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Chirrupsandchatter.com

Chirrup and Chatters offers education lectures, workshops, and behavior consulting to shelters.

PLAYING WITH YOUR CAT

Exercising your cats prey drive with interactive and solo play is a crucial part of your cat's development and contributes greatly to their quality of life. It provides exercise and mental and physical stimulation. It also allows your cat to express their natural behavior and provides predatory outlets, reduces boredom, helps with weight management, and bonds you and your cat closer to each other.

REMEMBER TO ALWAYS PROVIDE YOUR CATS WITH VARIETY AND CHOICE AND SEE WHAT THEY LIKE BEST.

TYPES OF PLAY

SOLO PLAY: This includes toys your cat can play with on their own. Also, providing your cat with toys they can play with on their own is recommended, everything from ping pong balls, motorized toys and catnip kicker toys, which are great for cats to attack, bunny kick, and snuggle with. Toy rotation is a simple idea that will keep your cat more interested in playing and prevent boredom. A few of my favorite motorized toys are PetFusion ambush interactive electric cattoy, SmartyKat electronic motion cat toy, and FroliCat pounce automatic catteaser

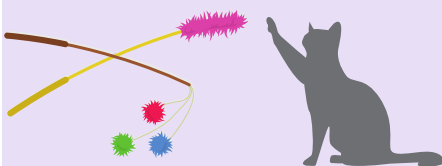
INTERACTIVE PLAY (social with humans): This is when you are playing with your cat. There are various ways to play a part in your cat's play including scheduled playtimes, impromptu play times, clicker training, and playing fetch with your cat. Some of my favorite wand toys are Da Bird, Go Cat Da Bird, Neko Flies toys, and the Cat Dancer toy. When it comes to play sessions with your cat, there are important do's and don'ts's which is listed below.

EXPLORE, SEARCH, FORAGE PLAY: This includes environmental enrichment which allows the cat to perch, hide, search, and forage. See enrichment handout for more!

IT IS IMPORTANT TO PROVIDE VARIOUS OPPORTUNITIES AND CHOICES FOR ALL TYPES OF PLAY.

ALWAYS

- **SIMULATE PREY:** When using an interactive toy such as a feather wand or a mouse on a string, move the toy like the prey it's supposed to represent. When birds aren't flying, for example, they hop around on the ground and then flutter off to land somewhere else. Mice and other rodents scurry with sudden starts and stops, keeping to corners and hidden places. If you're really serious about learning to play like prey, watch them at work in your yard or study videos of their behavior.
- **USE A WAND TOY** to play with your cat, avoid using your hands so your cats learn appropriate play.
- **IT IS REALLY IMPORTANT TO LET YOUR CAT "CATCH" THEIR PREY DURING THE PLAY SESSION.** Make sure the cat gets to catch and bite the toy frequently. Otherwise, they will get frustrated and either stop playing with you or act out in response to their unfulfilled urges.



NEVER

- **TOUCH/PET YOUR CAT** when you are playing with him
- **PLAY USING YOUR HANDS, feet, or any body part** as a toy
- **DANGLE ITEMS** of clothing as play objects
- **WRESTLE** with your cat
- **TEASE** a cat with a toy but never let them catch and bite it
- **LIFT THE CAT** off the ground as they are biting or grabbing a toy- by lifting the toy or the cat
- **SWING OR TOSS A TOY** directly at the cat's head or body



- **PLAY WITH YOUR CAT DAILY** using fishing poll/string type toys that simulate the unpredictable movement of prey.
- **GRADUALLY WIND DOWN EACH PLAY SESSION**, so the cat is not over-excited when you finish. For example, towards end of session, have the bird toy start to slow down and “die”. End each session with a small treat. Remember, for cats when hunting, it includes staring, stalking, pouncing, kill and eat. Giving them a small treat at the end of the session simulates them eating their kill.

- **HIT A CAT** with a toy
- **STOP PLAYING** while the cat is looking at the toy (even if they are not jumping or pouncing) as staring and stalking is a part of your cats natural hunting behavior
- **ABRUPTLY END A PLAY SESSION** without a wind-down period

REWARD POLITE REQUESTS FOR PLAY

We want to reinforce behaviors we like and when a cat asks kindly to play, what better way than to reinforce them with play!

HOW DOES A CAT ASK POLITELY TO PLAY? HERE'S A FEW EXAMPLES:

- If your cat brings you a toy
- If they sit in front of you and look at you with urgency
- If they go to a place where you keep toys or play typically
- When your cat becomes more active
- If the cat squirms adorably on their back or rolls over

HOW TO REACT TO A PLAYFULLY AGGRESSIVE ATTACK: DOS AND DON'TS

YOUR RESPONSE TO AN ATTACK FROM YOUR CAT CAN DETERMINE IF THE ATTACK ESCALATES OR ENDS, AND IF THE BEHAVIOR WILL IMPROVE OR WORSEN. *CONSISTENCY IS IMPORTANT.*

DO

- **GAME OVER.** Stop all play and calmly withdraw from the cat.
- **REDIRECT** your cat to appropriate toys. Use fetch toys or toys on a stick to keep the cat away from the human. If you have a common area your kitten ambushes and attacks, place a basket of toys there so it is easily accessible to you, then toss the toy in front of you prior to walking past common ambush areas.
- **PROVIDE INTERACTIVE PLAY** at least twice per day, preferably morning and evening hours. Good toys include cat-dancers, fishing pole toys, string-toys. Stick to a regular play routine so your cat has appropriate outlets for play and plenty of exercise. Also leave toys that they can play with alone. Try to vary them regularly to ease boredom.
- **LEARN TO RECOGNIZE EARLY SIGNS** of play aggression, such as dilated pupils, hiding around corners, and crouching. Redirect the cat immediately at the first sign of these behaviors.
- **OFFER YOUR CAT MORE MENTAL STIMULATION** with clicker training, harness walks, feeding with puzzle toys, and rotate toys.

DON'T

- **REACT WITH A QUICK JERK AWAY** from the cat because this is how prey responds to an attack and this can trigger continuing aggression.
- **USE PUNISHMENT** including yelling, spraying with water, grabbing, and hitting. Punishment should be avoided because it will escalate the cats behavior often resulting in aggression. **Punishment does not teach the cat the wanted behavior**, can cause fear and anxiety, can break the human animal bond and lastly, your cat deserves better!
- **HAVE A BIG REACTION** such as screaming and jumping because this may make the cat think you just attacked them back, which could increase the aggression.
- **PUT THE CAT IN A "TIME OUT,"** i.e. carry them into a room to confine them, especially if the cat is likely to bite you when you pick them up.
- **REACT IN ANGER** because this can cause fearfulness and stress in your cat, can escalate the attack, and most certainly will not improve the behavior.