss Kitty's Been Here (Spraying Problems)

I must admit, there is nothing more unpleasant to the nose than to enter a house and smell the presence of my feline cousins. Unfortunately, spraying is not just a male problem, females do it too, regardless of whether they've been" fixed (although spaying and neutering your cat greatly reduces the chance of spraying happening.)

Spraying is different than urinating in that we literally emit urine "spray" by lifting our tail in an upright position, essentially marking whatever it is we are spraying on. Because we are by nature very territorial, should anything or anybody upset our territory, we naturally want to circle the wagons and put our mark on our property. I can't tell you how many times my person has had to wash the shower curtain recently, because monster kitty Tigger joined our household. I simply had to prove that I was there first, so naturally I was going to spray on the shower curtain in that bathroom, in the same spot, over and over again. What else could I do to reduce my stress level over this intruder? (We won't talk about the time I ruined Mom's couch when sister Meg came on the scene. That was during my adolescence, what can I tell you.)

There are any number of reasons for spraying behavior, including a physical problem. But mostly, when your cat sprays, she's marking her territory, showing off her sexuality; or there is some other stressor affecting her behavior. Spraying often is a reaction to fighting for dominance and our unalienable rights to own property (i.e. your property or even you). It could be that your kitty feels threatened by a cat he has encountered outside. It could be that the new baby has taken over his spot. It could be because the new cat now sleeps on the bed where your kitty used to sleep. Your kitty is basically telling you: "hey, I'm still here". This is my place. And by the way, don't leave me for him (or her).



Ironically, this kind of spraying behavior has very little effect on the new cat in the household that may be causing the problem. He will probably just sniff and walk away. Or he might find another spot nearby to mark his territory. And the turf war goes on, with the end result of your having to buy new shower curtains, new couches, or investing in a lot of bottles of vinegar.

There is hope. I've been there, done that, and lived to tell the tale. Here is what I would suggest:



BONNIE'S BON MOTS – Spraying Solutions

- Don't use ammonia to remove the offending odor. The odor will remain and will act as an enticement for your kitty to return to the same spot. There are a number of good solutions in the market today. I would recommend "Nature's Miracle." Or you can use a mild dish detergent. Or, use a chlorine-based product. If you follow this with vinegar, you can deter your cat from returning to the same place. (We simply can't abide the smell of vinegar.)
- Use a room deodorizer to change the smell of the room so that kitty won't associate the area with her previous spraying behavior.
- Try to reassure your kitty that any new member of the household hasn't replaced her by giving her extra special attention. Have longer play times, find some special toys for her, and let her have that lap of yours to let her know that your relationship with her hasn't changed.



- Rule out any physical problems with your veterinarian.
- In a multi-cat household, in particular, if there is a cat that your kitty is feeling threatened by, try to separate them as much as possible. (However, don't confine your cat in a small space like a bathroom. This can only cause more stress and then... you know what.) If you can, put them in separate rooms, and separate them as often as possible if they are confronting each other. Also, feed your kitty in a separate place from the new cat.

- Make sure your kitty knows that there are certain places that are his alone. I know in my household, I own the green stuffed chair in the living room, and Tigger the monster cat has his little spot on the pink towel on the back of the couch. My person will not allow him to touch my chair, thank you very much.



- Never use physical punishment to get your point across that spraying is not acceptable. Walk away when you find the offending odor, count to 20 and think about what you are going to do to curb the behavior (and why kitty is doing it.)
- In some instances, if the spraying continues, certain medications may be advisable, but this should be a last resort. Check with your veterinarian.
- Don't confine kitty in a small area for long periods of time, thinking that the spraying behavior will simply go away. I know some people think that if you imprison the offending cat in a bathroom or a closet, she won't be able to do any more damage (out of sight, out of mind so to speak). Again, this kind of negative reinforcement only serves to create more stress and even more bad behavior, including a continuation of the spraying.



- If your kitty is an outdoor cat, he may be bringing the smell of other cats' urine into your household, which could be a threat and therefore another stressor. Try to keep Miss Kitty inside if possible until the spraying behavior stops.
- Use vertical spacing if possible. This is an interesting dynamic that occurs in multi cat households. The dominant cat usually will find a territory sitting in the highest place. If your cat is feeling threatened by the new kitty that is sitting in a taller place, try to find a higher space for him, or use planks that will give him access to higher places.



Go Ahead, Make My Day (Aggressiveness Problems)

Even though we have been domesticated for a very long time, we cats still have a bit of the jungle in us. That means we are predatory by nature. That's not to say that we should exhibit inappropriate aggressive tendencies, especially toward our owners and sibling cats (and dogs, too).

There are among us people who absolutely fear us. Some of this fear is not unwarranted because there are times when even your sweet little fur ball can have a bad day and simply attack – you, the furniture, other animals, whatever. When that happens, naturally your instinct is to run for cover and to be genuinely fearful of your kitty. My advice to you is, don't run, don't hide, but try to understand first where the behavior is coming from and then confront it head-on (gently of course).

Owners need to be aware of signs of aggression in order to avoid any possible harm. In taking a defensive position, cats will arch their backs, with their fur standing slightly on end, with their tails lowered in a half curled position away from their body, whiskers down, and pupils dilated when they are ready to attack. When cats are feeling like they are going to be attacked, they will take an offensive posture, constricting their pupils and crouching in a subservient but vigilant position with their rear end elevated.



There are many reasons why kitty turns into a veritable Little Chucky (i.e. terror). Here are some of them:

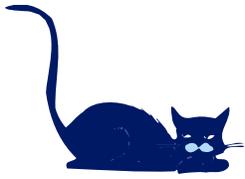
- **Kitty has fought with a neighborhood cat** and he transfers that fear onto you in the form of biting or attacking. Keep in mind that cats are extremely sensitive creatures. A single stressful incident can send a cat into a heightened state of arousal that may last as long as two days. It helps if you respect our boundaries and keep our environment calm and stress-free while we recover from the incident.

- **Kitty has been taught rough play.** I know this to be true because Tigger is constantly biting my person's hand whenever she goes to pet him. He thinks she's playing, no matter how many times I try to set him straight.
- **Kitty lashes out after being petted.** This is a hard one for owners to understand. Sometimes too much petting will cause your kitty to bite. In other words, there is only so much affection your kitty can tolerate; it's just way too emotional and overwhelming. (We can be, after all, at times a bit autistic) You might never know when this is going to happen (surprise, surprise). That's why it's important to recognize signs of aggression before aggression happens.
- **Kitty just doesn't want to be held,** but no, you insist on holding him. Reaching out to pick him up can cause him to be aggressive.
- **Putting your hand in front of his face** to pet him might make him think you are attacking him or closing him off from his environment.
- **Kitty has a new "playmate"** (and I use that word cautiously) in the form of a new cat or as she sees it, a new "rival."
- **Kitty has been left alone** (a lot) with little or no playtime, which has given her pent up energy and no place to displace it other than on you or other cat roommates.
- **Kitty has an underlying neurological disorder** (this is rare but it does happen.).
- **Kitty is reacting to her environment.** Either she's claustrophobic or the room she's in is just too messy to maneuver in.
- A young cat (6 months to a year) may be aggressive due to **changes in hormones.** In short, he or she feeling his or her oats or his or her sexuality. It will pass in most cases. Neutering can also greatly reduce this behavior.



- **Spring Fever** – You laugh at this, but I for one, after being cooped up all winter, go a little berserk in March. I think they call it March Madness. Cats need space to run around in, especially if they are indoor cats.

Here's the thing. Don't be scared. Be strong and follow my advice.



BONNIE'S BON MOTS– Aggression Solutions

- **Distract kitty from the aggressive behavior.** When kitty starts to bite your hand, for instance, grab his favorite toy and let him substitute your hand for the toy. Or use a rolled up ball of aluminum foil for him to chase. Or, use an object that he associates with you, like your car keys and throw the keys in another direction.
- **Gentle pokes** – If kitty is still biting your hand, you can gently nudge his nose. This is not considered physical punishment, but a reminder that this is not acceptable behavior. In fact, your kitty's mom probably did the same thing to him when he was a kitten – a gentle paw tapping his nose; only in this case it's your finger.
- **Separate kitty** from household cats he's aggressive toward until you can gradually get them used to each other (more on that when I talk about multi-cat households).
- If kitty attacks your foot or hand, **don't kick him away or push him away.** This will only serve to cause him to be fearful of you and want to attack you again. Try to stay very still and then try to distract him with a favorite toy.



- **Keep kitty away from the attack "zone"** by putting favorite food in a location nearby, thereby creating competing motivations. Sometimes cats will routinely "play" in an attack mode, jumping out from bureaus scaring their owners half to death. If you put some favorite crunches near enough the bureau but far enough away so he won't be inclined to do his routine jump, you can recondition him to not jump out at you.
- When petting your cat, **be aware of the signs of attack** (like when kitty's whiskers flare or start turning down, when his tail begins flicking very rapidly, or when he flattens or pulls back his ears), and stop petting as soon as you feel him getting ready. Increase the times you pet him each time so that he gets used to you petting him for longer periods.

- When petting kitty, **don't put your hand in front of his face**, come in the back door by starting with the back of his head and ears (scratches behind the ear are heavenly and less threatening).
- **Read body language** and don't pick kitty up if she just doesn't want to be held. She'll let you hold her if she wants you too, but don't force her or you're liable to get swatted. It is, after all, her prerogative as to how and when she is held. I mean, don't you feel the same way?
- **Use play therapy.** Help your kitty to channel his natural hunting instincts in a positive way by scheduling regular play sessions. Provide stimulating toys that mimic the movement of mice or birds. Some of the best toys for this purpose are the Kitty Tease, Da Bird, and the Cat Charmer (available at pet stores). Challenge your kitty's predatory skills but make sure you allow him plenty of successful captures. We do have egos to protect you know.
- **Be patient.** Even your kids graduate from adolescence and that nasty coming of sexuality age. More than likely your kitty will pass through this stage and settle into a normal, more than likely calm routine.
- **When all else fails** and kitty is still playing attack cat, check him out with your vet. There are tranquilizing medications to help calm him down, although this would be only a last resort measure.

Practice these behaviors and before you know it, you will have Fluffy eating out of your hand and not biting it.



Oh Where Oh Where Can My Little Cat Be (Shyness)

So you've just brought Fluffy home for the first time. She was so sweet at the shelter. Not aggressive at all, with that little face looking forlornly at you. You turn around and she's gone, you think, never to be seen again. You spot her there under the bed. Hours later, after much cajoling, opened cans of tuna shoved under the bed, and singing three verses of "Angelical Cats", Fluffy is unmoved, blinking at you in terror from the darkness.

So why bother? Why not just forget about her? Because that's not why you got a cat. You wanted a little fluffy object of affection that you could squeeze and kiss to your hearts content, which would purr in your ear and lick your finger with affection. You want the perfect well-behaved affectionate cat. You feel cheated, maybe disappointed, maybe thinking you made a mistake.

I'm here to tell you, DON'T GIVE UP ON HER. Think of her as a flower waiting to blossom with the right amount of nurturing. But she needs sunlight and water and sustenance. Mostly, she needs you.

I know from personal experience that formerly shy cats can turn into real scene-stealers if you give them the right attention. Take my adopted sister Meg. When she came to our home from the shelter, I was already a year and a half (queen of the roost in my young adulthood). She looked like something the cat, I mean, a person dragged in. She was a bag of bones with matted fur and the saddest expression on her face. Evidently her former owner had abused her and her spirit seemed to be broken.

Meg during her sad days, Me watching on



For six months, she hardly moved from the gold, stuffed chair in our living room. She just laid there, seemingly sleeping her sad life away. And then one day, she had enough. She felt safe enough to get up, roam around, and much to my horror, jump on MY bed with MY owner and sleep on MY pillow. (As you can see, I have mixed feelings about this development). Today she has no problem jumping on my person's lap. In fact, she sticks like Velcro to her most of the time.



Meg no longer being shy (trust me)

That's not to say there aren't some cats that, by nature, are very shy and retiring. It's important to know what you are looking for in a cat. If a shy cat is not for you, then look for shyness when you are picking her out. Like people, if she avoids your touch or avoids looking at you, then it may take some patience to get her to be less retiring.

Sometimes a cat will hide because he's hiding from something in his environment. He might hide for hours in the fireplace in the summer because the bricks are cool, or he may stay away from the carpet and certain areas because there are fleas he's avoiding.

Cats who have come from abusive situations or they have lived out in the wild most of their life generally don't quite trust humans. Trust, then becomes an important goal to strive toward. Developing trust takes a lot of patience and care. One way to spot distrust is to look into your cat's eyes. You can see the fear there if trust isn't there. Don't let this discourage you. My person has handled many feral cats who were fearful of a person's touch, until she would wrap them in a towel, pet them gently until they got used to the attention – a little bit at a time. It takes your not being fearful of your kitty, too. Trust is a two-way street.

Here's what I recommend



BONNIE'S BON MOTS– Shyness Solutions

- **Create a safe, calm environment** for your kitty. (Having small children around might not be ideal for a shy cat.) You can use classical music, soft pillows, and blankets, whatever it takes to create a warm, inviting environment.

- Gradually **get your kitty used to you** by holding her gently in a towel at first so she can't run away. But gauge how stressful this might be. If she really wants to be released then release her. But try a little coaxing each day.
- **Try to find a surrogate object** that your kitty can connect to. Monster Cat Tigger had a little shyness problem when he first entered our household, but my person gave him a stuffed yellow cat that he is simply gone gaga over (I swear they are having an illicit affair. I haven't had the heart to tell him that the yellow cat has no substance other than stuffing.)



Me with Tigger's stuffed object of affection

- **Be patient.** Give your kitty time to adjust. If she's been traumatized in any way, she isn't going to be sitting on your lap for quite some time. Or, she may never be a lap sitter. But accept her for who she is, just like you would accept your own child, even if she wasn't just what you ordered. There's plenty to love there. You just have to find it.
- If you are in a single cat household, sometimes **bringing in a companion cat** can bring your shy cat out of her shell. My shy sister Meg is a total flirt around new kitty Tigger. I mean she was never that outgoing with me, for heaven sake. (I just don't get it. I'm perfectly nice too.)



Two's a Crowd (Surviving a Multi-Cat Household)

Okay, I will admit. It has not been fun these past six months having yet another new addition to my household. I've mentioned Tigger the monster cat before. He just had to come and upset my dominant role. Then again, he has made life interesting to say the least, especially when he does that thing with the orange stuffed cat on the bed.

Not every cat is as understanding and mature as I am, though. Introducing a new cat into your home is often perceived as a threat to your older kitty, who after all, has had the total run of the house up to this point. Many owners, (my own person included) have spent many a sleepless night after having been awoken by cat screams coming from the next room.

Whenever there is more than one cat in the house, there is always going to be one cat who is going to be dominant. It's just our nature. As I mentioned before, the jungle isn't totally out of our system. You'll note that in a multi-cat household, each cat finds a particular spot or territory he calls his own. And the one who sits in the highest place usually establishes herself as the alpha cat.

Just the other day, my two adopted siblings and I were taking our usual 18-hour naps in the living room. I'm ashamed to say that I must no longer be the alpha cat as Tigger sat on top of the couch while I was in the lowly position of chair sitting (Meg doesn't care one way or another, her middle name is marshmallow). So while at times I seem aggressive toward Tigger, my growling is actually an offensive stance because I've reversed roles and am no longer top cat. (Another way to determine who is the dominant cat is to put a cardboard box or paper bag down on the floor and see who jumps in first.)

Whenever you introduce a new cat into a household with cats, there is bound to be a period of adjustment where hissing, screeching and other signs of fighting may or may not occur. You don't want to call the cops and you don't want to wake up the neighbors. (I'm sure my person has done the latter with her late night pleas for Tigger and me to stop screaming at each other.) So what do you do to prevent your previously sweet and well-behaved kitty from turning into a ninja cat ready to fight for her territory until the end? (Well, maybe not until the end...). Here's what I think:



BONNIE'S BON MOTS- Solutions for cats living with cats

- Make the appropriate introductions. When introducing a new cat into the household, be sure to separate her from older cats initially for at least a couple of weeks. Put the new kitty in one room with food, water, scratching post and litter box, and let her out to explore the house only when the older kitty is similarly confined in another room.
- Then, give them a chance to see each other cautiously by continuing to separate them but let them see each other. Try putting one kitty in a cat carrier while the other kitty explores. This way they can gradually get used to each other's scent.

- When both cats have adjusted, leave them be and see how the dominance falls out. You can't force a relationship. What will be will be. If it looks like they are going to harm each other, then physically separate them until they can calm down. Do not use physical punishment in any way to make them stop the behavior. It will only serve to cause more aggression. Using a clicker when they start to fight can stop them mid-stream and act as a harmless signal for them to stop the behavior.
- Cats will change dominance from time to time. Don't be alarmed if this happens. It is what it is and each will adjust to his or her role. Remember, there is always one cat that is going to be dominant. Equality doesn't work in a multi-cat household.
- Make sure each cat has a spot to call his or her own. Finding a "home" within a home is important to each cat.
- Be sure to use positive reinforcement when you see both cats together and not being aggressive in any way. This lets them know that what they are doing will give them praise from their person which (after all) is what we all crave.
- When vying for the dominant role, encourage the dominant cat by letting that cat have the choice places, and separating the beta cat in another room. This will cause less fighting for "equal" territory. Once dominance has been established and roles determined, peace will prevail.
- Be sure to give all cats a lot of attention, particularly the dominant cat that has been deposed. I can attest to this, being the deposed cat. Tigger now sleeps with my person, and once my nose got out of joint, I settled happily in my person's prayer shawl on the stuffed green chair in the living room (which is actually a much warmer spot, nestled next to the radiator, but don't tell Tigger.)
- Some cats simply can't tolerate sharing their home with another cat. If you tried everything possible, including a good deal of patience, then you may have to consider finding an alternate home for the new kitty, as difficult a decision as that might be. I would hope, however, before deciding this drastic step that you try all the right ways to introduce new pets and that you give your kitty at least six months to adjust to the dynamics in the household. (I know I for one kept my person from sleeping for at least three months when Tigger arrived, but now after six months, I just growl and sneer at him, which isn't such a bad thing after all, don't you think?)



There Goes the Grand Piano (Scratching)

Every cat owner has heard it – that shrill, scratching sound coming from somewhere. There's the sound of scratching on cloth, wood, wallpaper or any other area of your house that your cat uses to sharpen her claws. In either case, most cat owners will go a little berserk when they see Fluffy going to town on the legs of the grand piano or happily ripping holes in the favorite living room chair.

But remember, we aren't humans, we're cats. That's what we do. We scratch to sharpen and exfoliate our nails, and to stretch and tone our back muscles. And we need our nails for self-preservation, especially when roaming the great outdoors. When we scratch a piece of furniture, we're again marking our territory or we're saying to you that this is where we spend a lot of our time. In frustration, some owners believe the only way to stop the behavior is to remove kitty's front claws. Declawing has no benefit to cats whatsoever. In fact, it is an extremely painful and traumatic amputation process that is comparable to a human having all fingers removed down to the first knuckle. Declawing does not cure behavioral issues. Current studies suggest that declawing may actually increase behavioral problems such as aggressiveness or extreme shyness. Cats who have been declawed will also continue to scratch, even though they aren't doing any damage.

There are other ways to stop the behavior. But keep in mind that if you make the (great) decision to become a cat owner, you are going to be living with a creature of the wild by her very nature, will be a scratcher. If you have furniture that you consider to be more important than your ball of fluff, then you might want to consider adopting a bichon frise puppy instead (they are cute, like us, but not quite as intriguing, I must say.)

Scratching on things is a normal behavior. Once you have accepted the fact that we will scratch, here are some ways you can help save your sofa and your sanity:

- Cover the area kitty scratches with another material so that he doesn't feel comfortable scratching it. You can use such materials as plastic carpet runners for rugs, couches and pillows. (We tend to reject smooth surfaces.) You can also use aluminum foil or double-sided sticky tape, especially for vertical objects (like the sides of chairs and couches).
- Wipe the scratched area with something that smells unpleasant to kitty, like citrus. Of course, I hope that you target areas that aren't used by a lot of others. You don't want people to stop coming over to visit, for heaven sake.



Even before you bring a kitty into your home, invest in scratching posts or flat scratching cardboard boxes. Upon arrival, cats will immediately begin claiming territory as their own. If the scratching post is already in place, your kitty will be more likely to take to it from the start. Tigger, for one, loves the flat corrugated cardboard scratching box, especially when our person sprinkles it with catnip. Works like a charm. Be sure to place your scratching post near the preferred scratching area, as you know we are creatures of habit. You can gradually move the post away from the preferred object every week or so, if you don't want the post to be visible (but be sure to make it visible for your kitty.)

- When selecting a scratching post, try to find something that is similar to the touch that kitty is used to. For instance, if kitty is used to scratching on trees, then you should be using a scratching post that is vertical and long enough for kitty to stretch out on. There are rope scratching posts that feel similar to tree bark. If you can, play with your kitty while kitty is at the scratching post, so she will associate pleasure with the new post.
- You can also try blocking off the scratched area, although I know from experience, that we are often clever enough to maneuver around anything blocking our way.
- You might also want to invest in a laser-censored sound system that makes a loud noise when kitty comes near the preferred scratched object. This kind of security alarm would be a last resort measure.

There's another reason why you might be concerned about our scratching. If we scratch ourselves a lot or we scratch you, then there could be some medical reason. We could have ear mites, fleas, or any other malady that may be undiagnosed. That's why it's a good idea to check in with your kitty's vet to see what's going on physically with her if there's a lot of this kind of scratching going on.



Other Misdemeanors – Counter Capers

Okay, so we like to jump up on your table and leave a trail of fur in our wake. So we like to jump up on counters to check out the chicken you just pulled out of the oven. What's the big deal? We like to jump and we like to be close to you and of course we like food for the most part. And we're naturally curious. We want to know what's up on that counter besides the chicken.

But of course you humans have issues with cleanliness, which I completely understand (being a fastidious cat of course.) I've been squirted a number of times with the water bottle (which is really quite a nasty thing to do to us.) This method does work, but there are better ways to curtail this behavior.

- Use that clicker that you used to separate the fighting cats. Or clap your hands. Loud noises scare us. (It's that sensitivity thing again.)
- Some people advocate putting a mousetrap upside down on a dishtowel so that when kitty jumps up the mousetrap pops up in the air – another scare tactic. Be careful using this one that you don't hurt us, but I hear it does work.



The Morris Syndrome - Eating Disorders and Other Peculiar Behaviors

Here's a question. How many times have you left your kitty alone for a few days with plenty of food, only to come home and find the food untouched? What do you do? Do you panic and think that kitty is dying of lonesomeness for you? (This could be true, one never knows.) Do you think kitty is going to go into low blood sugar shock? Or, are we just finicky like that famous TV cat, Morris?

More than likely, we are the latter. Finicky is as finicky does. We have very distinct tastes; we know what we like and what we don't like. My sister Meg is the epitome of finicky. In fact, she will only eat dry food. This not a genetic preference, but somewhere along the line when she was a kitten, she was probably only introduced to dry food. Now at the ripe age of 14, there is no way she is ever going to deviate from this norm.

So for finicky eaters, the trick is to find healthy food that they will actually eat. The key word here is "healthy". (I mean wouldn't you love to just eat ice cream all day and nothing else? Meanwhile, your body would turn into a manatee's shape).

We have been known to be camel-like in our stubbornness. Take my sister Meg. She can go days without eating. Take me, for instance. When my person leaves town for a couple of days, I just don't feel like eating, even when the sitter comes in to give me fresh food. It just isn't the same without my person around. But it's not like I'm going to go into a diabetic coma or something like that.



It is important, though, to always keep fresh water available every day, and fresh food. If you are giving kitty wet food, make sure you don't leave it out for more than a couple of hours. It goes bad fast. It's also best to keep dry food available for kitty all day long. We are grazer's by nature. We like to nibble all day long. We'll also let you know if we don't like a particular cat food, by sniffing it and walking away. If you expect to feed kitty only at certain times, he's liable to eat his food too fast (and we know what that means. How many carpets have you had to clean as a result of your kitty's food "elimination")? Be sure to throw out any dry food the next day.

Sometimes we do get bored with our food, so it's a good idea to try to introduce different flavors. But I would stick with the same healthy brands. If kitty is getting a little too pudgy (not a crime mind you, but we make a lot of noise at night running up and down the stairs with our extra weight), be careful not to buy cat food that is more than 17% fat content. I, for one, don't enjoy eating the reduced calorie dry cat food, but when mixed together with NORMAL dry cat food, it's tolerable.

I've talked about competing priorities before. It's a really good idea to put kitty's food bowls away from the litter box. That way he can make up his mind about what he wants to do at the time.

I hate to keep using my sister Meg as an example, but she really does have peculiar eating habits. In addition to only eating dry food, she loves to suck on wool. This is evidently more common than you would think, and is called "pica" (when a cat craves foreign material like wool, other fabrics, rubber or even dirt). One can only speculate that the cause came from some inner coping mechanism to stress, and that the behavior soothes and calms her down. It can become a habit much the way a baby keeps a pacifier in his mouth (or think about how some people bite their fingernails – a nasty habit I know, but nonetheless done almost subconsciously because it was something learned a long time ago.)

If this doesn't bother you, then the behavior really is harmless. But if you want to make it stop, the first thing you can't do is to try to force your kitty to stop. It will just cause more stress (again). Try to find some other object she can transfer her behavior too, like a favorite play object. Or you can try giving her cat food with more bulk in it so she feels more full and less likely wanting to satiate herself on your best wool sweater.

One of the more unpleasant behaviors that I'm sure you have all been witness to at some point is vomiting. Yes, we have sensitive stomachs, especially longhaired felines who are more prone to hairballs. Sometimes this reaction is a result of hairballs, or eating too fast, or eating bad food, or introducing new food that she just can't digest well. If you have ruled out any of these reasons and kitty is still vomiting after several days, there could be a medical reason, in which case it's best to check in with your vet.





Defining the Well-behaved Cat

Now that you know a little bit about how to treat us when we are misbehaving (in your eyes), it's only a matter of time before you start parading your little bundle of fur before neighbors and friends just as you would beam when your child brings home a straight A report card. But is there really such a thing as the perfect cat. More importantly, do you want the perfect cat?

I, for one, find people and cats much more interesting when they have these little flaws that pop up now and then. If you can live with the little idiosyncrasies, knowing that they add spice and challenge to an otherwise routine, mundane existence, then you might want to keep Fluffy just the way she is. If you want to make a more harmonious living situation, then practicing these tidbits can go a long way toward making everybody happy.

I'm signing off now, not as the perfect Calico Cat, but as the nearly best behaved one around here. After all, there really are no bad Calico cats. Just interesting ones.

Bon chance!

Bonnie the Calico Cat (Bonnie Jean deManbey)

(As told to Mary Louise deManbey)

Resources

For more information on the topics and products discussed in this guide, contact the resources listed below.

Our Companions Domestic Animal Sanctuary
P.O. Box 673, Bloomfield, CT 06002
(860) 242-9999
www.OurCompanions.org

Behavior Counseling:

Cat's International – free counseling by telephone
(262) 375-8852
For great information, visit www.catsinternational.org

SFSPCA Behavior Hotline – free counseling by telephone
(415) 554-3075 or email at catbehavior@sfspca.org

Cornell University Feline Telephone Consultation Service - \$45 initial consultation fee,
\$30 for follow-ups
(800) 548-8937 (800-KITTY-DR)

Product Information:

Stress management

Rescue Remedy Flower Essences
Available at most health food stores or at www.bachflower.com

Stress and marking

Feliway Pheromone Spray and Diffuser
Contact your vet or call Veterinary Products Laboratories at 888-241-9545

Litter box Avoidance

Cat Attract Training Litter and Litter Additive
877-311-CATS (2287)

Scratching

Soft Paws Nail Caps
Available at most pet stores and at DrsFosterSmith.com

Sticky Paws Transparent Adhesive Strips

Available at pets stores or contact Fe-Lines, Inc. at 888-697-2873