

Fights Between Family Cats Caused By Outdoor Cats

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With the coming of nice warm weather, unfortunately more cats are being allowed to roam unsupervised outdoors. Not only does this put the outdoor cat at risk, surprisingly there can be repercussions for indoor cats as well.

We recently talked to a cat owner who had noticed her two cats staring out the backdoor, watching as a roaming cat paraded through the backyard. One of her cats was becoming more and more agitated by the outdoor cat's presence, and all of a sudden turned and jumped on her other cat who was sitting nearby.

The cat who was attacked fought back to defend herself, and the owner had a difficult time separating them. This is a classic example of redirected aggression. This occurs when an aggressive response is triggered by one event (the presence of the cat in the backyard), but released onto another target (the indoor cat), usually because the aggressor is prevented from attacking the provocateur.

We have seen a number of these cases over the years, in which this kind of an event turns two cats who were used to living together peacefully into animals who can't be in the same room together without fighting. One redirected episode like this can cause a problem that can take months to resolve.

If there are many loose cats in your neighborhood, you may want to take steps to prevent such a problem from developing. When you are home, don't let indoor cats sit in the window and observe outdoor cats. Encourage them to do something else, such as play with a toy, or if you are not home, consider confining them in a room without windows.

You can try to block the cat's view by placing sheets of cardboard or aluminum foil across the lower part of the window, if you don't object to a somewhat unsightly look. Another option is to "booby-trap" the window-sill so that your cats do not want to jump onto it. If your city or county has animal ordinances preventing cats from roaming, contact an animal control officer, or the owner of the cat.

If such an incident has already happened, and your cats are already fighting, you should separate them to prevent further fights. They will need to be re-introduced to each other as if they were meeting for the first time - allowing only minimal contact associated with something pleasant for both animals. Sometimes professional behavioral help is required and even short-term medication prescribed by a veterinarian.