

Five Steps to a Better Behaved Cat
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We are sometimes asked what we recommend to help people have a more enriching relationship with their cat. Here are five ideas that can help.

1. Create a “cat-friendly” environment. There are certain things that cats need to enrich their environment. These include cat-friendly litterboxes (at least one per cat, cleaned regularly, easily accessible, etc.), cat-friendly scratching posts (several around the house, easily accessible, made of material that encourages scratching), toys that encourage play, adequate hiding and resting places, some of which are elevated off the ground, and minimal harassment or conflict with other pets in the household.

2. Treat your cat like a cat, not a dog. Cats are not small dogs, they have different evolutionary histories, social systems and communication systems. Most cats don’t have the same strong social needs for attention and social activity that dogs do, and the kinds of social praise and punishment that works for dogs doesn’t work well with cats. We need to accept and understand our cats for the way they are.

3. Catch your cat doing something right. Too often owners focus on behavioral problems or complaints and don’t focus on trying to reward appropriate behavior. Few of us think to praise, pet or give a treat to our cats for playing with the right toys or sitting quietly. After all that’s what we expect them to do. But like all behavior, if we reinforce it, it will happen more often. If we reinforced desirable behavior more often, it would happen more often.

4. Encourage desirable playful behavior. Younger cats are prone to attack people, other animals and moving objects such as the drapes, as a part of play. Never encourage cats to jump at or play with human hands, feet or clothes or to attack other animals or inappropriate objects. Always be sure to provide and encourage play with appropriate objects such as strings on a stick, small balls or other small objects.

5. Manage the cat’s environment. Most of us are familiar with the concept of “baby-proofing” or “puppy-proofing” an area where we remove things that could be harmful or could be damaged by the inquisitive young child or dog. “Kitty-proofing” the areas where the cat spends her time can also reduce damage and prevent the development of bad habits such as scratching the stereo speakers.