

MESSAGE FROM THE BEHAVIOR DEPARTMENT AT

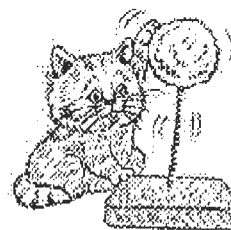


Is your kitten keeping you up at night? Ways to keep that frisky kitten busy

Playful, busy kittens can be both a joy to watch and a nuisance. Clients may ask how to stop these behaviors, but really the question should be how to embrace and redirect this natural desire to play, hunt, and attack. In the history of man and the cat, cats were likely drawn to human settlements because of the rodent populations. In turn, the residents appreciated the feline skill of rodent control. Wild felines would spend 16 or more hours a day hunting for food. Once they caught their next meal they would often play with it for extended periods of time. Now, most of our cats need only a short stroll to the food bowl for their next feast.

Kitten personalities vary, ranging from a limited to an excessive natural prey drive. The adept hunter may target anything that moves. Kittens who are weaned early, hand raised, or feral may demonstrate a more intense prey drive and may be more proficient hunters than your average cat. The goal is to embrace these bothersome behaviors and redirect them to more appropriate activities. This approach builds the bond between owner and cat by encouraging them to understand, appreciate and enjoy their cat's antics.

The following handout is intended for you to give to your clients whose kittens are demonstrating excessive play. These methods are not appropriate for feline aggression or severe kitten aggression cases.



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Providing solutions to pet behavior problems

Tricks and tips for living with silly, playful kittens

Playful prey driven activities are natural and innate for most kittens — some individuals require more activities than others. Appreciate that these are normal behaviors and look for ways to embrace and fulfill this need to hunt and stalk. The intensity of this play behavior often lessens with age, but some cats are proficient hunters well into adulthood. *These methods are not appropriate for feline aggression or severe kitten aggression cases.*



1. Provide paper bags. For more fun, provide paper bags with treats or toys hidden inside.
2. Scatter fresh or dried, odiferous cat nip on the floor.
3. Employ fishing pole toys—these provide a playful outlet and direct the kitten away from hands and feet. These toys should be put away and only used when a family member is involved.
4. Introduce an impossible game of chase with a laser toy.
5. Turn a battery operated mouse loose in your house.
6. Furnish with cat towers, shelves and elevated hiding places.
7. Hide food, treats, toys or cat nip to encourage use of any areas the kitten is allowed.
8. Teach your cat to play fetch or jump through a hoop.
9. Do not use physical punishment—do not poke, tap or flick in the face.
 - Cats do not learn well from punishment—they are more likely to develop fears than to decrease their undesirable activities.
10. Cats may be startled if it is precisely timed during an ambush attack— this must occur the instant the ambush occurs and should be aversive enough to just stop the behavior but not send the cat racing out of the room.
11. Avoid rough play with your hands or feet.
12. For the sneaky kitten capable of an aggressive ambush, fit the kitten with a well fit break away harness or collar and a noisy bell to announce the impending attack.
13. Remember, cat bites may cause serious infections in adults or children. If your cat's behavior seems severe or is resulting in bites that break the skin seek advice from your veterinarian immediately.
14. Determine if your cat enjoys fish tanks, computer screen savers and even videos designed feline audiences.
15. Provide food in toys that require manipulation. Nocturnal activities are normal for cats and they should have outlets for their activities.
16. Use startle techniques to abort a nighttime ambush as long as the cat isn't terrified by the event. Try keeping a spray can of compressed air near your bed — try to appear asleep while you do this so your cat will learn to avoid you while you slumber.
17. Please consult your veterinarian if your cats playfulness seems severe or extreme. Do not attempt these methods if you cat has been aggressive to people or other cats.



*This handout provided compliments of Dr. Theresa DePorter
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