



Thank you for choosing to adopt an animal. The Humane Society of Harford County is a small group of dedicated people – some paid staff and many volunteers – working very hard to find homes just like yours for almost 3,500 homeless pets each year. We rely on the generosity, the care, and the compassion of our community to aide in this life-saving work.

By adopting a pet you have already joined the ranks of those saving lives and for that we thank you. We hope that your life with your new pet will be as happy and fulfilling as possible. With this packet, we have provided some information to get your new relationship off on the right foot. Whether you are a first timer or a seasoned pet owner, we encourage you to utilize the information provided in this packet and contact HSHC with any questions. Adopting a pet means adding a new member to your family. To us it means joining ours as well, and we are here to help you with your pet in any way we can.

HSHC adoption counselors can be reached by calling 410.836.1090 ext. 105 or by email at adopt@harfordshelter.org to answer any questions you might have about your new pet.

Your packet contains:

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Bringing Your New Feline Friend Home

Dear New Parent:

There are approximately 9 million cats that come into shelters every year. But thanks to you, one has found a home! This guide was designed to help you outfit yourself with some basic supplies for your new feline friend, as well as offer some basic advice and information to make the transition to life with a cat that much easier.

Good luck to you and your new family member!
HSHC



What You'll Need to Start

- Cat litter box, litter and scoop
- Food dish
- Water dish or dispenser
- Scratching post
- Cat food
- Cat toys
- Cat brush
- Treats (optional)

Need More Ideas? How About...

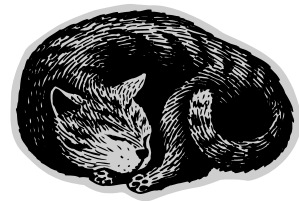
- Cat Grass (you can grow your own!)
- Catnip
- Cat bed
- Kitty fountain for water (cats like running water)
- Play posts or scratching towers
- Hooded or self-cleaning litter boxes

Getting to Know Your New Feline Friend

Okay, so you have all the gear, you've adopted your new cat, and now you're home with your new addition. It's time to get acquainted. Cats are well known for their curiosity and independence, but they are also sensitive to new environments and need time to adjust to their new home. We have included a few ways to make the transition a smooth one for you, your pets already in residence, and your new cat.

Give Your New Cat Time

When you first arrive home with your new cat, open the carrier and allow him/her to come out at his or her own speed. It's best to do this in a room that is quiet and separate from any other pets. This will be your cat's "safe" room. Make sure you have a litter box, food, water dish, and bedding so that your cat can feel right at home.



Some cats are very outgoing and will jump right out of the carrier and go about seeking attention from you, he/she may eat, start playing, and generally feel perfectly adjusted.

For others, it may take days until he/she feels completely comfortable in this area, and even more time once he/she is able to explore the entire household.

Hiding is a typical response from many newly adopted cats. For some, it may take days, weeks, and even months to feel comfortable enough to explore their new surroundings. Often, cats hide in closets or under beds. Make sure you have food/water available in areas near where your cat is hiding. Do not force your cat to come out from a hiding place, as that will only intensify his/her fears and make the adjustment harder.

Keep Your New Cat Separate From Cats-in-Residence for a While

Shelters are a place that cats are often stressed, and in such crowded conditions, diseases tend to be much more prevalent than are seen in owned cats. For this reason, when you adopt a new cat, keep your new cat in his/her “safe” room for a few days, not only to make sure he/she is adjusting mentally, but also physically. Upper respiratory infections (URI’s) are very common in animal shelters, and often, adopted cats do not show symptoms until a couple days after they have been adopted. By keeping your new cat separated from resident cats, you are minimizing exposure in case symptoms do occur. In most cases, adopted cats are healthy, but in the case that your new cat does develop the sniffles, treating one cat with antibiotics is much easier than treating all of them.

Introducing Your Cat to Other Pets

CATS: If you have other cats at home, it’s best to keep the new cat in the “safe” room for a few days. During that time, if all the cats seem healthy, you can periodically take the new cat out of the “safe” room and let your resident cats in to learn the smell of their new buddy. Smells are very powerful to cats and will be incredibly enticing, but without the added stress of a visual meeting.

Other ways to prepare for a face-to-face meeting are to place food and water dishes for your new cat and resident cats on either side of a door. That way, they can hear and smell each other but associate it with a pleasant experience, such as eating.

When the day comes that you feel ample adjustment time has gone by, you can introduce your new cat. Definitely supervise this introduction, as there may be some hissing, swatting, growling, and jealousy. Some cats will take to a new companion without any trouble. Others may become upset. Be careful not to discipline your cat(s) for reacting poorly. That is their way of telling you they are not happy. You must understand that the new addition may take more time for them to adjust. Reward them for the behavior you do want, such as being able to sleep on the bed with the new cat, sharing food, and even not reacting poorly when the new cat seeks attention from you. Over time, the cats will adjust, but it may not be immediate, so give it time.



DOGS: If you have a dog at home, it’s also best to keep the cat in the “safe” room for a few days. Dogs, no matter the size or temperament, are often a shock for cats, even if they have previously lived with dogs. When you are ready to do the introduction, leave the “safe” room door slightly ajar so that the cat can escape if needed. While keeping your dog on a leash, let the cat explore the dog. Curiosity on both parts is normal. You should know your dog’s

behavior and be able to determine what is appropriate and what is not. It may take many short introductions until you can feel confident that the relationship will work. Often it is wise to put up a baby gate or leave doors closed enough so that the cats can escape if needed to an area the dog cannot get to. Do not leave your dog and cat unsupervised until they have spent an ample amount of time together so that you feel confident that you can leave them alone.

Introducing Your Cat to Your Kids

Cats and kids can be the best of friends, as long as your kids understand some basic facts about cat behavior:

1. Cats do not like to be squeezed, picked up without feeling supported, or have their tails pulled.
2. Cats do not like loud noises or sudden movements. They have much greater hearing abilities than we do and are very sensitive.
3. Cats do not like to be disturbed while they are eating. Many cats learn to tolerate this, but it's good to get in the habit of letting them have some peace while trying to eat.
4. Cats are individuals just like people. Some cats will love being toted around, love the attention of kids, and be very easy-going. Others may have a short temper and will let you know when they are unhappy. Get to know your cat and choose the right temperament for you and your lifestyle.

The Best Way to Meet and Greet a Cat

Cats can feel over-stimulated and threatened when someone new approaches them. We have listed a few ways that you can make an introduction go smoothly:

1. Talk to the cat first. Cats are soothed by gentle voices.
2. Sit down and wait for the cat to come to you. Hold out your hand for the cat to sniff.
3. Cats often like their ears or under their chin scratched. Some also like their rump scratched.
4. Stay away from petting the cat's tummy. Many cats don't like that.
5. Cats will give you signs if they are agitated. Ears back, tail swishing, growling, hissing, and hiding behavior are all indicators that the cat is not happy. Don't push it because cats will nip, bite, or swat when they feel threatened.

What Do I Feed My Cat?

Picking the right cat food is up to you; however, some brands are considered higher quality than others. Those that we recommend are Science Diet, Eukanuba, Iams, and Purina.

Feeding a higher quality food will reduce the risk of Urinary Tract Infections, tooth decay, will keep your cat's coat healthy and shiny, and overall will provide more of a nutritious diet.

Most brands of cat food now provide oral care food that is great to mix into regular dry food. These large chunks of food chip away tartar and keeps your cat's teeth healthy.



Canned or Dry Food?

Many people want to feed their cats canned food. Cats do not need canned food, but they sure do like it! Like people, some cats can be obese. Often these cats eat and eat and eat and don't stop. These cats are the ones that you don't want to feed canned food, and will want to limit feedings of lite food. Most cats like canned food and it is up to you how often you want to provide it. Cats can be completely happy eating only dry food throughout their life.

Stay away from feeding only canned food, as dry is needed to keep your cat's teeth tartar-free and healthy.

How Do I Train My Cat to Use the Litterbox?

Cats are naturally fastidious animals and want to be clean. Using a litterbox is natural for them and most have learned it from a very early age. Once you bring your new cat home, and the adjustment period has been successful, you can move your litterbox to its permanent place.

Keep your litterbox clean, as cats often will not use a litterbox that they consider to be too dirty. Depending on how many cats you have, you may want to scoop every few days, and empty the litter completely every week or two.

A general rule is: one litterbox for every cat you have. So, for 3 cats, you should have 3 litterboxes.

Should I Let My Cat Outside?

There is a debate among animal shelters on whether cats should be indoors or not. Most shelters now say they'd prefer if you keep your cat indoors, but are not being absolute about the decision. There are obvious benefits of having indoor cats, such as a longer, healthier life (no chance for being hit by cars, being attacked by other animals, or catching diseases).

However, it is understandable that there are some cats that just the opportunity to go outside periodically. HSHC advocates keeping your cats indoors. If you do want to let your cat outside, wait at least a couple months until your cat gets acclimated to his/her environment. NEVER let an unsprayed/unneutered cat outside! Declawed cats should never go outside as they have no means to escape predators or defend themselves.

It is also recommended that you outfit your cat with a collar and ID tag. Adding a small cat bell also helps to locate your cat and enables small, prey animals to escape any potential threat.

Going to the Vet

Once you have brought your new cat home, you will need to make an appointment with a veterinarian. The sooner you do this, the more confident you can feel that your cat is healthy. At shelters, cats will receive vaccinations and basic veterinary care, if needed. Often cats that are up for adoption have no vaccination history and may have a medical condition that can only be detected with a much more thorough exam that's performed by a vet. Your new cat will require yearly veterinary check-ups and booster vaccinations.

There are some basic vaccinations, tests, and treatments that your cat will need. To help you understand the purpose of each of these, we have explained each below:

- FVRCP – Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis and Calicivirus plus Panleukopenia – FVR is a severe respiratory infection that is caused by the type 1-herpes virus. It is most severe in kittens and older cats. Symptoms are lethargy, discharge from the eyes and nose, dehydration, lack of appetite, and sometimes ulcers in the eyes. Cats usually require hospitalization, as this disease is debilitating and chronic.

There are many kinds of calciviruses that affect cats. Some may be asymptomatic, while others can cause life-threatening pneumonia. Cats can be infected by direct contact with other cats or objects, such as litter pans, brushes, and blankets. Cats can pass the virus into the environment for up to a year.

- Panleukopenia (also known as Feline Distemper) is caused by the same parvovirus as seen in dogs. This disease is highly contagious and often fatal. This disease is most severe and common in kittens, and early symptoms are loss of appetite, vomiting, and diarrhea. Infected cats must be hospitalized and even with aggressive treatment, most do not survive. Mortality rates in kittens under 6 months of age are 90%, and in adult cats, may reach 50%. Panleukopenia is a serious disease that is easily prevented with the vaccine.
- FeLV – Feline Leukemia Virus is fairly common in stray cats that come into shelters. The virus is spread through saliva and tears of an infected cat. This may seem like a difficult way to be infected, but house cats sitting in their screen window can get it from an infected stray cat that hissed close enough to your cat. Also, outside cats are highly susceptible as confrontations with other cats often occur.

Some cats can be carriers of the disease and never show symptoms. Others will carry it and in situations where they are highly stressed, will break out with the fatal disease. Most cats that are infected will eventually die from it. There is no set time limit. Some live for weeks, while others have been known to live for years.

Symptoms vary from loss of appetite and blood in the stool, to excessive drinking and anemia. There is no cure for feline leukemia. However, the vaccine is safe and prevents the disease. Animal shelters test for the disease but often do not administer the costly vaccination, allowing instead to let the new owners decide what is best. Strictly indoor cats do not necessarily need the vaccine, although it is recommended if there is any chance of outdoor exposure.

- FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus) – This virus is shed in saliva and is transmitted through bites. It is closely associated with feline leukemia, but was only diagnosed in 1986. The virus has 3 clinical stages. The first occurs 4-6 weeks after infection and symptoms are swollen lymph nodes and a fever. The virus begins to attack the white blood cells. The next phase is a period of normalcy, which can last months to years. The third phase is a result of the destruction of white blood cells and dysfunction of the immune system.

The most common symptoms of all phases of this disease is chronic oral infection of the gums, tongue, and mouth. If you notice your cat with unusual coloration or nodes in their mouth, they may possibly have FIV.

There is no cure for FIV. The treatment revolves around maintaining a strong immune system and caring for the affected organs. This disease is similar to HIV, as seen in humans, where the immune system is attacked from within. Cats with FIV should be tested every 6 months, also with routine blood work taken. Infected cats must be kept indoors and be the only cats in the household, unless you have other FIV positive cats.

- Rabies – This is a deadly disease that is preventable by getting a vaccination at 3 months of age and every year (or 3 years) for the rest of your cat's life. This disease is zoonotic, meaning it is transmittable to humans. Once infected, the disease develops over 10 days to several months. Any unvaccinated animal suspected to have been infected must be quarantined and observed. Any animal that shows symptoms of rabies must be euthanized immediately.

Vaccination Schedule for Your Cat

Kittens

- 8 weeks – FVRCP 1st vaccination.
- 12 weeks – FVRCP 2nd vaccination & rabies vaccination; FELV vaccination optional (2nd vaccination due 2-3 weeks after initial).
- 16 weeks – FVRCP 3rd vaccination.
- 1 year, 4 months – FVRCP/rabies, then repeat yearly.



Adults

- FVRCP – if unknown vaccine history, give initial vaccination and booster 2-4 weeks later.
- Rabies – give initial vaccination, then yearly, depending upon vaccine.
- FeLV – if you have an indoor/outdoor cat, this vaccine should be administered yearly.

Spaying and Neutering: Why Should I Do It?

The reason there are so many stray and unwanted cats in this country is because if even one person feels it is not necessary to spay their female cat, she can have litter after litter for the span of her life (which can be up to 20 years). Cats can breed at 4 months of age, and unlike many mammalian species, they do not have “seasons” – they can breed all year round. Because cats are not monogamous species, males can and will continually breed females in heat and move on to the next. This irresponsibility on the part of cat owners is the reason that shelters are inundated with kittens each year. Unfortunately, most do not get adopted.

There are also health reasons to spay and neuter your cat. Unneutered males will tend to be restless and roam far distances in search of females. They also mark their territory (which includes your home) by spraying very odorous urine. Intact males can be more aggressive with people and often attack and fight with other male cats. Unneutered males also can suffer from prostate disease, serious hernias, and cancers.

Unspayed females can run the risk of developing cancerous tumors and/or infections of the reproductive organs. When females are in heat, they are often very vocal, exhibit undesirable behavior, such as scratching, urinating excessively, and aggression, and attract stray and owned tomcats for miles around.

If you think the cost is too great to spay and neuter, think of it this way: the cost of the surgery is equal to a dinner for 2 at a restaurant, tickets to a Broadway show, or the cost of a new prom dress. What you save from not having to care for unwanted kittens/puppies is priceless.

By making a conscious decision to have your cat spayed or neutered, you are living up to your responsibility as a pet owner to reduce the number of unwanted kittens that must be humanely destroyed each year. Spaying and neutering makes your cat less temperamental, prevents unwanted litters, and eliminates heat cycles and roaming tomcats.

How Can I Help Solve the Cat Population Problem?

With so many unwanted cats in the U.S., you may think that there is nothing you can do to help. But there is. You have already done so by adopting a new cat! We have listed a few other ways that you too can make a difference in helping such wonderful creatures find a home just like your new cat did.

- Educate others on the positives of adoption and the necessity of spaying and neutering
- Be an example for your children on how to be a responsible pet owner
- Always adopt from animal shelters
- Volunteer at HSHC
- Donate to HSHC (our wish list is on page 31)
- Join clubs and groups that focus on cat care and helping solve the population problem

One Last Thing...

We at the Humane Society of Harford County thank you for helping us find one more home for an unwanted cat. We hope that you and your new addition will live a happy and long life together. If you have any questions or need further assistance, please don't hesitate to speak with one of our dedicated staff members.

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Introducing Your New Cat to Your Other Pets

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It's important to have realistic expectations when introducing a new pet to a resident pet. Some cats are more social than other cats. For example, an eight-year-old cat that has never been around other animals may never learn to share her territory (and her people) with other pets in the household. However, an eight-week-old kitten separated from her mom and littermates for the first time, might prefer to have a cat or dog companion. Cats are territorial and need to be introduced to other animals very slowly in order to give them time to get used to each other before there is a face-to face confrontation. Slow introductions help prevent fearful and aggressive problems from developing.

****PLEASE NOTE:** When you introduce pets to each other, one of them may send "play" signals that can be misinterpreted by the other pet. If those signals are interpreted as aggression by one animal, then you should handle the situation as "aggressive."

Confinement

Confine your new cat to one medium-sized room with her litter box, food, water and a bed. Feed your resident pets and the newcomer on each side of the door to this room. This will help all of them to associate something enjoyable (eating!) with each other's smells. Don't put the food so close to the door that the animals are too upset by each other's presence to eat. Gradually move the dishes closer to the door until your pets can eat calmly, directly on either side of the door. Next, use two doorstops to prop open the door just enough to allow the animals to see each other, and repeat the whole process.

Swap Scents

Switch sleeping blankets or beds between your new cat and your resident animals so they have a chance to become accustomed to each other's scent. Rub a towel on one animal and put it underneath the food dish of another animal. You should do this with each animal in the house.

Switch Living Areas

Once your new cat is using her litter box and eating regularly while confined, let her have free time in the house while confining your other animals to the new cat's room. This switch provides another way for the animals to experience each other's scents without a face-to-face meeting. It also allows the newcomer to become familiar with her new surroundings without being frightened by the other animals.

Avoid Fearful and Aggressive Meetings

Avoid any interactions between your pets that result in either fearful or aggressive behavior. If these responses are allowed to become a habit, they can be difficult to change. It's better to introduce your pets to each other so gradually that neither animal becomes afraid or aggressive. You can expect mild forms of these behaviors, but don't give them the opportunity to intensify. If either animal becomes fearful or aggressive, separate them, and start over with the introduction process in a series of very small, gradual steps, as outlined above.

Precautions

If one of your pets has a medical problem or is injured, this could stall the introduction process. Check with your veterinarian to be sure that all of your pets are healthy. You'll also want to have at least one litter box per cat, and you'll probably need to clean all of the litter boxes more frequently. Make sure that none of the cats are being "ambushed" by another while trying to use the litter box. Try to keep your resident pets' schedule as close as possible to what it was before the newcomer's appearance. Cats can make lots of noise, pull each other's hair, and roll around quite dramatically without either cat being injured. If small spats do occur between your cats, you shouldn't attempt to intervene directly to separate the cats. Instead, make a loud noise, throw a pillow, or use a squirt bottle with water and vinegar to separate the cats. Give them a chance to calm down before re-introducing them to each other. Be sure each cat has a safe hiding place.

Cat-to-Dog Introductions

Dogs can kill a cat very easily, even if they're only playing. All it takes is one shake and the cat's neck can break. Some dogs have such a high prey drive they should never be left alone with a cat. Dogs usually want to chase and play with cats, and cats usually become afraid and defensive. Use the techniques described above to begin introducing your new cat to your resident dog. In addition:

Practice Obedience

If your dog doesn't already know the commands "sit," "down," "come" and "stay," you should begin working on them. Small pieces of food will increase your dog's motivation to perform, which will be necessary in the presence of such a strong distraction as a new cat. Even if your dog already knows these commands, work with obeying commands in return for a tidbit.

Controlled Meeting

After your new cat and resident dog have become comfortable eating on opposite sides of the door, and have been exposed to each other's scents as described above, you can attempt a face-to-face introduction in a controlled manner. Put your dog's leash on, and using treats, have him either sit or lie down and stay. Have another family member or friend enter the room and quietly sit down next to your new cat, but don't have them physically restrain her. Have this person offer your cat some special pieces of food or catnip. At first, the cat and the dog should be on opposite sides of the room. Lots of short visits are better than a few long visits. Don't drag out the visit so long that the dog becomes uncontrollable. Repeat this step several times until both the cat and dog are tolerating each other's presence without fear, aggression or other undesirable behavior.

Let Your Cat Go

Next, allow your cat freedom to explore your dog at her own pace, with the dog still on-leash and in a "down-stay." Meanwhile, keep giving your dog treats and praise for his calm behavior. If your dog gets up from his "stay" position, he should be repositioned with a treat lure, and praised and rewarded for obeying the "stay" command. If your cat runs away or becomes aggressive, you're progressing too fast. Go back to the previous introduction steps.

Positive Reinforcement

Although your dog must be taught that chasing or being rough with your cat is unacceptable behavior, he must also be taught how to behave appropriately, and be rewarded for doing so, such as sitting, coming when called, or lying down in return for a treat. If your dog is always punished when your cat is around, and never has "good things" happen in the cat's presence, your dog may redirect aggression toward the cat.

Directly Supervise All Interactions Between Your Dog and Cat

You may want to keep your dog on-leash and with you whenever your cat is free in the house during the introduction process. Be sure that your cat has an escape route and a place to hide. Keep your dog and cat separated when you aren't home until you're certain your cat will be safe.

Precautions

Dogs like to eat cat food. You should keep the cat food out of your dog's reach (in a closet or on a high shelf). Eating cat feces is also a relatively common behavior in dogs. Although there are no health hazards to your dog, it's probably distasteful to you. It's also upsetting to your cat to have such an important object "invaded." Unfortunately, attempts to keep your dog out of the litter box by "booby trapping" it will also keep your cat away as well. Punishment after the fact will not change your dog's behavior. The best solution is to place the litter box where your dog can't access it, for example: behind a baby gate; in a closet with the door anchored open from both sides and just wide enough for your cat; or inside a tall, topless cardboard box with easy access for your cat.

A Word About Kittens and Puppies

Because they're so much smaller, kittens are in more danger of being injured, of being killed by a young energetic dog, or by a predatory dog. A kitten will need to be kept separate from an especially energetic dog until she is fully-grown, and even then she should never be left alone with the dog. Usually, a well-socialized cat will be able to keep a puppy in its place, but some cats don't have enough confidence to do this. If you have an especially shy cat, you might need to keep her separated from your puppy until he matures enough to have more self-control.

When to Get Help

If introductions don't go smoothly, seek professional help immediately. Animals can be severely injured in fights, and the longer the problem continues, the harder it can be to resolve. Conflicts between pets in the same family can often be resolved with professional help. Punishment won't work, though, and could make things worse.

Cat-to-Cat Introductions

It's impossible to estimate how well any particular pair or group of cats will ultimately tolerate each other. Some cats are unusually territorial, may never adjust to sharing their house, and may do best in a one-cat family. However, many aggressive problems between cats can be successfully resolved. To do this, you may need help, both from your veterinarian and from an animal behavior specialist who is knowledgeable in cat behavior. Cats with aggression problems may never be best friends, but can often learn to mutually tolerate each other with a minimum of conflict. Working with aggression problems between family cats will take time and commitment from you. Don't give up without consulting the appropriate experts.

Common Types of Aggressive Behaviors Between Cats

- **Territorial Aggression:** Cats are very territorial, much more so than dogs. Territorial aggression occurs when a cat feels that his territory has been invaded by an intruder. Depending on where your cat spends his time, he may view your whole neighborhood as his territory. Female cats can be just as territorial as males. The behavior patterns in this type of aggression include chasing and ambushing the intruder, as well as hissing and swatting when contact occurs. Territorial problems often occur when a new cat is brought into a household, when a young kitten reaches maturity, or when a cat encounters neighborhood cats outside. It's not uncommon for a cat to be territorially aggressive toward one cat in a family, and friendly and tolerant to another.
- **Intermale Aggression:** Adult male cats normally tend to threaten, and sometimes fight with, other males. These behaviors can occur as sexual challenges over a female, or to achieve a relatively high position in the cats' loosely organized social dominance hierarchy. This type of aggression involves much ritualized body posturing, stalking, staring, yowling and howling. Attacks are usually avoided if one cat "backs down" and walks away. If an attack occurs, the attacker will usually jump forward, directing a bite to the nape of the neck, while the opponent falls to the ground on his back and attempts to bite and scratch the attacker's belly with his hind legs. The cats may roll around biting and screaming, suddenly stop, resume posturing, fight again or walk away. Cats don't usually severely injure one another this way, but you should always check for puncture wounds which are prone to infection. Intact males are much more likely to fight in this way than are neutered males.
- **Defensive Aggression:** Defensive aggression occurs when a cat is attempting to protect himself from an attack he believes he cannot escape. This can occur in response to punishment or the threat of punishment from a person, an attack or attempted attack from another cat, or any time he feels threatened or afraid. Defensive postures include crouching with the legs pulled in under the body, laying the ears back, tucking the tail, and possibly rolling slightly to the side. This is not the same as the submissive postures dogs show because it's not intended to "turn off" an attack from another cat. Continuing to approach a cat that's in this posture is likely to precipitate an attack.
- **Redirected Aggression:** This type of aggression is directed toward another animal that didn't initially provoke the behavior. For example, a household cat sitting in the window may see an outdoor cat walk across the front yard. Because he can't attack the outdoor cat, he may instead turn and attack the other family cat that's sitting next to him in the window. Redirected aggression can be either offensive or defensive in nature.

What You Can Do

- If your cat's behavior changes suddenly, your first step should always be to contact your veterinarian for a thorough health examination. Cats often hide symptoms of illness until they're seriously ill. Any change in behavior may be an early indication of a medical problem.
- Spay or neuter any intact pets in your home. The behavior of one intact animal can affect all of your pets.

- Start the slow introduction process over from the beginning (see the section “Introducing Your New Cat to Your Other Pets”). You may need professional help from an animal behavior specialist to successfully implement these techniques.
- In extreme cases, consult with your veterinarian about medicating your cats while you’re working with them on a behavior modification program. Your veterinarian is the only person who is licensed and qualified to prescribe any medication for your cats. Don’t attempt to give your cat any over-the-counter or prescription medication without consulting with your veterinarian. Animals don’t respond to drugs the same way people do, and a medication that may be safe for a human could be fatal to an animal. Keep in mind that medication, by itself, isn’t a permanent solution, and should only be used in conjunction with behavior modification.

What Not To Do

- If your cats are fighting, don’t allow the fights to continue. Because cats are so territorial, and because they don’t establish firm dominance hierarchies, they won’t be able to “work things out” as dogs sometimes do. The more often cats fight, the worse the problem is likely to become. To stop a fight in progress, make a loud noise, such as blowing a whistle, squirting the cats with water, or throwing something soft at them. Don’t try to pull them apart.
- Prevent future fights. This may mean keeping the cats totally separated from each other while you’re working on the problem, or at least preventing contact between them in situations likely to trigger a fight.
- Don’t try to punish the cats involved. Punishment is likely to elicit further aggression and fearful responses, which will only make the problem worse. If you attempt punishment, you may become a target for redirected and defensive aggression.

Because their social organization is somewhat flexible, some cats are relatively tolerant of sharing their house and territory with multiple cats. It’s not uncommon for a cat to tolerate some cats, but not get along with others in the house. However, the more cats sharing the same territory, the more likely it is that some of your cats will begin fighting with each other.

When you introduce cats to each other, one of them may send “play” signals which can be misinterpreted by the other cat. If those signals are interpreted as aggression by one of the cats, then you should handle the situation as “aggressive.”

The factors that determine how well cats will get along together are not fully understood. Cats that are well-socialized (they had pleasant experiences with other cats during kittenhood) will likely be more sociable than those that haven’t been around many other cats. On the other hand, “street cats” that are in the habit of fighting with other cats in order to defend their territory and food resources, may not do well in a multi-cat household. Genetic factors also influence a cat’s temperament, so friendly parents are probably more likely to produce friendly offspring.

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Starting Out Right with Your New Cat and the Litterbox

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Most cats have a specific preference about where they want to eliminate. By following the suggestions outlined in this handout, you'll be able to start off on the right foot with your new cat.

Location

Most people are inclined to place the litterbox in an out-of-the-way spot in order to minimize odor and loose particles of cat litter in the house. Often, the litterbox ends up in the basement, sometimes next to an appliance and/or on a cold cement floor. This type of location can be undesirable from your cat's point of view for several reasons.

If you have a kitten or an older cat, she may not be able to get down a long flight of stairs in time to get to the litterbox. Since she is new to the household, she may not remember where the litterbox is if it's located in an area she seldom frequents. Your cat may be startled while using the litterbox if a furnace, washer or dryer suddenly comes on and that may be the last time she'll risk such a frightening experience! If your cat likes to scratch the surface surrounding her litterbox, she may find a cold cement floor unappealing.

Therefore, you may have to compromise. The litterbox should be kept in a location that affords your cat some privacy, but is also conveniently located. If you place the litterbox in a closet or a bathroom, be sure the door is wedged open from both sides, in order to prevent her from being trapped in or out. Depending on where it's located, you might consider cutting a hole in a closet door and adding a swinging door. If the litterbox sits on a smooth, slick or cold surface, put a small throw rug underneath the litterbox.

Type of Litter

Research has shown that most cats prefer fine-grained litters, presumably because they have a softer feel. The new scoopable litters usually have finer grains than the typical clay litter. However, high-quality, dust-free, clay litters are relatively small-grained and may be perfectly acceptable to your cat. Potting soil also has a very soft texture, but is not very absorbent. If you suspect your cat has a history of spending time outdoors and is likely to eliminate in your houseplants, you can try mixing some potting soil with your regular litter. Pellet-type litters or those made from citrus peels are not recommended. Once you find a litter your cat likes, don't change types or brands. Buying the least expensive litter or whatever brand happens to be on sale, could result in your cat not using the litterbox.

Many cats are put off by the odor of scented or deodorant litters. For the same reason, it's not a good idea to place a room deodorizer or air freshener near the litterbox. A thin layer of baking soda placed on the bottom of the box will help absorb odors without repelling your cat. Odor shouldn't be a problem if the litterbox is kept clean. If you find the litterbox odor offensive, your cat probably finds it even more offensive and won't want to eliminate there.

Number of Litterboxes

You should have at least as many litterboxes as you have cats. That way, none of them will ever be prevented from eliminating in the litterbox because it's already occupied. You might also consider placing them in several locations around the house, so that no one cat can "guard" the litterbox area and prevent the other cats from accessing it. We also recommend that you place at least one litterbox on each level of your house. It's not possible to designate a personal litterbox for each cat in your household, as cats will use any litterbox that's available. Occasionally, a cat may refuse to use the litterbox after another cat has used it. In this case, all of the litterboxes will need to be kept extremely clean and additional boxes may be needed.

To Cover or Not To Cover

Some people prefer to use a covered litterbox, however, there are some potential problems with using this type of box. You may want to experiment by offering both types at first, to discover what your cat prefers.

Potential Problems

- You may forget to clean the litterbox as frequently as you should because the dirty litter is "out of sight – out of mind."
- A covered litterbox traps odors inside, so it will need to be cleaned more often than an open one.
- A covered litterbox may not allow a large cat sufficient room to turn around, scratch, dig or position herself in the way she wants.
- A covered litterbox may also make it easier for another cat to lay in wait and "ambush" the user as she exits the box. On the other hand, a covered litterbox may feel more private and may be preferred by timid cats.

Cleaning the Box

To meet the needs of the most discriminating cat, feces should be scooped out of the litterbox daily. How often you change the litter depends on the number of cats you have, the number of litterboxes, and the type of litter you use. Twice a week is a general guideline for clay litter, but depending on the circumstances, you may need to change it every other day or once a week. If you scoop the litter daily, scoopable litter can go two to three weeks before the litter needs to be changed. If you notice an odor or if much of the litter is wet or clumped, it's time for a change. Don't use strong smelling chemicals or cleaning products when washing the litterbox, as it may cause your cat to avoid it. Washing with soap and water should be sufficient.

Liners

Some cats don't mind having a liner in the litterbox, while others do. Again, you may want to experiment to see if your cat is bothered by a liner in the box. If you do use a liner, make sure it's anchored in place, so it can't easily catch your cat's claws or be pulled out of place.

Depth of Litter

Some people think that the more litter they put in the box, the less often they will have to clean it. This is not true. Most cats won't use litter that's more than about two inches deep. In fact, some long-haired cats actually prefer less litter and a smooth, slick surface, such as the bottom of the litterbox. The litterbox needs to be cleaned on a regular basis and adding extra litter is not a way around that chore.

"Litter-Training" Cats

There's really no such thing as "litter-training" a cat in the same way one would house-train a dog. A cat doesn't need to be taught what to do with a litterbox. The only thing you need to do is provide an acceptable, accessible litterbox, using the suggestions above. It's not necessary to take your cat to the litterbox and move her paws back and forth in the litter, in fact, we don't recommend it. This may actually be an unpleasant experience for your cat and is likely to initiate a negative association with the litterbox.

If Problems Develop

If your cat begins to eliminate in areas other than the litterbox, your first call should always be to your veterinarian. Many medical conditions can cause a change in a cat's litterbox habits. If your veterinarian determines that your cat is healthy, the cause may be behavioral. Most litterbox behavior problems can be resolved by using behavior modification techniques. Punishment is not the answer. For long-standing or complex situations, contact an animal behavior specialist who has experience working with cats.

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Solving Litterbox Problems

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Cats tend to have surface and location preferences for where, and on what, they like to eliminate. Most cats prefer a loose, sandy substance, which is why they will use a litterbox. It's only when their preferences include the laundry basket, the bed or the Persian rug, that normal elimination behavior becomes a problem. With careful analysis of your cat's environment, specific factors that have contributed to the litterbox problem can usually be identified and changed, so that your cat will again use the litterbox for elimination.

Some common reasons why cats don't use the litterbox are: an aversion to the box, a preference for a particular surface not provided by the box, a preference for a particular location where there is no box, or a combination of all three. You'll need to do some detective work to determine the reason your cat is house soiling. Sometimes, the reason the litterbox problem initially started may not be the same reason it's continuing. For example, your cat may have stopped using the litterbox because of a urinary tract infection, and has now developed a surface preference for carpet and a location preference for the bedroom closet. You would need to address all three of these factors in order to resolve the problem.

Cats don't stop using their litterboxes because they're mad or upset and are trying to get revenge for something that "offended" or "angered" them. Because humans act for these reasons, it's easy for us to assume that our pets do as well. Animals don't act out of spite or revenge, so it won't help to give your cat special privileges in the hope that she'll start using the litterbox again.

Medical Problems

It's common for cats to begin eliminating outside of their litterbox when they have a medical problem. For example, a urinary tract infection or crystals in the urine can make urination very painful. Cats often associate this pain with the litterbox and begin to avoid it. If your cat has a house-soiling problem, check with your veterinarian first to rule out any medical problems for the behavior. Cats don't always act sick, even when they are, and only a trip to the veterinarian for a thorough physical examination can rule out a medical problem.

Cleaning Soiled Areas

Because animals are highly motivated to continue soiling an area that smells like urine or feces, it's imperative that you thoroughly clean the soiled areas (see our handout: "Successful Cleaning to Remove Pet Odors and Stains").

Aversion to the Litterbox

Your cat may have decided that the litterbox is an unpleasant place to eliminate if:

- The box is not clean enough for her.
- She has experienced painful urination or defecation in the box due to a medical problem.
- She has been startled by a noise while using the box.
- She has been "ambushed" while in the box either by another cat, a child, a dog, or by you, if you were attempting to catch her for some reason.

- She associates the box with punishment (someone punished her for eliminating outside the box, then placed her in the box).

What You Can Do

- Keep the litterbox extremely clean. Scoop at least once a day and change the litter completely every four to five days. If you use scoopable litter, you may not need to change the litter as frequently. This will vary according to how many cats are in the household, how many litterboxes you have, and how large the cats are that are using the box or boxes. A good guideline is that if you can smell the box, then you can be sure it's offensive to your cat as well.
- Add a new box in a different location than the old one and use a different type of litter in the new box. Because your cat has decided that her old litterbox is unpleasant, you'll want to make the new one different enough that she doesn't simply apply the old, negative associations to the new box.
- Make sure that the litterbox isn't near an appliance that makes noise or in an area of the house that your cat doesn't frequent.
- If ambushing is a problem, try to create more than one exit from the litterbox, so that if the "ambusher" is waiting by one area, your cat always has an escape route.

Surface Preferences

All animals develop preferences for a particular surface on which they like to eliminate. These preferences may be established early in life, but they may also change overnight for reasons that we don't always understand. Your cat may have a surface preference if:

- She consistently eliminates on a particular texture. For example, soft-textured surfaces, such as carpet, bedding or clothing, or slick-textured surfaces, such as tile, cement, bathtubs or sinks.
- She frequently scratches on this same texture after elimination, even if she eliminates in the litterbox.
- She is or was previously an outdoor cat and prefers to eliminate on grass or soil.

What You Can Do

- If your cat is eliminating on soft surfaces, try using a high quality, scoopable litter, and put a soft rug under the litterbox.
- If your cat is eliminating on slick, smooth surfaces, try putting just a very thin layer of litter at one end of the box, leaving the other end bare, and put the box on a hard floor.
- If your cat has a history of being outdoors, add some soil or sod to the litterbox.
- Make the area where she has been eliminating aversive to her by covering it with an upside down carpet runner or aluminum foil, or by placing citrus-scented cotton balls over the area (see our handout: "Aversives For Cats").

Location Preferences

Your cat may have a location preference if:

- She always eliminates in quiet, protected places, such as under a desk downstairs or in a closet.
- She eliminates in an area where the litterbox was previously kept or where there are urine odors.
- She eliminates on a different level of the house from where the litterbox is located.

What You Can Do

- Put at least one litterbox on every level of your house.
- Make the area where she has been eliminating aversive to her by covering it with upside down carpet runner or aluminum foil, or by placing citrus-scented cotton balls over the area OR
- Put a litterbox in the location where your cat has been eliminating. When she has consistently used this box for at least one month, you may gradually move it to a more convenient location at a rate of an inch per day.

Oops!

If you catch your cat in the act of eliminating in the house, do something to interrupt her like making a startling noise, but be careful not to scare her. Immediately take her to where the litterbox is located and set her on the floor. If she wanders over to the litterbox, wait and praise her after she eliminates in the box. If she takes off in another direction, she may want privacy, so watch from afar until she goes back to the litterbox and eliminates, then praise her when she does.

Don't ever punish your cat for eliminating outside of the litterbox. If you find a soiled area, it's too late to administer a correction. Do nothing but clean it up. Rubbing your cat's nose in it, taking her to the spot and scolding her, or any other type of punishment, will only make her afraid of you or afraid to eliminate in your presence. Animals don't understand punishment after the fact, even if it's only seconds later. Punishment will do more harm than good.

Other Types of Housesoiling Problems

- Marking/Spraying
- Fears or Phobias. When animals become frightened, they may lose control of their bladder and/or bowels. If your cat is afraid of loud noises, strangers or other animals, she may house soil when she is exposed to these stimuli (see the handout: "The Fearful Cat").

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Cats: Destructive Scratching & Declawing

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Why Do Cats Scratch?

It's normal for cats to scratch objects in their environment for many reasons:

- To remove the dead outer layer of their claws.
- To mark their territory by leaving both a visual mark and a scent – they have scent glands on their paws.
- To stretch their bodies and flex their feet and claws.
- To work off energy.

Because scratching is a normal behavior, and one that cats are highly motivated to display, it's unrealistic to try to prevent them from scratching. Instead, the goal in resolving scratching problems is to redirect the scratching onto acceptable objects.

Training Your Cat to Scratch Acceptable Objects

1. You must provide objects for scratching that are appealing, attractive and convenient from your cat's point of view. Start by observing the physical features of the objects your cat is scratching. The answers to the following questions will help you understand your cat's scratching preferences:
 - Where are the objects located? Prominent objects, objects close to sleeping areas and areas near the entrance to a room are often chosen.
 - What texture do they have – are they soft or coarse? Carpeted?
 - What shape do they have - are they horizontal or vertical?
 - How tall are they? At what height does your cat scratch?
2. Now, considering your cat's demonstrated preferences, substitute similar objects for her to scratch (rope-wrapped posts, corrugated cardboard or even a log). Place the acceptable object(s) near the inappropriate object(s) that she's already using. Make sure the objects are stable and won't fall over or move around when she uses them.
3. Cover the inappropriate objects with something your cat will find unappealing, such as double sided sticky tape, aluminum foil, sheets of sandpaper or a plastic carpet runner with the pointy side up. Or you may give the objects an aversive odor by attaching cotton balls containing perfume, a muscle rub or other unpleasant odor. Be careful with odors, though, because you don't want the nearby acceptable objects to also smell unpleasant.
4. When your cat is consistently using the appropriate object, it can be moved very gradually (no more than three inches each day) to a location more suitable to you. It's best, however, to keep the appropriate scratching objects as close to your cat's preferred scratching locations as possible.
5. Don't remove the unappealing coverings or odors from the inappropriate objects until your cat is consistently using the appropriate objects in their permanent locations for several weeks, or even a month. They should then be removed gradually, not all at once.

Should I Punish My Cat For Scratching?

NO! Punishment is effective only if you catch your cat in the act of scratching unacceptable objects and have provided her with acceptable scratching objects. Punishment after the fact, won't change the behavior, may cause her to be afraid of you or the environment and may elicit defensive aggression. Used by itself, punishment won't resolve scratching problems because it doesn't teach your cat where to scratch instead. If you do catch her in the act of scratching inappropriate objects, remote punishment is best, in which you do not directly interact with her. Ideas for remote punishment include making a loud noise (using a whistle, shaking a pop can filled with rocks or slapping the wall), throwing a pillow at her or using a water-filled squirt bottle. If punishment is interactive, she'll learn to refrain from scratching in your presence but will continue to scratch when you're not around.

How Do I Trim My Cat's Claws?

To help keep them sharp, cats keep their claws retracted except when they're needed. As the claws grow too long and become curved, they can't be retracted completely. You should clip off the sharp tips of your cat's claws on all four feet every week or so. Clipping your cat's claws will also help prevent them from becoming snagged in carpets, fabrics and skin.

Before trimming your cat's claws, accustom her to having her paws handled and squeezed. You can do this by gently petting her legs and paws while giving her a treat. This will help to make it a more pleasant experience. Gradually increase the pressure so that petting becomes gentle squeezing, as you'll need to do this to extend the claw. Continue with the treats until your cat tolerates this kind of touching and restraint. It may take a little longer if she's not used to having her legs or paws handled. Apply a small amount of pressure to her paw, with your thumb on top of her paw and your index finger underneath, until a claw is extended. You should be able to see the pink or "quick," which is a small blood vessel. Don't cut into this pink portion, as it will bleed and be painful for your cat. If you cut off just the sharp tip of the claw, the "hook," it will dull the claw and prevent extensive damage to household objects and to your skin.

There are several types of claw trimmers designed especially for pets. These are better than your own nail clipper because they won't crush the claw. Until you and your cat have become accustomed to the routine, one foot a day is enough of a challenge. Don't push to do all four at once, or you'll both have only negative memories of claw clippers!

Should I Declaw My Cat?

NO! We strongly discourage cat owners from having their cats declawed. Scratching is a natural behavior and instinct for cats and can be directed to appropriate items, such as a cat scratching post. Without the ability to claw, your cat may develop behavior problems that you have not previously experienced. However, if you feel that you must either declaw or give up your cat, we would rather see your cat stay in your home and be your lifelong companion. If you do decide to have your cat declawed, we suggest you have the surgery done at the same time she's spayed (or neutered if your cat is a male), that you only declaw the front paws and that you **always** keep your cat indoors.

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Your Cat: Indoors Or Out

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If you want your cat to live a long and healthy life, keep her inside. If you allow your cat to wander around on her own, without your supervision, she is susceptible to any of the following tragedies:

- becoming hit by a car
- ingesting a deadly poison like antifreeze or a pesticide
- becoming trapped by an unhappy neighbor
- being attacked by a roaming dog, cat or wild animal
- contracting a disease from another animal
- becoming lost and unable to find her way home
- being stolen
- encountering an adult or child with cruel intentions

Following are some of the reasons people have provided for allowing their cat to be outdoors without their supervision, along with our comments and suggestions.

“I have a six-foot fence.”

Unless you have special fencing that's designed to prevent a cat from climbing out, your cat will be able to scale your fence and escape the confines of your yard. Even if you do have special fencing, you need to make sure that it can keep other cats or animals from getting into your yard to get to your cat.

“My last cat went outdoors and he loved it.”

Your cat may enjoy being outdoors, but by allowing him to go outside, unsupervised, you're putting him at risk and shortening his life span. Most cats that are allowed to roam outdoors usually don't live for more than a few years. Cats who live strictly indoors can live up to 18 - 20 years of age.

“My cat's litter box smells. I don't want one inside.”

Scoop your cat's litter box on a daily basis. How often you change the litter depends on the number of cats in your home, the number of litter boxes, and the type of litter you use. Twice a week is a general guideline for clay litter, but depending on the circumstances, you may need to change it every other day or once a week. Wash the litter box with soap and water every time you change the litter. Don't use strong smelling chemicals or cleaning products when washing the litter box, as it may cause your cat to avoid it.

“My cat likes to sun herself.”

Your cat can sun herself by any window indoors. If you're really set on letting your cat sun herself outdoors, put her on a harness and leash and stay with her while she's taking in the rays.

“I can't keep him in. He meows and paces by the door.”

Keep your windows closed or put in screens. Remember to always keep your doors closed and teach your children the importance of keeping the doors closed, too. It may take a few days or a few weeks, but if there are enough interesting things for your cat to

play with indoors, he'll come to enjoy being indoors. Be sure to provide him with a scratching post and safe toys to bat or carry around.

“We’ve always let her out.”

You can change your cat’s behavior. It will take time and patience, but it might save her life. When you implement your “closed door” policy, give her a lot of extra attention and entertainment. At first she may cry, but don’t give in. Soon she’ll be happy to stay indoors with you.

“My cat knows to avoid cars.”

Even if this were true, all it would take is another car, a dog or a shiny object to lure your cat into the street and into the path of traffic. Also keep in mind that some people may not swerve to miss a cat in the road.

“We live in the country.”

Just because you live in an area where there may not be as many cars, there are other concerns to be aware of. In more rural settings, there tends to be more wildlife and dangers to domestic cats, such as passing diseases, injuries due to fights, or death from a wild animal attack. Often cats in rural areas travel long distances and many can get lost, injured by an annoyed neighbor, or killed by a variety of causes.

“My cat needs exercise and likes to play with other cats.”

Stray cats are likely to spread viruses like feline leukemia and other fatal diseases. If your cat needs a friend, adopt another cat that’s healthy and disease-free.

“My cat yowls and acts likes he really needs to go outside.”

Your cat may be feeling the physiological need to mate. If this is the case, make sure your cat is neutered (males) or spayed (females). Sterilized cats don’t have the natural need to breed, and therefore, won’t be anxious to go out to find a mate.

Remember...

NEVER let a declawed cat outside. They cannot defend themselves.

NEVER let an unaltered cat outdoors. One female can produce up to 60 kittens per year.

NEVER let kittens outside until they are at least 6 months of age and altered. This gives them time to build up immunity to many diseases and to complete their vaccination cycle.

NEVER let unvaccinated cats outdoors. Cats must have a rabies vaccination and a yearly distemper vaccination. Also consider the feline leukemia vaccination.

NEVER let a FeLV or FIV positive cat outside. Feline leukemia is fatal and there is no cure. The disease is passed in saliva to other cats. FIV is feline AIDS and is often seen in tomcats that get into fights. In both cases, positive cats can live together for many years before succumbing to the disease.

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Children & Cats: Important Information for Parents

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Living with a cat can be beneficial to children. Cats can enhance children's self-esteem, teach them responsibility and help them to learn empathy. However, children and cats may not always automatically have a wonderful relationship. Parents must be willing to teach the cat and the child acceptable limits of behavior in order to make their interactions pleasant and safe.

Selecting a Cat

What age is best? Many people have a warm and fuzzy image of a kitten and a child growing up together. If you have a young child and are thinking of adopting a kitten (less than 1 year old) there are a few things you need to consider.

- **Time and energy:** Kittens require a lot of time, patience and supervision. If you have a young child who already requires a lot of care and time, you should ask yourself if you will you have enough time to care for a kitten as well.
- **Safety:** Kittens, because they're babies, are fragile creatures. A kitten may become frightened or even injured by a well-meaning, curious child who wants to constantly pick him up, hug him or explore his body by pulling on his tail or ears.
- **Rough play:** Kittens have sharp teeth and claws with which they may inadvertently injure a small child. Kittens also tend to climb up on small children and accidentally scratch. All interactions between your child and kitten will need to be closely supervised in order to minimize the chances of either being injured.
- **Advantages of getting an adult cat:** Adult cats require less time and attention once they've adjusted to your family and household routine. You can better gauge how hardy and tolerant an adult cat will be of a child's enthusiasm and you can work with your local animal shelter to adopt a cat that has previously lived with children. As a general rule, if your child is under six years old, it's best to adopt a cat that's over two years old. Although kittens can be a lot of fun and it's exciting and rewarding to help them grow into wonderful companions, they do require significantly more time to supervise than an adult cat.

Who Will Care For The Cat?

It's unrealistic to expect a child, regardless of age, to have the sole responsibility of caring for a cat. Cats need basic things, like food, water, shelter and litterbox maintenance, but they also need to be played with and given opportunities to exercise on a consistent basis. Teaching a cat the rules of the house and helping him become a good companion is too overwhelming a task for a young child. While responsible teenagers may be up to the task, they may not be willing to spend an adequate amount of time with the cat, as their desire to be with their friends usually takes over at this age. If you're adopting a cat "for the kids," you must be prepared and willing to be the cat's primary caretaker.

Starting Off Right

Below are some guidelines to help you start off on the right foot. Remember, small children should never be left alone with a cat or kitten without adult supervision.

- **Holding:** Because kittens often squirm and wiggle they can easily fall out of a young child's arms and become injured. If held too tightly or forcibly restrained, the kitten may respond by scratching or biting. It is safest for everyone if your child is sitting down whenever he wants to hold the kitten.

For adult cats, have your child sit in your lap and let the cat approach both of you. This way you can control your child and not allow him to get "carried away" with pats that are too rough. You are also there to teach your new cat to treat your child gently. Some cats do not want to be held, but will sit next to you and your child if offered treats or petting. Keep in mind that the cat should always be allowed to leave when it feels like it.

- **Petting and giving affection:** Children often want to hug cats or grasp them too firmly. Your cat may view this as a threatening gesture, rather than an affectionate one, and may react with scratching or biting. You should teach your child to let the cat approach on his own terms and pet lightly. You should also teach your child to avoid staring at, or looking directly into, your cat's eyes.
- **Giving treats:** When children offer a treat from fingers held together as a pincher the cat may accidentally bite fingers instead of only taking the treat. Have your child place the treat in an open palm, rather than holding it in his fingers. You may want to place a hand underneath your child's hand to help guide him.
- **Supervising play:** Cats interpret quick and jerky hand movements as an invitation to play. You should teach your child to offer the cat or kitten a toy on a string in order to maximize the distance between the child's hands and the toy. Encouraging a cat to play with hands and fingers may result in scratches or bites.
- **Be patient:** Your new cat may take some time to feel comfortable with your child's actions and sounds and will approach when he feels ready. Your cat must also learn which behaviors on his part are appropriate and which are not. Our handout "Managing Your Kitten's Rough Play" outlines procedures for discouraging rough play and encouraging appropriate play. Punishing your cat for inappropriate behavior will not help. If he learns that being around children always results in "bad things" happening to him, he may become defensive in their presence.

If your cat is growling, hissing or biting at your child for any reason, the situation needs IMMEDIATE attention. Punishing your cat is likely to make matters worse. Please consult with your veterinarian for suggestions on how to remedy the situation.

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The Fearful Cat

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When cats feel threatened, they usually respond in three ways to the object, person or situation they perceive as a threat: fight, flee or freeze. Some cats become so frightened they lose control of their bladder or bowels and eliminate right where they are. Each cat has his/her preferred way of dealing with a crisis. You'll notice that your cat probably tends to try one option first, and if that doesn't work, she's forced to try a different option. For instance, if your cat is afraid of dogs and a friend brings his dog to your home to visit, you might notice the following: first, your cat puffs out her fur to make herself look big, then hisses and spits at the dog. If the dog doesn't retreat, your cat may flee the situation, find a hiding spot, and freeze until she deems the situation safe.

Your cat may show the following behaviors when she is fearful:

- Hiding
- Aggression (spitting, hissing, growling, piloerection, swatting, biting, scratching)
- Loss of control over bladder and/or bowels
- Freezing in place

It's normal for you to want to help and comfort your cat when she's frightened. However, this isn't necessarily the best thing to do from your cat's point of view. It's normal for a cat to feel insecure or frightened in a new environment. Often, your new cat will hide for a day or two when you first bring her home. Sometimes a traumatic experience like a visit to the veterinarian, or introducing a new animal into the household, can disrupt her routine and send her under the bed for a few days.

What Causes Fearful Behavior?

You'll need to closely observe your cat to determine the trigger for her fearful behavior. Keep in mind that just because you know that the person or animal approaching your cat has good intentions, doesn't mean that she feels safe. The trigger for her fearful behavior could be anything. Some common triggers are:

- A particular person
- A stranger
- Another animal
- A child
- Loud noises

What You Can Do

Take the following steps to reduce your cat's anxiety and help her become more confident:

- First, schedule an appointment with your veterinarian for a thorough physical examination to rule out any medical reasons for your cat's fearful behavior. Cats don't always act sick, even when they are. Any sudden behavior change could mean that your cat is ill and should be taken seriously. Some common symptoms that your cat may be ill are aggressiveness, hiding and eliminating outside of the litter box.
- If your cat is healthy, but hiding, leave her alone. She'll come out when she's ready. To force her out of her hiding spot will only make her more fearful. Make

sure she has easy access to food, water and her litter box from her hiding place. Clean the litter box and change the food and water every day so you know whether she is eating and drinking.

- Keep any contact with the fear stimulus to a minimum.
- Keep your cat's routine as regular as possible. Cats feel more confident if they know when to expect daily feeding, playing, cuddling and grooming.
- Try to desensitize your cat to the fear stimulus:
 1. Determine what distance your cat can be from the fear stimulus without responding fearfully.
 2. Introduce the fear stimulus at this distance while you're feeding your cat tasty treats and praising her.
 3. Slowly move the fear stimulus closer as you continue to praise your cat and offer her treats.
 4. If at any time during this process your cat shows fearful behavior, you've proceeded too quickly and will need to start over from the beginning. This is the most common mistake people make when desensitizing an animal, and it can be avoided by working in short sessions, paying careful attention to your cat so that you don't progress too rapidly for her.
 5. You may need help from a professional animal behavior specialist with the desensitization process.

A Note About Aggression

If your cat is threatening you, another person or an animal, you should seek help from a professional animal behavior specialist. To keep everyone safe in the meantime, confine your cat to an area of the house where all interactions with her are kept to a minimum and are supervised by a responsible person. Cat bites and scratches are serious and can easily become infected. Bites should be reported to your local animal control agency so that your cat can be quarantined and watched for signs of rabies. If you can't keep your cat separated from the stimuli that brings on her aggressive behavior and you're unable to work with a professional animal behavior specialist, please consider having your cat humanely euthanized. The safety of your cat and the other animals and humans she encounters, should be your first consideration.

What Not To Do

- Don't punish your cat for her fearful behavior. Animals associate punishment with what they're doing at the time they're punished, so your cat is likely to associate any punishment you give her with you. This will only cause her to become fearful of you and she still won't understand why she's being punished.
- Don't force her to experience the object or situation that is causing her fear. For example, if she is afraid of a certain person, don't let that person try to pick her up and hold her. This will only make her more frightened of that person.

The Humane Society of Harford County
2208 Connolly Road
Fallston, MD 21047
410-836-1090
www.harfordshelter.org

Play with Your Cat!

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While pet owners would never consider withholding food or water from their cats, many forget to provide adequate exercise and stimulation. Yes, cats do sleep a lot, but play is an important component of any pet's health and well-being. The release of energy triggered by regular daily interactive play sessions can help alleviate stress and prevent behavior problems.

Stress Reduction

The average indoor cat is subject to a variety of stressors, usually the result of perceived or real invasions of her territory. Seeing a roaming cat out the window that she can't chase away, having houseguests, adding a new resident (human or animal), or a trip to the veterinarian can cause your cat anxiety.

One response to stress for many cats is eliminating outside the litter box. Another response may be redirected aggression – where the cat takes out her frustration on another cat, the family dog or you! Over time, stress can cause chronic medical problems. Engaging your cat in regular play sessions can help alleviate her stress and help keep her mentally and physically healthy.

Preventing Behavior Problems

Without appropriate outlets for their energy, cats may attack ankles, play too roughly or interrupt their owner's sleep with nocturnal adventures. Several interactive play sessions per day, especially one timed shortly before bedtime, can help reduce or eliminate these behaviors.

Structured Play Sessions

Simulating the hunt

Create your play sessions to mimic the cat's natural hunting behavior. Remember, cats are natural hunters, and we originally domesticated them to rid our homes and barns of rodents and other vermin. Choose a fishing pole toy – one that imitates the noise of flapping bird wings is irresistible to most cats. Make the toy soar around the room, engaging your cat's attention. Or simulate mouse activity by sliding the end of the toy around on the floor in quick, jerky movements. Allow the cat to pounce and catch the toy and bat it around, then jerk the toy away for the cat to chase some more. End the play session by allowing the cat to capture the toy. (Avoid laser lights for these play sessions as it is important for the cat to enjoy the satisfaction of catching the toy as he would live prey.)

After the play session

Sessions should be long enough for the cat to get tired – probably 15 - 20 minutes, depending on the age and activity level of the cat. About five minutes after the end of the session, feed your cat some canned cat food. This mimics what would happen at the end of a real hunt – the cat would eat her catch. Don't be surprised if your cat takes a long nap after a play session.

Routine

Schedule several play sessions a day, preferably at times when your cat is normally active. Try to make them about the same time every day. This allows the cat some control over her environment, as she can predict and anticipate her interactive play time with you. A session shortly before bedtime may help prevent a bout of the nighttime crazies.

Other Toys and Activities

- Provide plenty of safe toys for your cat and rotate them to make them more interesting.
- To allow your cat to enjoy the outdoors safely, cat fencing can be added to your yard's existing fence. It will keep your cat in and other small animals out. Or you might wish to build or buy a small outdoor enclosure. (But, remember, a cat should never be left unattended outdoors, even in a secure enclosure.) Some cats can learn to go outdoors on a harness and leash.
- Provide perches with a view. A window with a view of bird activity or squirrels can provide hours of entertainment. Some cats enjoy watching videos made especially for cats. An aquarium also makes for interesting "cat TV."
- Hide your cat's food so she has to hunt for it, instead of putting it in a bowl. Also, toys that may be stuffed with food are available at most pet stores.

A Note About Water

Cats that drink more water are less likely to get urinary tract infections. (Urinary tract infections are a leading cause of house soiling in cats.) Provide several bowls of water, and make sure the water in them is always fresh. Since cats usually like to drink running water, you might want to purchase a cat water fountain, available in most pet stores. Mounting a few rabbit water bottles (the kind with the metal tubes that the animal drinks from) in several locations offers another novel drinking opportunity to encourage your cat to drink water.

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Your Cat Needs A Tag!

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Animal shelters throughout the country take in millions of lost cats each year and 99 out of 100 of these cats have no identification. Less than three out of 100 lost cats are ever reclaimed by their owners, and usually one of those three has an identification tag. The owners of the other two cats end up spending hours, days and even weeks looking for their lost cats and personally visiting every animal shelter in their area. Most owners of lost cats search long and hard, and never find their cats at all.

Don't risk losing your feline friend forever. Please put a collar on your cat and an identification tag with your name, address and phone number. Be sure to keep the information current. You'll want to tag your cat even if you never let it go outside because there is always the chance that it could slip through an open door or window and become lost.

There are collars made especially for cats with a short piece of elastic sewn in. These "break-away" collars can be buckled snugly around the cat's neck, but will stretch and let the cat escape if it should get hung up on a tree limb or fence. It's important to remember that many more cats have died because they were lost and their owners couldn't find them, than have ever been injured from wearing a collar.

The first time you put a collar on your cat, give it a catnip-filled toy. The toy will distract the cat's attention from the odd feeling of wearing a collar and by the time it finishes shredding the toy, it may have forgotten the collar entirely.

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Wish List for Our Homeless Friends

See www.harfordshelter.org for a complete list

FOR DOGS & CATS

- Hill's Science Diet dry food for dogs, cats & kittens
- Canned food for dogs, cats & kittens (any brand)
- Cat toys
- Kitty litter (any brand)
- Buckle-type Martingale collars
- Pill pockets for dogs & cats
- Semi-moist cat & dog treats like Pupperoni & Pounce

FOR SMALL ANIMALS

- CareFresh small animal bedding
- Timothy & alfalfa hay
- Oxbow rabbit & guinea pig food

CLEANING SUPPLIES

- Dawn dish soap
- Finish PowerBall detergent pods
- Germicidal bleach (no low-splash)
- Trash bags (kitchen & 55-gallon heavy duty)
- Toilet paper
- Tissues
- Paper towels
- Sponges
- Lysol disinfectant spray & wipes
- Jugs of Simple Green all-purpose cleaner
- Nitrile gloves
- Jugs of white vinegar
- Mr. Clean magic erasers
- Commercial grade string mop heads from Home Depot

OFFICE SUPPLIES

- Copy paper
- 1st-class stamps
- 3-tab manila folders
- Colored 2-pocket folders
- Batteries (AA, AAA & 9V)

OTHER

- Gift cards to Staples, Walmart, PetSmart, Home Depot, , etc.
- Pet-friendly ice melt
- Gas gift cards