



Cats with Play Aggression

Cats engage in social play from 3 to 12 weeks of age and social fighting from 14 weeks onward, mainly to develop hunting skills. Between 6 to 8 weeks, their play becomes more refined as they gain eye-paw coordination and react to threats. By 5 weeks, they can start showing independent predatory behavior, guided by their mothers and family members in large groups. Cats weaned early or from sick mothers show early predatory behavior, sometimes replacing play.

This behavior can turn into play aggression, often directed at people or older animals, usually due to early weaning or rough play with humans. Rough play, if unchecked by littermates or mothers, leads to more aggressive behavior. The differences in how cats play with each other versus humans are important but not fully understood.

Treatment Strategies

1. **Avoid Circumstances Encouraging Aggression:** Prevent situations that encourage rough play.
2. **Recognize and Interrupt Aggressive Behaviors:** Pay attention to early signs of aggression and interrupt them.
3. **Provide Appropriate Outlets for Energy:** Offer suitable toys and activities for play.

Cat bites and scratches can cause serious diseases, especially for those who are ill, immunocompromised, or have poor circulation. Controlling your cat's aggression is not mean; it improves your relationship.

Checklist

1. **Recognize Signs of Play Aggression:**
 - **Tail Twitching:** Rapid, twitching tail movements.
 - **Dilated Pupils:** Eyes wide with dilated pupils, indicating excitement.
 - **Growling or Hissing:** Vocalizing aggressively during play.
2. **Interrupting Play Aggression When you Recognize the Signs**
 - Play-aggressive cats hide and wait to pounce, using both teeth and claws before fleeing.
 - Interrupt aggressive behaviors at the first sign. Use loud noises such as a loud yelp (as if you're in pain) or clapping your hands loudly.
 - Avoid physical punishment, as it can cause the cat to play more aggressively or get injured.
3. **Use a Bell on the Cat's Collar:**
 - A bell (on a breakaway collar) helps you know the cat's location, especially if it attacks moving body parts or hides under furniture.
4. **Avoid Rough Play with Hands:**

- Always use a toy to play with your cat.
 - If the cat grabs or scratches you, stop the play and act hurt. Startle the cat with a sound.
5. **Increase Aerobic Exercise:**
- Use interactive toys such as ball track toys, balls, spring toys, cats meow (amazon)
 - Set up a scratching post with treats for energetic scratching.
 - Use catnip toys or attach toys to elastic ropes for the cat to chase.
 - Throw treats across the room so the cat has to “chase” and “hunt” their prey.
6. **Consider Getting Another Cat:**
- Another cat, especially one that is also outgoing, can provide an outlet for aggressive play and correct inappropriate behaviors.
7. **Trim Your Cat’s Claws:**
- Keep the claws short, providing scratching posts or other surfaces for the cat to use.
8. **Use Time-Outs:**
- If aggression persists, banish the cat to another room when it’s aggressive. Let it out when calm and repeat.
9. **Seek Medical Help if Injured:**
- Immediately seek medical help for any injuries caused by the cat.

Following these guidelines can help manage and reduce play aggression in cats, ensuring a safer and more enjoyable environment for both the cats and their owners.