



Cat Toys and Interactive Play

The first step with any behavioral issue is to take your cat to the veterinarian for a full evaluation. Cats are very stoic animals and will hide illness and injury. Sometimes our only clue that something is physically wrong is a behavioral symptom. Many behavioral modification programs can begin in conjunction with or shortly after your trip to the veterinarian.

Toys, toys, toys! Playing with your cat is a lot of fun and one of the best ways to bond with your cat.

Cats love to play, and each cat has their own individual style of play as well as their favorite types of toys. There are some cats, though, that need a little encouragement. Leaving toys out for your cat isn't always enough. Sometimes you need to play with them, and/or figure out which toy will entice your cat to play.

Cats are curious, so tapping into that curiosity is often the way to entice a cat to play. If it isn't the right type, the cat may not show any interest at all. Older or less confident cat may shows interest in the toy, and will watch or wiggle its butt a little, but never "goes for it". Be patient as your cat gains confidence and learns a new style of play. Experiment with different toys and ways of interacting with them until you find one your cat cannot resist.

When cats play, they are hunting their prey. They will watch the toy, stalk the toy, pounce or catch the toy, play with the toy, and then "kill" the toy. Sometimes you may even witness a "kill bite", which is when the cat clamps down on the toy and keeps it in their mouth, rather than immediately going back to tossing it around or playing with it. The best way for a cat to play is to have their prey drive needs met.

If you have an active cat or kitten, interactive play time should be a part of your daily routine. This means you should be playing with your cat 2-3 times daily, or more if needed. Cat Wand toys are terrific for this. There are several to choose from - The Cat Dancer, Da Bird, The Cat Charmer, Neko Flies are just a few examples of popular wand toys. Basically, there is an irresistible toy attached to the wand by a string. You get the fun job of moving this toy around in the manner that prey would move – up in the air, around the chair, through a tunnel, underneath a pillow, slow, maybe fast, or in jerky movements. You will need to try a variety of movements along with speed to determine what your cat is going to enjoy the most. Allow your cat to catch the toy every few minutes, so they don't become frustrated and walk away. When it looks like your cat is about to have had enough, slow down the movement of the toy, and eventually allow your cat to catch it or let the toy stop by the cat and don't move it anymore. The toy will appear "dead". When you pick it up, the game is over. Be sure to give your cat a tasty treat

or feed a meal afterwards. Cats eat after they hunt, so doing this provides satisfaction to your cat, and your cat will be happy! What to do when you aren't home? Provide safe & fun toys to occupy your cat. Try a few different types of toys in the beginning to see what your cat likes – a toy mouse, a ping pong ball, something with a bell inside. If your cat ends up liking a variety of toys, bonus! Change the toys every 4-5 days so your cat doesn't get bored with the toy. A Kitty Kong can have canned food or treats put inside, which can help occupy your cat for a while as well. You can also strategically place toys in corners, underneath the bed, in the hallway, a little bit hidden to make finding those toys more fun. Stuffed toys made specifically for cats are called Kicker toys, and are great for the cat that enjoys wrestling. The stuffed toy should be big enough for the cat to wrap all of its legs around it, so they can bite on it and kick it with their hind legs.

Catnip can be a lot of fun for your cat. Some toys have catnip already in them or are designed to have catnip added to them. You can also purchase catnip spray or flakes to sprinkle on towers or toys. Cats can eat catnip as well, but please always read labels first.

Avoid toys that have string, yarn, feathers, loose bells, etc... If you do buy a toy with these, remove them or make them a toy that your cat only plays with when you can fully supervise. Don't allow your cat to play with a toy that is small enough for them to swallow. Boxes and paper bags are fun for cats as well; however, remove any handles that might trap or choke your cat and never let cats play with plastic bags.

If after trying these suggestions you are still experiencing undesirable behaviors in your cat, SUBMIT QUESTIONS by clicking the link under Ask A Trainer on the Behavior and Training page of the Wayside Waifs website: www.waysidewaifs.org.

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