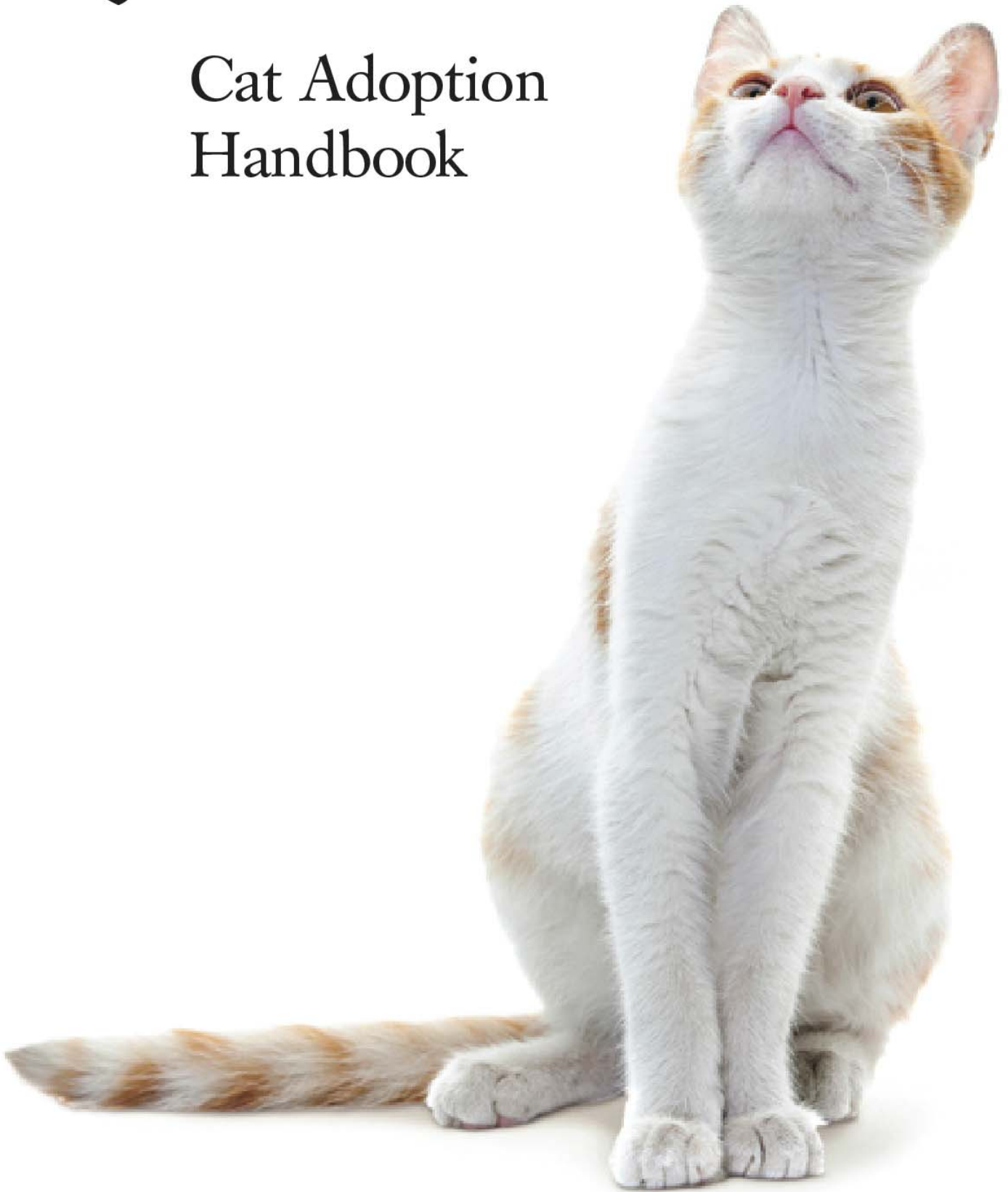




SAN FRANCISCO  
SPCA

# Cat Adoption Handbook



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## CONGRATULATIONS!

Dear Cat Adopter,

Congratulations on your new family member! Bringing a new cat into your home—and your life—is a big commitment, one that comes with many benefits and joys. We are thrilled you have decided to take this step.

Cats truly have become part of our families—we buy them toys, we have their teeth cleaned, we share our apartments and houses with them. For their own safety and health, we keep them indoors, away from the many cat hazards of the modern world.

But amid this loving assimilation of cats into the core of the family, we tend to forget that cats are, well, cats. Not long ago, they were farm animals with a large territory to patrol, trees to climb, and license to stalk and hunt vermin and household pests. We radically changed the environment of cats in what amounts to an evolutionary blink of an eye, and it's up to us to help them be successful in that environment by providing plenty of activities, training, and outlets for their innate abilities.

Give your cat those things, and in return she will give you not only years of love, companionship, and enjoyment, but also better health and a longer life—at least statistically speaking.

For our part, we are committed to helping you make your new family member's transition into your life a success.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Scarlett, DVM  
Co-President



Jason Walthall  
Co-President

## SET UP FOR SUCCESS

### Meeting Your Cat's Needs

Adding any new family member, especially the four-legged kind, requires a certain amount of equipment and some adjustments to your home for everyone's safety and comfort.

Here's a list of must-have supplies for a great start with your new cat:

#### Basics

- Food
- Water and food bowls
- Cat bed
- Scratching post
- Cat carrier
- Collar
- Litter box
- Litter, litter scooper
- Enzymatic cleaner

#### Cat Care

- Cat toothbrush, cat toothpaste
- Nail trimmer
- Grooming brush
- Flea control treatment

#### Training and Mental Stimulation

- Harness, leash
- Food dispensing toys (KONG® Cat Wobbler, treat balls)
- Interactive toys (wands, laser toys, feather toys, mitt toys)
- Play-alone toys (squeaky toys, fluffy balls, crinkle/crackle balls)
- Soft treats, crunchy treats, freeze-dried meats
- Catnip, catnip spray, catnip toys

### Setting Up Your Home

#### Safe Haven

As tempting as it is to give your cat the run of the house right away, moving into a new home is a stressful experience for cats. Having a safe, confined area instead—a safe haven—allows your cat to make a gradual transition to her new home. The safe haven is where your cat will stay until she is completely comfortable with her new home (which could take days or even weeks), as well as a place she can retreat to anytime she needs a little space and alone time.

**Where?** The ideal safe haven is small, quiet, and easy to close off with a door. It should be mostly free of furniture, especially anything your cat can hide in or under where you can't get to her. The best places for a safe haven are the bathroom, a small bedroom, or a large, well-ventilated closet.

**What?** Furnish the safe haven with a bed, water and food bowls, some play-alone toys, a scratching post near the bed, and a litter box as far away from the bed and food as possible.

**Tip:** More than one cat? Then giving your new cat a safe haven is even more important.

## Household Hazards

Remember, cats are curious by nature. Keep your cat safe from these common household hazards:

**Plants.** Many plants (such as plants of the lily family, onions, and garlic) are toxic to cats. Put your plants in areas your cat can't access. Alternatively, spray them with bitter apple to discourage your cat from eating them. Provide safe herbs such as catnip or alfalfa for your cat to chew on.

**Poison.** Human medications (especially aspirin, acetaminophen, and NSAIDs), veterinary medications, insecticides, rodenticides, household cleaners, chemicals, and paints can all cause severe injury or death to cats, so can chocolate. Secure all cupboards, closets, and cabinets—use childproof latches when possible.

**Chemical rub-off.** Use natural, nontoxic cleaners in your home. Cats are fastidious groomers and easily pick up chemical residue on their fur and paw pads from contact with harsh cleaning agents. Ammonia-based cleaners and phenol disinfectants are particularly dangerous.

**Strings.** Cats love string games and are quick to pounce when they see an opportunity. But swallowed string can cause intestinal damage and may require expensive surgery to remove. Keep tinsel, thread, dental floss, rubber bands, cords from blinds, necklaces, dangly earrings, and anything similar out of your cat's reach as they can be fatal.

**Cords.** Bundle up and hide any electrical wires or cords. Cats find them tempting to chew on, and they may try to pull out plugs.

**Bags.** Cats love the way plastic bags sound and move; however, plastic bags are not safe for cats since they often try to chew on them or climb into them. Paper bags are a safer option, but make sure to cut off bag handles as cats can get caught in them.

**Unsafe hiding places.** Block access to dangerous places for cats, such as behind stoves, refrigerators, motors, washers, dryers, etc.

**Open windows/doors.** Contrary to popular belief, most cats that fall from windows don't survive. Make certain all your windows are cat-proof (screens should be tight!) and can't be pushed open.

## For a Happy and Healthy Cat Play and Training

Environmental enrichment through play and training (yes, cats can be trained) means a healthier *and* easier-to-live-with cat. Active cats with a stimulation-rich environment are less anxious, sleep more, and are more likely to maintain a healthy weight. Does that mean you must take up cat agility if you adopted a young, active cat? Of course not, but occasionally winding up a motorized mouse isn't enough.

Here are some suggestions for activity sessions:

- Play with your cat using interactive toys like wands, laser pointers, or feather toys
- Set up an obstacle course for your cat to navigate to reach her food
- Provide a multi-limb climbing tree or jungle gym
- Train your cat to walk on a leash with a harness and stroll in a quiet, safe area
- Train your cat to fetch, sit, shake, come when called, and other tricks

**Tip:** Apart from leashed walks, we recommend keeping your cat indoors. For more about indoor vs. outdoor cats, see Entertaining and Training Your Cat on page 10.

### **Mental Stimulation**

Bored cats are a lot like children. Unless you give them something fun to do, they will make their own fun. An energetic cat might climb the curtains; a more sedate cat may take over a windowsill and not move at all. Encourage your cat to be physically and mentally active by giving her a variety of toys, puzzles, and other brainteasers.

Here are some options\* for exercising your cat's mind:

- Brainteaser toys (of the pick-a-prize, play-n-squeak, or seek-a-treat variety)
- Play-alone toys (cat mobiles, toys that move or squeak, ball toys, feather toys)
- Homemade jungle gyms, e.g. using cardboard boxes, paper bags, and cushions
- Visual stimulation, e.g. fish tanks (securely covered), screensavers, Video Catnip™ DVDs
- Food-dispensing toys, cat KONG, treat balls

\*Always choose safe, cat-appropriate toys. Beware of small, loose objects or string that can be ingested. Check with your vet before introducing your cat to a new product.

### **Cat Care Grooming**

Cats have a lot of fur and despite meticulous self-grooming, they do shed. Brushing and combing are excellent ways to bond with your cat, keep all that fur under control, and deal with any fleas. Frequent brushing can help lessen hairballs. Use a soft- to medium-bristle brush and groom your cat regularly. To make sure she enjoys the experience, give her little tasty treats while you groom her.

### **Food and Water**

Have one food bowl (use ceramic or stainless steel, never plastic, which can cause an allergic reaction) or food-dispensing toy for each cat in the household, and ditto for water bowls. Pay careful attention to how much food your cat eats. It's crucial for her health that she eats well and any loss of appetite should cause concern. Discuss feeding with your veterinarian the first time you visit with your cat.

**Tip:** Milk is a no-no. Cats don't need it; in fact milk makes many cats ill if they drink it, because they don't have the enzymes to break it down, which results in upset stomachs.

### **Medical Concerns**

Cats hide illness very well, so watch carefully for signs of illness. Some things to watch out for:

- Is your cat eating, drinking, and using the litter box regularly?
- Is she lethargic?
- Does her coat look less healthy? Has she stopped grooming herself?
- Does she strain or cry when using the litter box?
- Does she have diarrhea?
- Is she sneezing? Does she have watery eyes?
- Is she shaking her head a lot or scratching at her ears?

**Visits to the Veterinarian**

Even healthy adult cats should have annual vaccine booster shots and checkups, because many illnesses can be detected in their early stages. Be prepared, too, for emergencies. Have the name of emergency veterinary services handy, and know how to get there in a hurry if necessary.

**Multi-Cat Households**

If there are other cats in your household, a slow introduction is very important. For more information, see *Introducing Cats* in the Behavior & Training section of our website.

## ARRIVING HOME WITH YOUR CAT

Territory and a predictable routine are key elements of feline happiness. Cats thrive when they know a) which part of the world is theirs and b) what to expect from their human family. That's why it's best to resist the urge to lavish your cat with attention the moment you bring her home, and instead let her adjust to her new home (and territory) in her own time. A calm, unhurried transition at a feline-appropriate pace can prevent many stress-related behavior problems, such as digging, biting, scratching, excessive grooming, and litter box aversion.

Here's how to do it:

### The First Hour

1. When you arrive home, take the cat carrier into your cat's safe haven. If you haven't set up a safe haven yet, do so before opening the carrier.
2. Open the carrier and let your cat decide whether she wants to come out to explore. Please note your cat may stay inside the carrier for hours.
3. Whether or not she comes out of the carrier, leave your cat in her safe haven.

### The First Few Days

Visit the safe haven often during the day, but let your cat decide the pace of interactions. Never force attention or petting on your cat; she will ask for it when she's ready.

When your cat is completely comfortable in her safe haven, feels at home with everyone in the household, and paws at the door asking to be let out, open the door and let her explore the rest of the house at her own pace. Cats usually begin exploring at night, making brief excursions into new territory, followed by rapid retreats to the safe haven.

**Tip:** It's common for a cat to take a few days to adjust to her new home, but it could take several weeks, or even months.

### The Bedtime Routine

By nature, cats are most active at dusk and dawn, but domestic cats are primarily creatures of habit. If you'd like your cat's activity schedule to suit your lifestyle—rather than late night workouts followed by her pouncing on you in bed and meowing for food at 5 a.m.—then work actively to create those habits right away.

- Play with your cat every day at times that work for you. If you go to bed at midnight, set playtime for 11:30 p.m. Or, if you go to bed at 10 p.m. and get up at 6 a.m., set playtime for 6:30 a.m., and give her evening meal later, after final play session.
- Establish a special location for play—and don't make it your bedroom. Use a cat-appropriate space like near a cat tree or condo.
- Pick up all toys (and items your cat likes to play with) at night and put them away.
- Close the door to your bedroom or put your cat in her safe haven and ignore any tantrums.

For more information, see *Nocturnal Behavior in Cats* in the Behavior & Training section of our website.



### **Going Forward: Creating a Routine**

- Feed your cat the same brand of food at the same time every day.
- Set aside some time to play with your cat mornings and evenings (when cats are most active).
- Groom and pet your cat every day.
- Clean the litter box at approximately the same time every day.
- Establish a noise and activity level for your household that isn't stressful to your cat.
- Reward your cat consistently for behaviors you like, such as using her scratching post.

## LITTER BOX OVERVIEW

The best way to introduce your cat to her new home is to confine her to one room or area—her safe haven. A further benefit to this approach is that it helps prevent litter box problems. However confident and ready to explore your cat is, keep her confined to the safe haven until she has used the litter box at least once.

### Litter Box Do's and Don'ts

#### DO

- Have enough boxes. You need one litter box per cat in the household, plus one extra.
- Experiment to find a litter your cat likes: clumping, non-clumping, pellets, etc.
- Keep the litter box immaculate; cats are extremely fastidious.
- Use mild dishwashing liquid or hot water and vinegar to clean the box. Never use harsh chemicals like bleach or ammonia.
- Scoop the box every day. Clean the box every two to three days, or at least weekly.
- Place the litter box in a quiet, private area away from food and water bowls.

#### DON'T

- Use scented litter. Perfumed smells tend to repel cats.
- Get a box that's too small; your cat needs space to turn around, dig, and cover.
- Leave waste sitting in the litter box; nobody likes a dirty bathroom.
- Use strong chemicals or disinfectants to clean the box.
- Use a litter box liner or a restrictive box.
- Place the litter box near anything noisy, like a washing machine or furnace.
- Place the litter box in a high-traffic area in your home.

**Tip:** If you have a multi-story house, have litter boxes on each level.

### Litter Box Problems

First, it's important to know that your cat isn't eliminating outside her litter box out of spite. She has either not learned to use the litter box reliably, is stressed, is ill, or is avoiding it because she doesn't like it. Cats can form aversions to the litter box for a variety of reasons, so do a bit of sleuthing. She may object to the smell, litter texture, or may prefer a covered/uncovered box. Litter box problems are common and usually very fixable.

#### Troubleshooting Litter Box Problems

1. *Always begin by consulting your veterinarian to rule out medical causes.*
2. Check all the do's and don'ts above to make sure you're following the guidelines.
3. If the problem could be stress-related (new cat in the area, construction outside), deter stray cats from your yard and restrict your cat's view/access to windows, noisy areas, etc.
4. Could it be roommate squabbles? Confine your cats to separate areas of the house. For more information see *Introducing Cats* in the Behavior & Training section of our website.

For detailed information, see *Litter Box Problems* in the Behavior & Training section of our website. If the problem persists, consult a certified animal behaviorist or veterinary behavior specialist.

**Tip:** Never yell at or punish your cat for not using her litter box. It will only make her afraid of you, and it will usually make the problem worse.

## ENTERTAINING AND TRAINING YOUR CAT

To be physically and behaviorally healthy, your cat needs outlets for her innate feline abilities. That means opportunities to stalk, hunt, pounce, climb, hide in safe shelter, and watch interesting small-animal activity like fish in a bowl, birds outside a window, or screensavers with moving critters. She also needs plenty of respectful attention from and interaction with you.

### Indoor vs. Outdoor

We recommend keeping your cat indoors. This may sound like an unnatural life for a cat—and in a sense, it is. But like it or not, we humans have created a world that isn't safe for cats to roam in, whether in cities, suburbs, or the countryside.

Compare the hazards of these two lifestyles:

#### Outdoor Hazards

Getting hit by a car  
Fights with other cats and wild animals  
Diseases (feline leukemia, FIV)  
Parasites (fleas, worms, ticks, mites)  
Chemicals (anti-freeze, rat poison)  
Getting trapped in garages, basements  
Inclement weather, hunger, and thirst  
Being stolen or mistreated by strangers

#### Indoor Hazards

Boredom  
Weight gain due to inactivity  
Household poisoning or accident

Given that you can easily alleviate—or completely eliminate—the indoor hazards by playing with your cat, enriching her environment in various ways, and cat-proofing your home, it's easy to see how the indoor-only lifestyle is superior.

However, if you decide your cat should have outdoor experiences, here are ways to do so safely:

- Wait until your cat is completely settled into your home, generally a few weeks to a few months, before letting her go outside.
- Install the CAT FENCE-IN™ backyard netting system.
- Build an enclosure (many cat magazines have plans and ideas)
- Train your cat to wear a harness and walk her on a leash

For more information, see *Indoor vs. Outdoor* in the Behavior & Training section of our website.

### Preventing Escapes

For some cats, transitioning to an indoor-only lifestyle may be an adjustment, especially if the cat has lived outdoors in the past or is naturally adventurous. Here are some tips to keep your cat safe:

- Avoid getting into the habit of saying hello or goodbye to your cat right next to the doorway.
- Instead, designate another spot away from the door for all greetings and departures. This should be a spot your cat likes, such as her cat tree or condo.
- When entering the home, walk directly to the designated spot before greeting your cat.
- Say goodbye here rather than at the door as well. Distract your cat by leaving her with a treat or a toy.

## **How to Play with Your Cat**

Fun toys that encourage your cat to entertain herself are great. But truly stimulating and satisfying play involves a playmate—you. We recommend two interactive play sessions per day of about 10–15 minutes. Great times are in the morning before you leave or start work, and in the afternoon/evening shortly after arriving home or finishing work.

### **1. Set the Stage**

Create a jungle gym or obstacle course in your living room with cardboard boxes, chairs, and paper bags (never plastic) with the handles cut off as proxy bushes and trees. Create tunnels by rolling up area rugs. Add interest with egg cartons, shoeboxes, and paper tubes scattered along the way.

### **2. Provide Realistic Prey**

Over time, get an assortment of “prey” so you can vary the game. Great options are toys that resemble the look and movements of birds, rodents, insects, and snakes. For interactive play, nothing beats the fishing-pole variety of those toys. When you play with your cat, try to mimic the relevant prey animal’s behavior. Birds, for example, flap their wings, land occasionally, take a step or two, and then take off again. And give your cat time to plan her attack so her mind is engaged, not just her reflex to swat at anything that dangles.

### **3. Make It Fun**

Allow your cat to make many satisfying captures during a play session. Keep this in mind if you use interactive toy alternatives like laser light pointers or soap bubbles. Fun as they can be, don’t rely solely on these; it’s too frustrating for your cat to never actually get to catch her prey.

### **4. End the Game Gradually**

Always wind down play session gradually, instead of abruptly. Do this by making the injured prey slowly “die.” This sets off end-of-hunt responses in your cat, lowering her excitement and energy level.

Put all interactive toys away between play sessions; they should be reserved for playtime with you. Instead leave out furry mice and other toys that are safe for solo play.

## **Environmental Enrichment**

Enriching your cat’s environment is key to having a healthy, happy cat. Just as zoos provide toys, puzzles, and food challenges to alleviate boredom and stress in wild cats, you can use environmental enrichment to reduce urine marking, play aggression, cat-cat aggression, and fearful behavior in your cat.

- Cats are hunters, so never free-feed. Have your cat forage for her food by using treat balls and other food-dispensing toys, and by hiding dollops of food in different locations throughout the house.
- Get a cat fountain or use an old bowl for games that involve floating ping-pong balls or hollow plastic fish.
- Have a variety of toys for solo play and rotate them so your cat doesn’t get bored with her squeaky mouse or crinkle ball.
- Fish tanks with secure covers, cat videos of birds and small animals, and computer screensavers can entertain your cat for hours.

- Use catnip in toys or simply as a stimulant once every two to three weeks to see your cat enjoy some silly antics. Stop if your cat becomes aggressive while under the influence of catnip.
- Put a ping-pong ball in the bathtub; the slight slope toward the drain will help the ball stay in motion, and it won't be lost under the sofa.

## **Training Your Cat**

It's time to dispel the myth that cats can't be trained. Not only can you train your cat to come when called, do a high five, and go through an agility course, but you also can change unwanted behaviors, reinforce behaviors you like, and help her become less fearful and more confident.

### **Positive Reinforcement**

Training your cat through positive reinforcement means using your cat's natural motivations to teach her which behaviors you like and which you don't. The trick is to find the right motivations. Where dogs have been bred to work with us and respond well to praise and attention, cats are solo hunters and much less social.

Determine your cat's favorite things, such as play, toys, and treats, and use those to motivate her.

### **A Word on Punishment**

Never use physical punishment. A cat's response to yelling or physical punishment is stress—and stress is the leading cause of behavior problems such as aggression and house soiling. It also erodes the trust between you and your cat and prevents learning.

### **A Word on Declawing**

Declawing involves surgical amputation of the first joint on a cat's paw and is most often done to prevent the cat from scratching furniture or people. The procedure comes with health risks and unfortunate behavioral consequences. We strongly advise against declawing, and instead recommend training cats to use scratching posts and trimming their claws regularly.

### **Unwanted Behaviors**

Using positive reinforcement methods doesn't mean you never say "no" to your cat. You just say it in a way she understands instead of using human language.

Either:

**Avoid the situation.** Restrict your cat's access to a place, person, or object.

**Redirect** her to an acceptable outlet for her behavior, for example pouncing on a toy instead of your shoe, or scratching her post instead of the couch.

For more about cat training and behavior visit Karen Pryor's website, [clickertraining.com](http://clickertraining.com).

## WHEN PROBLEMS ARISE

Keep in mind that most of what we label “problem behavior” is normal feline behavior, and none of it is meant to spite or frustrate us. Your cat is simply being a cat.

Cats do what they do because they want food, play, attention, social time with us, etc. Pleasing—or annoying—us isn’t part of the picture. Fortunately, you can use what your cat wants to train her to behave in ways you like. With patience and consistency, most problem behavior can be changed for good.

### Troubleshooting Problem Behavior

#### LITTER BOX ISSUES

Can be due to:

- Undiagnosed illness
- Stress or anxiety
- Territoriality
- Soiled litter box
- Aversion to litter type
- Aversion to litter box location

#### **My cat goes to the bathroom in the laundry basket, on my bed, or on the carpet.**

If your cat squats to relieve herself anywhere other than the litter box, your first stop is always the vet’s office to rule out a urinary infection or other medical reason. After that, systematically go through the guidelines on page 9 to eliminate stress triggers and find the right litter, litter box style, and litter box location for your cat.

#### **My cat sprays urine on my front door/walls.**

If your cat squirts urine on vertical surfaces, that’s classic marking behavior most often set off by stress or territoriality. The triggers can seem innocent to us: new furniture in the living room, a strange cat strolling through the yard, or social tension between feline housemates.

Clean marked locations thoroughly with enzymatic cleaners, and discourage stray cats from coming near your house. Try to identify stressors in your cat’s life, then work to change or remove them, for example by blocking your cat’s view of strange cats, confining your cats to separate parts of the house, etc.

If your cat’s issues persist, consult a qualified veterinary behavior specialist. For more information, see *Litter Box Problems* and *Deterring Cats from Your Yard* on our website.

#### PLAY AND BITE/SCRATCH

Can be due to:

- Playful energy
- Attention-seeking
- Overstimulation

#### **When I walk through the house, my cat pounces on my ankles.**

Painful as this can be for you, it is normal play behavior in cats. Redirect your cat’s playfulness to an appropriate toy and consider having more interactive play sessions to give her other outlets for her energy. You can also put a bell on your cat’s collar so you can hear her coming and redirect her before the assault.

**When my cat is curled in my lap, and I'm gently petting her, she suddenly bites/scratches.**

This is called petting-induced aggression or overstimulation. Your cat is trying to tell you about her tolerance level for petting, and the best cure is to watch and listen carefully. Look for subtle body language that signals overstimulation, like tail swishing, twitching ears, cranky meowing, staring, body stiffness, or hissing. If you see any of these signs, stop petting your cat. Over time, you'll be able to recognize her signals, and she won't be forced to escalate them.

Also be careful not to pet your cat's belly or misinterpret the "elevator butt" (pushing the lower back upward) as an invitation to pet this area. Studies show most cats prefer petting on their heads and cheeks.

For more detailed information, see *Overstimulation* and *Play Aggression* in the Behavior & Training section of our website.

**SCRATCHING OBJECTS**

Can be due to:	Nails that need trimming	Territoriality
	Stress relief and mood boosting	Stretching after a snooze

**My cat scratches my new leather couch/the antique rug/my wicker chair.**

This is another normal feline behavior that can cause friction at home. The important thing to remember is that your cat has no concept of the value of things and isn't deliberately destroying your possessions. She's merely doing what comes naturally to her and feels good.

First, keep your cat's claws neatly clipped. Just like fingernails, claws grow continuously and must be trimmed every few weeks to every few months, depending on the cat. To learn how to clip your cat's claws read *Cat Claw Clipping* on our website and/or attend one of our Claw Clipping Clinics, held on the first and third Sunday of every month from 10–11 a.m.

Second, make sure your cat has several sturdy scratching posts of varying textures. Place them strategically around the house, near items you don't want her to scratch. Temporarily cover any furniture she's already begun to scratch with an unattractive surface like Sticky Paws. If necessary, use treats or play to entice your cat over to the post (never carry her there or physically force her), and praise her lavishly when she uses it.

If you suspect territoriality is the cause, a spray such as Feliway®, which contains a synthetic copy of the facial pheromone cats use to rub on their territory to feel safe and secure, can help. To learn more, visit [www.feliway.com](http://www.feliway.com).

**FEARFULNESS**

Can be due to:	Lack of socialization
	Traumatizing events
	Genetic predisposition

**My cat hides when we have guests.**

Many fearful cats do bond strongly with their caretakers over time, but many remain shy with strangers for life. If you have adopted a naturally fearful cat, she may never develop into the life of the party. To give a fearful cat the best possible life, follow these guidelines:

Provide plenty of cozy hiding places for her to hang out in when visitors come over. An option that works for many cats is a tall cat tree. Your cat might hang out in the same room as you and

your guests if you give her a high spot to perch on while she watches the action. If you hold a big dinner party or have noisy work done to your house, confine your cat to her safe haven. Never pull her from her hiding place or force her to be held.

For more information, see *Adopting a Fearful Cat* in the Behavior & Training section of our website.

## COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

**Myth: My cat scratches the couch or pees on the carpet out of spite. I know because she looks guilty.**

**Reality:** When you return home to find scratch marks on the couch or a puddle on the living-room carpet, it's easy to think your cat did those things because she's angry with you. But guilt is a wholly human concept. The "guilty" body language when your cat slinks away doesn't mean she feels bad about what she did—those were natural behaviors to her—it means she's reading subtle cues in your body language that tell her something is wrong.

Don't take her scratching or urinating personally. Instead, try to figure out the real reason. Stress? Territoriality? An aversion to her litter box? It could be many things.

**Myth: Rubbing my cat's nose in her urine or feces will stop her from soiling the house.**

**Reality:** Absolutely not true. The only thing your cat will learn from this experience is to expect irrational and unpleasant behavior from her human caretakers. In fact, just like newspaper swatting and scolding, it will likely teach your cat not to go to the bathroom in front of you, which makes it harder to persuade her to use only her litter box.

**Myth: My old cat needs a friend.**

**Reality:** While some cats are extremely social, many cats may prefer to be the only feline family member. Even if your cat has lived with a sibling or housemate for years, she may not want a new cat after losing a companion. Adding more cats to the household can be very stressful, particularly for older cats. If you do add a second or third cat, keep in mind that the best matches are made between cats of similar age, temperament, and energy level.

**Myth: Cats can't be trained.**

**Reality:** They most certainly can be. Cats are different from dogs and don't respond to many common dog training techniques. But just like chickens, dolphins, giraffes, and hippos, cats can indeed be trained. Integrating training games in your cat's everyday routine is a great way to enhance her well-being and quality of life.

**Myth: Female cats don't spray/mark around the house.**

**Reality:** Yes, the primary offenders when it comes to marking behavior are intact males. But both neutered males and spayed females sometimes spray urine on vertical surfaces like doors, walls, and furniture. Most often, this behavior springs from stress or territoriality—or a combination of both.



## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

We hope the information in this handbook will be helpful during your cat's transition into her new home.

If you have further questions, we offer basic advice via our **Cat Behavior Email Hotline**. If you adopted a cat from us and need help with cat-to-cat aggression, litter box usage, rough play, or socialization, email **[catbehavior@sfspca.org](mailto:catbehavior@sfspca.org)**. Our website at **[sfspca.org/behavior-training](http://sfspca.org/behavior-training)** has helpful information to answer many behavior questions.