



## **Support Manager Handbook**

### Overview

The Support Management program provides adopters and foster guardians an extra layer of support for under socialized Cat Town cats living in a home environment.

Support managers are volunteers who have significant experience with under socialized cats and are adept at offering both practical advice and emotional support to a cat guardian when they need it most. Individual cases are assigned based on the cat's expected behavior or its history while at Cat Town.

The program was created to provide new adopters with a friendly and knowledgeable resource they can turn to with questions about their cat's adjustment to home life. Since under socialized cats can take weeks or months to acclimate, the extra support may prevent adopters from becoming so frustrated that they return a cat unnecessarily. Support managers also answer questions from adopters and fosters that were previously addressed to the info account.

### The role

Support managers perform functions that are similar to, yet different from, many of the other volunteer roles at Cat Town. Like working in CZ1 or doing outreach, support managers have an opportunity to educate adopters about Cat Town's mission and about the special needs of under socialized cats. Like adoption counsellors, they work to ensure a successful relationship between guardians and cats. Like CZ2 workers, support managers help cats become less stressed and more confident.

The major difference between support management and the other roles, however, is that the work is done via email and phone calls, without actually seeing the cat.<sup>1</sup> That makes it especially important for support managers to have very strong listening and communication skills and a solid

---

<sup>1</sup> On rare occasions, a home visit may be required, but it would probably be done by a Cat Town staff member rather than the support manager.

understanding of cat behavior. They will need to apply what they've learned at Cat Town and as a cat guardian, and may also need to consult other resources as needed (see below).

Support managers must be sensitive to the guardian's language and general tone in all communications. For example:

**Is the person happy to hear from you?** It's a good sign when the adopter is thrilled to tell you how well their cat is adjusting to home life. That doesn't mean they will never run into any adjustment issues, but suggests that things are moving in a positive direction.

**Does he or she seem comfortable with the cat's progress?** If so, it is another good sign. If not, try to find out whether the person's expectation is off the mark, or if the cat is showing signs of stress. It's important to do this in a non-judgmental and supportive way.

**Does the person have any questions or concerns?** Your main job is to provide useful information when they have concerns. Follow up promptly by email or phone with the relevant info or to learn more about their situation so you can get them what they need. If you are ever unsure, let the adopter know you will do some research and get back to them. At that point contact Gina and Erin for additional assistance.

**Does the person seem annoyed or impatient that you are checking in?** Make it clear in your initial message (and all communications) that you are there to offer them assistance in case it's needed, not to check up on them. If an adopter seems defensive, be reassuring and empathetic. After all, an adoption counsellor and a staff member approved the adoption. We don't want anyone to feel that Cat Town is judging their pet guardian skills and finding them lacking.

**Does he or she describe a situation that is relatively common for under socialized cats, or something that is unusual and potentially worrisome?** Depending on what you hear, you may need to probe gently for more information. Be aware of your language and tone.

You need the person to trust you enough to:

- Tell you what's going on
- Give you a chance to explain what might be behind the cat's behavior, and
- Be receptive to your advice

Although most adoptions -- and cases -- have very positive outcomes, there are times when the support manager needs to correct a guardian's misreading of a cat's behavior. As you know, even innocent and well-intentioned actions can trigger a fearful or aggressive response from an under socialized cat, and many of the techniques that work best with under socialized cats are counterintuitive. By helping the guardians see the household dynamics from the cat's perspective, they can adjust their own actions to give the cat more space, or time, or a greater sense of security.

If you have any concerns whatsoever about a situation, reach out to the support manager program leads (Erin and Gina) to let them know. They will engage the Executive Director (Ann) and Dawn as needed.

## The work

Support managers provide two kinds of support:

- Proactive
- Reactive

### Proactive: Post-adoption check-in

Some Cat Town cats adapt quickly to living in a home environment, but others need weeks -- even months -- to relax, feel safe, and interact with their human family. Cats are assigned a support manager when they are expected to need extra time to adjust. This will be noted in the CZ1 Cat Population Google doc.

Within a week of an adoption, the support manager should check in with the adopter to ask how the cat is doing and if there are any questions. Ideally, the adopter paid attention during the adoption counseling process, has realistic expectations about his/her cat's behavior during the adjustment period, and the cat is settling in well. The majority of cases fall into this category.

However, some adopters are surprised by the reality of having an under socialized cat in their home. They think the cat doesn't like them, or worry that they have failed because their cat is still anxious, skittish and/or aloof weeks or months after arrival. Most of the time, the cat is just working through its issues at its own pace, and support managers can help the guardian understand what is "normal" and what is a potential cause for concern.

Having the check-in within the first week gives us the chance to quickly catch and address any concerns before they get worse. Adopters are relieved when they learn their cat's behavior is normal or at least not unexpected. If the first check-in reveals a problem, however, it's the support manager's job to provide advice and whatever help they need to move forward.

### Reactive: Respond when needed

A few support managers also assist foster guardians or adopters who ask for help with a new or ongoing behavioral issue. These requests usually come in through the foster or info email account, so Cat Town management or staff will reach out for a support manager's assistance when appropriate.

People often struggle with difficult behavior for quite a while before finally asking for help, so the assigned support manager should reach out to the guardian promptly (within a day). It's even more important to ask the right questions and listen carefully to the responses in these cases, because both the guardian and the cat are already stressed.

Your goal is to understand what's causing the cat's undesirable behavior and recommend how to fix the underlying problem. Be sympathetic and supportive to ensure that the guardian doesn't become defensive or feel judged. Focus on finding a practical solution and moving things forward.

These cases will always involve a series of contacts between the support manager and the guardian. They may also involve coordinating with Cat Town staff or management.

## Always

In both proactive and reactive situations, support managers should:

- Seek to establish rapport with the adopter or foster from the outset
- Ask general, open-ended questions to see how the person is feeling about the situation
- Use appropriate follow-up questions to get more information
- Help the adopter or foster understand when behavior is normal and when there is cause for concern
- Seek help if you are not comfortable with a situation or unsure what advice to offer

This last point is crucial: every under socialized cat and every situation is different, so it's very important to know when to turn to someone with more expertise. If an issue is beyond your scope, tell the adopter or foster that you need to confer with another volunteer or a staff member and let them know someone will get back to them within 24 hours. If it's an urgent medical issue, email or text the medical manager ASAP. If it's a behavioral issue, please reach out to your support person.

## The process

### Step 1: Select cats

Staff select which cats in the cafe will have a support manager. These are likely to be the most under socialized cats, forgotten kittens, or cats that have been returned. This information is now included in the cat's profile, so adoption counsellors should let the adopter know that a volunteer support manager will be contacting them to see how the cat is adjusting in the home. Ideally, the AC will ask the adopter how s/he would prefer to be contacted (email, call, text) and record that info on the adoption contract.

### Step 2: Assign a support manager

Erin or Gina will ask support managers if they can handle a new assignment. If you are asked, please respond within 24 hours.

If you agree to take the case, you'll get the guardian's contact info and preferred contact method (when known) sent to you. You'll also get background information, such as the cat's known issues (shyness, preferences, personality) and dates of arrival at OAS and Cat Town.

### Step 3: Initiate contact

You should reach out **within one week after an adoption or one day after a request for help** to introduce yourself and explain your role. (See below for sample language.) To avoid duplication, Jay will NOT be following up when a support manager is assigned. That means the support manager is the main Cat Town contact for any questions the adopter may have about the cat's behavior, litter box issues, food issues, etc.

Support managers should use a Cat Town email account for all email correspondence and copy [support@cattownoakland.org](mailto:support@cattownoakland.org). If you do not have an individual account, use the [support](#) account.<sup>2</sup> This allows others to see details of the discussion if needed and reassures the guardian that you are a representative of Cat Town. They may not respond if they see an email from someone they don't know.

If the guardian does not respond to your email within a few days, **try again**. If there's still no reply, send a text, make a phone call or try an alternative email if one is provided, because some adopters use a "junk" email address on the adoption form. Make at least three attempts to contact the guardian, trying two different communication methods, before giving up. If there's still no response, **let your support person know you were unable to connect**.

### Step 4: Follow up

After your first contact with the foster or adopter, give them whatever specific advice and resources they need within a day or two. **Follow up on any open issues to make sure they are resolved**.

Check back in another two weeks to see how things are going and supply any new info or resources that might be helpful. This step should be repeated as often as necessary. Some of the more challenging cases may require weeks or months of follow up until the issue is resolved. Try picking a specific day of the week to do your check-ins, and put a note on your calendar to remind yourself to follow up on your cases.

---

<sup>2</sup> It is a gmail account and the password will be shared with support managers when they get their first assignment. Each support manager has a folder to file her own correspondence. Erin and Gina are the main administrators of the support account, so support managers should not delete any emails not addressed to them.

## Step 5: Document the case

You should **make notes** indicating the **date(s)** on which you initiated and made contact, along with a **short description** of the cat's status, any issues and any advice you offered. Your notes will be a record of each cat's progress in her new home, which other volunteers or Cat Town staff may need to review at some point. Your notes will also contribute to our overall understanding of the kind of challenges people face with our cats and which advice proves to be most effective.

Support managers each have their own page in the Support Manager [tracking spreadsheet](#), set out in alphabetical order. Please put all notes relating to your assigned cats on your own page. Feel free to browse other pages to see what's happening with other cats and to get ideas for situations you may face.

Please also keep track of the **time** you spend reaching out to and counseling adopters. Cat Town may seek grant funding to support this program at some point, so your data will help make the business case for why someone should write a check. Please log your hours on the second page of the tracking spreadsheet.

## Step 6: Close the case

Whenever it is clear that everything is going well in the home -- whether it's after the first two post-adoption check-ins or many weeks of communicating back and forth with the guardian -- you can mark the case as closed. Make sure the guardian knows s/he can reach out for help about behavior issues anytime via the [support@cattownoakland.org](mailto:support@cattownoakland.org) account. Medical and other questions should still go to the [info@cattownoakland.org](mailto:info@cattownoakland.org) account. Your support management notes will be added to the cat's permanent Cat Town record.

If you ever have any questions or suggestions for improving this program, please share them with Erin and Gina. We are breaking new ground with this program, and welcome ideas and input from all of you!

## A final note

While all support managers are chosen for their experience and sound judgment, it's very likely that you run into a situation you've never encountered before. Ann and Dawn are fully supportive of the support manager program, and want you to know that you are not on your own. You should always ask for help if you are not sure what to do in a particular situation, and never give advice unless you are sure it is on point and consistent with Cat Town's philosophy. It is far better to tell an adopter or foster that an issue is outside of your realm of expertise and that you need to consult with others than to give an answer that might be flawed.

If you run into a situation where you aren't sure what to do, the right answer is to escalate! Send an email to Gina and Erin at the [support@cattownoakland.org](mailto:support@cattownoakland.org) account, and they will get staff or management support as needed. If there's a risk to people or the cat, Ann or Dawn may need to get involved directly, or call in Feline Minds for a consult (typically in the case of biting). Please do not offer this option to fosters or adopters unless approved directly by Ann and Dawn.

## Resources

The following tools and resources are here for you to review before beginning your first case assignment and to consult as needed in your counseling work. Every one of you has your own unique experience with under socialized cats, so please suggest additional topics and resources to make it more useful for all.

## Sample emails

### **Proactive - follow-up after adoption**

Hi, Marge:

Congratulations on adopting June and July! I am a volunteer support manager with Cat Town, here to offer extra support as your new family members adjust to their life with you. As you learned during the adoption process, they don't have much experience living with people in a normal household setting, and it may take some time for them to settle in. I wanted to check in and offer my support for any questions or issues that come up.

How are they doing? Are they hiding, or venturing out and about? Do you have any questions or anything else I can help you with? When you have a chance, please share an update.

Again, congratulations! Thank you again for providing these sweet cats with a loving home.

Best regards,  
Evie

PS Cat Town staff and volunteers always love to see photos of our cats in their new homes. Please send a few when you get a chance!

Or

Hi George and Martha,

Congratulations on adopting Vernon! My name is Betsy Ross and I am a volunteer adoption counselor at Cat Town and Vernon's support manager. Because he has less experience living with people than many cats his age, it may take him longer to adjust to life in his new home. I am here to provide any help and support you might need as Vernon transitions to his new home, and to answer any questions you might have.

I know it's only been a few days, but I wanted to check in and see how are things going so far. Is there anything I can help you with?

I'm happy to talk by phone if that's easier for you. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me with any questions or concerns.

I look forward to an update when you have a chance. Also, if you have any photos you care to share, our staff and volunteer community would love to see them.

Thanks for adopting from Cat Town!

Regards,

Dolly M

### **Reactive – responding to request for behavioral help from fosters or adopters**

Hi, John:

I am a volunteer support manager at Cat Town, available to offer extra support in situations like yours. Dawn told me a bit about Lance's aggressive play behavior, but I'd like to know more so I can suggest ways to help you redirect that energy.

When's a good time for us to talk by phone?

Regards,

Sally Lou

### Typical issues

The topics that you are most likely to encounter as a case manager are listed below.

<b>Fearfulness</b>	<b>Stress</b>	<b>Aggression</b>	<b>Other issues</b>
--------------------	---------------	-------------------	---------------------



Running away	Not using the litter box	Rough play	Challenges with another animal
Hiding	Crying	Biting	Excessive meowing
Hissing	Not eating	Scratching	Claws -- trimming, scratching
	Not grooming		Dietary issues

If the guardian is concerned about their cat’s behavior, you’ll need to know what is happening in order to diagnose potential causes, and to give appropriate advice. Keep the conversation friendly and solution-oriented -- the person shouldn’t feel like they are being interrogated. Actively listen. Ask follow up questions. Use the information you receive to try to solve the problem, but don’t give advice if you aren’t sure.

Use the following sample questions as a guide. Reach out to Erin and Gina at any time for support.

**Sample questions**

**Signs of fear or anxiety: running - hiding - hissing**

- Ask about the cat’s introduction to the home. Was it the slow introduction process we recommend?
- What does the cat do, exactly?
- When does it happen? What seems to trigger it?
- When did it start, if it’s a new behavior?
- Describe the cat’s physical appearance during an episode.
- How long does it take before the cat returns to its previous state?
- How often does it happen? Is it happening more or less over time?
- What have you tried so far to help remedy the situation? Has it worked?

**Signs of stress**

**Crying**

- When does the cat cry? How often, and for how long? How long has it been going on?
- Where is the cat when s/he is crying? Where is everyone else in the household?
- Describe the sounds as best you can. Have you ever heard a sound like this before from another cat?
- If so, when and under what conditions?
- What have you tried so far to help remedy the situation? Has it worked?

**Not using the litterbox**

When did it start?

Is it urine or feces or both? Is it a little or a lot?

Where is it happening?

When is it happening? Is it every time, or just some times?

What do you do when you find the feces or urine? *Make sure the guardian knows not to yell at or punish the cat.*

How does the cat respond when you find the feces or urine? Does it run away?

What are you using to clean the soiled area? *An enzymatic cleaner is a must. Bleach is NOT effective.*

Has anything changed in the household? People, other animals, caregiver's work or travel schedule, diet?

Are there other animals in the home?

What kind of litterbox are you using (covered boxes are often an issue for cats)? How many do you have, for how many cats? *Experts recommend one box per cat plus one extra for multi-cat households.*

What kind of litter are you using?

Where is the box located? If you have more than one, where are they all? *If it is a multi-story home, they should have one box per floor.*

What have you tried so far?

Does the cat go outside? If so, has it had any confrontations with other cats recently?

If not, does it see other cats from the window that seem to cause it stress?

Litterbox problems can be a medical symptom. Has the guardian ruled out that possibility?

### **Not eating**

Has the cat eaten at all since arriving in the home? If so, when and how much?

If not, how long has it been since the cat ate?

If this is a new behavior, when did it start?

What kind of food are you offering? How often, and what time of day?

Where is/are the food bowls? Do you leave food out?

Is the cat using the litterbox?

Are there other cats or dogs in the home?

Have you tried staying nearby while the cat eats? *Some cats are social eaters and won't eat alone.*

What have you tried so far to help remedy the situation? Has it worked?

### **Not grooming**

What makes you think the cat is not grooming?

What does the coat look like?

Are the cat's eyes clear, or clouded?

What is the cat's energy level?

Is the cat eating well? What kind of food?

A poor coat can be a sign of poor nutrition or a medical condition. Has the guardian ruled out this possibility?

Have you tried brushing the cat? What happened? What kind of brush were you using?

### **Signs of aggression: rough play - biting - scratching**

What is happening? When did it start?

When does it happen? What triggers it, if anything?

Does it only happen with certain household members?

Are you (or anyone) trying to pet the cat during a play session? Could the cat be mistaking a hand for a toy, or for prey?

What does the cat do right before the aggression? Think back: is there any warning, like a twitching tail, flattened ears? *Cats usually telegraph their intent to attack, if you know what to look for.*

How do you react? *Make sure no one is yelling at or trying to punish the cat. Freezing and withholding attention is the best response - see below.*

What have you tried so far? What seems to help, if anything?

How much playtime does the cat get every day? *Young cats need to play until they are exhausted, every day.*

### **Other issues**

#### **Challenges with another animal in the household**

How many cats live in the home or apartment? What about dogs?

What are their ages, gender, history in the home and personalities?

Describe how you introduced the new cat to the household, including timeline and each animal's responses over time.

What's happening now? Is the situation getting better or worse?

Are you keeping the new cat separated? Please describe the living arrangement, including the availability of accessible hiding spots, litter boxes and food bowls.

Have other animals that lived in this household that are no longer present?

What happened to each of them?

How did those animals get along with the current resident(s)?

#### **Excessive meowing**

Describe what is happening.

When did this start? What seems to trigger it, if anything?

What time of day or night?

Could the cat be hungry?

How do you react?

What have you tried so far?

Excessive meowing can be a symptom of kidney disease, hyperthyroidism and diabetes, as well as dementia. Has the guardian ruled out the possibility of medical issues?

## Approved advice

Every situation is different and you have been selected as a support manager because of your experience with under socialized cats and your good judgment. That said, support managers are representatives of Cat Town and it is important that you are giving advice that aligns with and reinforces Cat Town's philosophy.

The following advice has been vetted by Cat Town management. If it is different from or conflicts with advice you would give based on your experience, please tell us -- we are all learning every day, and will all benefit from a healthy discussion.

### **Addressing fear, anxiety and stress**

Although fearful behaviors can be distressing for a foster or adopter to see, they aren't necessarily a surprise or a cause for worry in the early days of a transition. (Obviously, cats going to foster straight from the shelter may display more fear and anxiety than a cat coming from the Cat Zone.) We check in early to try to prevent any feelings of frustration or disappointment.

Based on the guardian's description of the cat's behavior, you will probably be able to tell if it's part of a normal adjustment process or something more serious. Make sure to review the importance of slow introductions and make sure the guardian understands that the **cat needs to control the timeline**. Emphasize politely that no one in the household should push the cat beyond its comfort level -- and that doing so will only slow down progress.

Here's a good resource you can share with the guardian on fearful and/or stressed cats:  
[http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/cats/cat\\_problem\\_solver/stress.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/cats/cat_problem_solver/stress.html).

General tips for reducing fear:

**Quiet 1:1 time** is an important part of helping a cat feel safe and secure in its new home. The guardian should visit the cat in its safe space to read, talk, sing or just spend time doing slow blinks, as we do with the under socialized cats in CZ2. While everyone in the household is excited about getting to know the new cat, it is best not to crowd multiple people into a small room, because a fearful cat may feel outnumbered and overwhelmed. It's better for the cat to have only one or two visitors at a time, and for the visitors to focus on building the cat's trust.

**Exercise and play** are also excellent tools for reducing stress. Cats -- especially indoor-only cats, solo cats and young cats -- need a lot of playtime for both their physical and mental health. During its initial adjustment period, the cat may be too stressed to want to play. But as days go by, she may not be able to resist a cat dancer or string toy, or may start to play by herself when no one is around. Guardians should encourage play to help the cat overcome its fear, just like we do at Cat Town.

**NOTE:** If you are supporting a guardian whose cats is displaying fearful behaviors, review the excerpts from the CZ2 manual that follow this handbook. Share the information with the guardian as appropriate, especially the sections related to Dos and Don'ts and feline body language.

**A few more words about exercise:** Guardians, especially those of young cats, need to make time to play with their cats at least twice a day. To make sure the cats get the exercise they need, suggest to the guardian that s/he incorporate playtime into their daily routine. Because cats like to hunt, eat, groom and then sleep, in that order, guardians can establish rituals that involve play before a meal. The cat will usually bathe after eating and then take a nap. For especially active or nocturnal cats, initiate a 20-minute, vigorous play session about 45 minutes before bedtime. Include time for the cat to wind down, then give him or her some wet food or a heavy snack before heading to bed.

Stimulation is especially important if there's only one cat in a household. When there are two or more cats, they can wrestle and play with each other when you're not around, if they get along.

All play sessions should include a cool-down phase. Be sure to put toys away after playing – the strings can pose a choke hazard. Ping-pong balls and small furry things stuffed with catnip are good options for when you're not home. For cats that like to explore, try a long crinkly tube toy. Try swapping out toys often to keep things interesting. See if treat-dispensing toys help keep him occupied.

We normally don't recommend the use of laser pointers, but if your cat isn't interested in other toys, try it. However, be sure to follow up any laser pointer play with something the cat can physically catch, like a feather wand or mouse toy, to avoid leaving him or her frustrated. Offering treats after laser pointer play can also give the cat a sense of accomplishment.

Exercise gear to buy or make

DIY cat climbers (IKEA hack video): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CXRnNs70aYo>;  
<http://www.ikeahackers.net/2013/03/black-and-white-stolmen-cat-tree.html>

long play tunnel:

<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0107SRQI8?ref%5F=cm%5Fsw%5Ffr%5Fcp%5Fep%5Fdp%5FYGtKybSGQQ9TY&p1dnSite=1>

mouse teaser: [https://www.amazon.com/Cat-Catcher-Teaser-Wand-Mouse/dp/B00R6RU8UM/ref=sr\\_1\\_4?s=pets-supplies&ie=UTF8&qid=1487203366&sr=1-4&keywords=cat+wand+wire+mouse](https://www.amazon.com/Cat-Catcher-Teaser-Wand-Mouse/dp/B00R6RU8UM/ref=sr_1_4?s=pets-supplies&ie=UTF8&qid=1487203366&sr=1-4&keywords=cat+wand+wire+mouse)

cat dancer: [https://www.amazon.com/Cat-Dancer-101-Interactive-Toy/dp/B0006N9I68/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=pets-supplies&ie=UTF8&qid=1487203496&sr=1-1&keywords=cat+dancer](https://www.amazon.com/Cat-Dancer-101-Interactive-Toy/dp/B0006N9I68/ref=sr_1_1?s=pets-supplies&ie=UTF8&qid=1487203496&sr=1-1&keywords=cat+dancer)

## **Solving litter box problems**

Litter box issues are the #1 reasons cats end up at the shelter, because (a) the constant cleanup can wear out even the most dedicated cat-lover, and (b) it's a complex problem to diagnose and correct.

Make sure the guardian follows the golden rules of the litterbox:

1. Don't use a hood on the box! It concentrates the smell and many cats feel trapped.
2. Have enough boxes for everybody in the household: one for each cat and one extra.
3. The litter should be clay, UNSCENTED. Some cats prefer a smooth surface, so if the cat is always peeing and pooping on the floor, in the tub or on other smooth surface, texture might be the problem. Leave one box without clay in a place the cat has soiled, and see if it'll do it in the box instead.
4. Location, location, location! Make sure the box isn't too near food, isn't in a place with lots of traffic, or noisy, or near appliances (or sump pumps) that can suddenly make noises that startle the cat. It can't be in an area where a door might get closed or access otherwise barred. As noted elsewhere, it's best to have them in different spots. This is especially true if the home is large or if one cat might be bullying another when s/he is using the box.
5. Cleanliness is next to godliness. Scoop at least once a day (per cat) and swap out the litter weekly -- cleaning the box with unscented soap -- until things settle down, and biweekly thereafter. It's less hassle than cleaning up a mess elsewhere.
6. Clean the soiled areas thoroughly with an enzymatic cleaner like Nature's Miracle -- nothing else will do. If there's any scent left, the cat will be drawn back to the soiled area. Never use bleach, which has ammonia -- the cat will be attracted to the pee-like smell.
7. Try using Cat Attract, a clay-based litter that has a natural herbal attractant which encourages cats to use the litterbox.

If the guardian is doing all of this but there's still a problem, it may be a stress response or a way to get the person's attention. Peeing on the bed or in the closet after a guardian brings home a new love interest is usually interpreted as a sign the cat doesn't approve of the new person, but is more likely related to its concern -- real or imagined -- that the guardian may be less attentive to the cat's needs. Be sure to maintain important playtime and bonding rituals to reassure the cat that it is not being displaced in the person's affections, and encourage the new partner to forge a respectful relationship with the cat.

More details: <http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/cat-care/common-cat-behavior-issues/litter-box-problems>; <http://catinfo.org/the-litter-box-from-your-cats-point-of-view/>

## **Resolving tension between animals in a household**

Slow introductions are hugely important in helping an undersocialized cat adjust to a new environment. New adopters are often so excited about bringing the new cat into their household that they overlook signs that the cat isn't ready to leave its safe haven. The situation is even more complicated when there are other animals in the home.

If the adopter mentions anything at all that suggests tension between the new cat and other animals, ask detailed questions. Emphasize the benefits of taking introductions one step at a time, only when both (or all) animals indicate they are ready to move forward. Failure to do so can delay the new cat's adjustment and threaten their long-term relationship.

Review the protocol for introducing animals with them, explaining the importance of every step: keep the new cat in a contained, safe space; let the animals sniff each other's scents (by exchanging items that smell of each, and under the door); feed them on opposite sides of the door; allow visual contact through a barely-opened door; have several peaceful supervised visits before ever leaving them alone together. If the relationship is strained at any point, have the adopter go back to an earlier step in the process and start again.

Let the adopter know that it can take months for cats (or cats and dogs) to get used to one another. It may take even longer for them to become best pals, if they ever do. **Don't rush things.**

More at: <https://www.americanhumane.org/fact-sheet/introducing-cats-to-cats/>;  
[https://www.sfspca.org/sites/default/files/cat\\_bringing-your-new-cat-home.pdf](https://www.sfspca.org/sites/default/files/cat_bringing-your-new-cat-home.pdf)  
[https://www.sfspca.org/sites/default/files/cat\\_bringing-your-new-cat-home.pdf](https://www.sfspca.org/sites/default/files/cat_bringing-your-new-cat-home.pdf)

## **Correcting attention-seeking behaviors: excessive meowing, etc.**

Consistency is key to working with cats; you don't want to reinforce behavior problems by rewarding them. Many cats exhibit "attention-seeking behaviors". This can be meowing at you, trying to get a response, clinging to your legs when you try to leave the room, or nipping for attention when you are ignoring him or her. We often unintentionally encourage this behavior by talking back to the cat or petting the cat when it bats at us. Even negative attention may be perceived by some cats as better than no attention at all.

Attention-seeking behavior is best ignored. When the behavior is rewarded it will continue. If it is ignored, eventually the cat will give up as it learns that it cannot get attention by meowing/ nipping, etc. For nipping behavior, use appropriate correction.

Cats don't generally vocalize with one another, but they hear us speaking to them and to each other. If a cat is very vocal, don't talk back to the cat. It is okay to talk to the cat and praise him when he is being quiet. If a cat's meowing gets annoying or excessive, notice when s/he meows and your own response. If she wants to be fed and learns that meowing in the kitchen gets you to refill the food bowl, she'll keep meowing. You'll have to change your behavior to change hers, both by declining to do as requested, and rewarding quiet behavior with treats.

Watch the video on rewarding non-meowing – it's amazing:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSwUw9DiT6A>

More: <https://www.catchat.org/index.php/meowing>; <http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/cat-care/common-cat-behavior-issues/meowing-and-yowling>

## **Addressing aggression**

Aggressive behavior should be taken seriously. The immediate need is to stop the behavior before someone gets hurt. The real goal, however, is for the guardian and support manager to figure out what might be causing the cat's behavior so the underlying issue can be addressed.

Pay close attention so you can learn to recognize the cat's triggers and "tells". Triggers are sounds or activities that provoke a negative behavioral response, such as a sudden loud noise that startles the cat into a defensive posture. If you see the cat react in a way that seems out of proportion to what happened, the cat may connect it to a past experience that was traumatic or frightening. If it's possible to avoid or minimize the trigger, do so. If it's not, stop playing and talk to the cat in a low, soothing voice and use slow blinks until he calms down.

"Tells" are physical clues that signal the cat's intentions right before an attack, and often include narrowed eyes and flattened ears. If playing with a feather toy causes the cat to become overstimulated and swatty, switch to a different toy before the play gets rough. Don't stop playing, but try throwing a ball or tin foil ball -- something that the cat can chase and burn off some of its excess energy.

If a cat starts biting or scratching during play, freeze immediately for 10-15 seconds and withhold your attention. When it's safe to do so, calmly remove your hands and arms from harm's way (under your legs, behind your back) and then walk away. Some cats will view any attention, whether it is positive or negative, as better than being ignored.

It's especially disturbing when a cat bites during an otherwise gentle and loving cuddling session, or for no apparent reason at all. An affectionate but biting cat is one of the most difficult to address, so if you encounter this or any biting issue, let Erin and Gina know immediately. They will consult with Ann and Dawn on how to move forward.



Finally, don't pick up a cat while it is agitated, because it's likely to become even more upset and may break your skin with teeth or claws. Wash any bites and scratches thoroughly and use an antibiotic cream.

**Prevention:** as with stress, aggression can often be alleviated through play. Make sure the cat gets enough playtime, both in the morning and evening. Many/most young cats, unless they are injured or recovering from surgery or an injury, can play until they are panting.

Be sure to always keep hands away during play -- wands and other toys that provide distance between your hand and their claws are key to your health and safety. Include a wind-down period so your cat does not feel frustrated; ending a session too early can actually encourage aggression instead of preventing it.

**NOTE:** If you encounter a case where the cat is aggressive, whether during play or at other times, review the excerpts from the CZ2 manual related to fear, aggression and overstimulation at the end of this handbook. Stay on top of the situation to make sure the guardian gets the help needed to address the problem.

## **Other behavioral challenges**

### **Scratching furniture, walls, drapes...**

Cats have different preferences for scratching. Some like to stretch up and scratch its claws on something tall, while others like to stretch out long on a rug or carpet. Some cats like both types of scratching, but at different times. (Stretch out horizontally after waking up, stretch up vertically after eating, for example.) Cats also have preferences about the kind of material they like to use to sharpen their claws. Some like the disposable cardboard scratchers (or corrugated boxes you don't put away fast enough!), and others like carpet, sisal rope or even wood. Be sure that any carpet you use or buy on a commercial product doesn't have loops, because claws can get caught in them. Experiment with a few inexpensive options to find out what your cat likes before buying an expensive cat condo that she might not like. If at all possible, provide scratching spots in different parts of the home.

### **Keeping cats off counters**

1. Start by keeping the counters free of enticing things.
2. Make sure there are other, appropriate places to climb.
3. Provide an appealing alternative place to hang out in the kitchen so your cat can keep you company while you're in there.
4. If need be, use sticky tape or cover with aluminum foil to discourage visits.

See Jackson Galaxy on this: <http://www.thekitchn.com/jackson-galaxys-words-of-wisdom-for-keeping-cats-off-the-counter-207331>

## **Eating too quickly**

Sometimes cats bolt down their food and it comes right back up in an unappealing mess. If your cat does this, slow her down by serving her kibble on a large flat surface (like a small baking sheet) so she has to pick up the individual pieces one at a time.

Products that make the cat work for their food are also helpful. Some are designed for regular dry food and others are for treats.

Recommended: <http://www.petco.com/shop/en/petcostore/catit-senses-20-cat-digger-cat-toy>;  
[https://www.amazon.com/Catit-43741-Multi-Feeder/dp/B011K9929Y/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1454317143&sr=8-1&keywords=catit+multi+feeder](https://www.amazon.com/Catit-43741-Multi-Feeder/dp/B011K9929Y/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1454317143&sr=8-1&keywords=catit+multi+feeder); <https://www.amazon.com/PetSafe-SlimCat-Meal-Dispensing-Blue/dp/B0018CG400>

### Online Resources

<https://www.sfspca.org/behavior-training/cat-behavior-resources>

<http://www.catvets.com/public/PDFs/PracticeGuidelines/FelineBehaviorGLS.pdf>

## Under socialized cat behavior (from CZ2 Manual):

### As adopters visit their new cat in its safe room, they should:

1. **Start slowly! Come into the room quietly and talk in a calm, friendly but low-key voice.** Be patient, go slow, pay attention to signals/body language, and don't overstep the cat's boundaries. Cats need as many positive experiences with people as possible to help them build trust. Do not push the cat out of its comfort zone by upsetting him/her or causing him/her to react aggressively. Every change of environment is stressful for a cat, and Cat Town cats have had more transitions than most.
2. **Sit near the cat, offer your hand and see if the cat smells you.** If yes, then good. If not, continue to talk quietly to the cat until it relaxes and try again.
3. Offer a **treat and try to pet the cat.**
4. **If petting goes well, keep offering gentle pets.** Try chin rubs and gentle pets near the cat's head. Avoid the back area of the cat at first – some cats don't like pets near the back.
5. **After petting, try some playtime.** Do not intermingle playtime with petting. Some cats don't understand the difference and will try to swat at you if you try petting during playtime. Everybody wins by not confusing the cat in this way.
6. **Not every visit needs to involve touching or petting.** Just being in the room with the cat and talking, reading a book aloud, or softly singing can help the cat relax and get used to you. The goal is to build trust so the cat becomes less worried, and starts looking forward to your visits.

### DO's

- Approach slowly and in full view of the cat. Be predictable so you don't startle the cat.
- Talk to the cat in a calm, slow, and steady tone.
- Get down on the cat's level – this provides a better opportunity for the cat to approach you and makes you less threatening to them.
- Let the cat come to you. Extend one finger to the cat. If they respond and approach, then offer your hand for the cat to inspect before attempting to pet them. If they seem unwilling or you have doubts about touching them, see if you can coax them by offering a toy to play or a treat. If they are still not interesting in playing, petting, or eating, just talk, read aloud, or sing softly to them.

### DONT's

- Do not reprimand a cat in any way other than saying "No!" to get it to stop a behavior.

- Do not use any part of your body as a toy. This can confuse the cat and lead to biting behavior which may make them have a more difficult time getting adopted.
- Do not put yourself in between two cats that are disagreeing. Give a loud clap and say “NO!” to try and startle them away from one another.

## **FELINE BODY LANGUAGE AND WHAT IT MEANS**

Cats are not unpredictable. They will give you signs of what they are about to do if you know what to look for. Watch the cat’s body language for signs that s/he may need a break. If the cat shows signs of overstimulation, irritation, or fear, good solutions may include:

- Playing with a cat toy
- Stop petting
- Just talk
- Leave

Body language given to communicate irritation, overstimulation, or fear:

- Ears lowered
- Tail swishing rapidly from side to side, vibrating, or just the tip swishing
- Walking away
- Quick body movements
- Puffed tail and/or backside
- Hissing
- Quick head turn or watches your hand while you pet
- Long, drawn out meow
- Dilated pupils, wide open eyes
- Refusal to make eye contact
- Refusal to smell your hand when you hold it to the cat’s face
- Tight or tense body
- Ducks when you attempt to pet her/him
- Jerky movements
- Nips or bites
- Backs up or corners her/himself
- Growls or gives very loud hiss
- Raises paw to strike or swat at you
- Ears are flat

## **FEARFUL CATS AND FEAR AGGRESSION**

With fearful/under-socialized cats, you need to take a very slow, gentle approach. **Do not pick the cat up or pull it out of hiding.** A scared cat who is hiding should be petted in its hiding space. Picking up these cats not only makes them feel less secure, but could make them less trustful of

people as they may worry that they will be handled against their will every time a person comes in the room.

Enter the room quietly. Sit down, allowing some space between you and the cat, and give the cat a few minutes to get used to your presence. Then, you can slowly offer your hand to the cat (**if the cat is known to be fear-aggressive, see the section below on approach**). If the cat seems slightly responsive, gently touch the cat. Keep your hand low, or approach from behind the head as some cats are fearful of hands coming at their face. Move slowly at all times. Try some chin or ear rubs and gentle head petting from the back. If you are getting a positive response, you may try a full body stroke. If the cat starts over-stimulating or seems to have areas that are sensitive to petting, avoid those areas and focus on the places s/he seems to like having petted. If the cat is still frozen, try offering baby food (bbf) on a tongue depressor. If the cat responds to the bbf, you can incorporate small amounts of petting to this routine.

Although you want to physically interact with the cat as much as possible, you do not want to agitate the cat at any time. You may not get much response from a cat frozen from fear. In this case, try getting a response to being touched by the paintbrush or try to interest it in playtime with small toys. Even just watching the toy can be a good sign (unless the cat is cowering away from the toy, in which case, it is too soon to try playtime). It is okay to just sit in the room and talk to the cats, but whenever possible, **it is best to try to engage the cat directly for at least part of your visit**. We want them to associate human interaction as a positive thing.

These cats may need longer visits to help them get used to you and build trust (**20 minutes at a time, ideally longer**). They also benefit from seeing the same people, especially at the early stages of their acclimation, so they can build trust with their new family members. Later on, they will need to expand their socialization by receiving visits from many different people.

Cats that have been triggered into aggression may swat, hiss, bite, or scratch when approached.

### **THE FEAR-AGGRESSIVE CAT**

These cats are very fearful in a new environment. They may hiss or swat if approached too quickly, and may feel the need to defend themselves if they believe they are being threatened or cornered. Some cats become more confident in a week or so, others may take months.

- Begin with sitting at a distance that does not provoke defensive aggression.
- See how s/he responds to gentle conversation or soft humming/singing. You can try reading a book out loud to accustom the cat to the sound of your voice.
- Avoid prolonged eye contact, though you may allow eyes to meet briefly.
- Avoid sudden movements and loud noises.
- You may try tossing treats/kibble in her direction; note the response. If s/he is overtly scared, then do not continue. If no noticeable response, check back later to see if kibble has been eaten. If the cat eats in front of you, this is a good sign!

- Gradually move closer and closer (over the course of days), again remaining at a distance that feels safe for the cat. You may try using toys such as the cat-dancer, a string toy, etc. to attract the interest of the cat.
- Remember, even a fleeting interest in something other than the object of the cat's fear is therapeutic.
- Once you are able to sit very close to the cat, you may attempt to touch him/her.
- Use caution and proceed slowly. Do not push past comfortable limit. Building trust takes time and patience.
- There is a good possibility that the cat will always be timid, at least in new situations with new people. Do not expect a drastic personality change.

## **FELINE PLAY AGGRESSION**

- Learn to recognize early signs of play aggression – such as dilated pupils, hiding around corners, and crouching. Correct the cat at the first sign of these behaviors. Sometimes a loud clap works to startle the cat.
- Do not use any type of physical punishment (including nose tapping or bottom swatting). This only teaches the cat that you will play back roughly and the cat will respond with intensified violence.
- Any play with hands or other human body parts should be strictly avoided. This includes wrestling with the cat or moving your hand so the cat chases it. Whenever you play with the cat you must use toys. If you do not use toys, the cat will not learn to distinguish your body parts from items of play.
- Play-aggressive cats need consistent handling. If the cat directs its playful behavior towards body parts such as hands and feet, use a verbal correction as the aggressive action is taking place and stop the interaction or play session.
- Try verbal corrections such as “No” in a deep voice, or “Ouch” in a high-pitched voice. If the cat does not respond to verbal correction, you can try blowing lightly on the kitty's face, clapping, or as a last resort, gently scruffing and removing the cat from you. The latter method usually requires that you withdraw from the cat's company for a while, as they are liable to repeat the attack.
- No one should let the cat get away with biting hands or any body part. You should only use the most minimal amount of correction needed to obtain the desired response. The point is to interrupt the aggressive event so the cat learns from that experience, but to not be so traumatic that the cat begins to fear you. If done consistently, this action will decrease the probability of the cat exhibiting the inappropriate behavior in the future.
- The cat should be given appropriate outlets for play and plenty of exercise. Provide interactive play at least once per day, preferably 2-3 times. Good toys include cat-dancers, fishing pole toys or string toys. The play-session should include a “cool-down” period at the end where the toy is moving much slower so the cat is not left feeling more frustrated.
- Leave toys that the cat can play with when alone such as balls. Try to vary them to ease boredom.

## OVERSTIMULATION

Overstimulation in cats can manifest itself in a few different ways – there is petting aggression, which is when petting begins to feel irritating to the cat; and there is “busy” behavior – cats that do not settle down, pace the condo, rub frequently on objects and people, and may nip. When visiting these cats it is very important to review the BP and understand the signals that the cat gives when it is overstimulating. These signals may not be the same in every cat: some cats may swish their tails, others may give a cranky meow or head turn, and some may not give many signals at all.

The irritation that cats experience from too much petting can be likened to the feeling you might get when you are being tickled for an extensive period of time, or someone is rubbing your shoulders and it goes from feeling good to feeling irritating.

Start your visit slowly; let the cat approach you. You can hold out your hand to let the cat sniff and rub against your hand. If the cat is not showing any signs of agitation, you can pet the cat a few times. Always limit the amount of petting you give a cat that overstimulates and do not push them past their boundaries. A good approach is a few pets at a time, with breaks in between. As time goes on, you may be able to *gradually* increase the cat’s tolerance for petting. If the cat seems irritated, stop petting immediately. If the cat is on your lap, you can let it sit there, just do not pet him or her. If the cat seems agitated still, even when you are not petting him or her, slowly stand up so the cat falls gently off your lap.

With “busy” cats, pet cautiously and in small amounts. If they want to pace or move away from you, let them; that may be their way of giving themselves a break from the interactions which may be overwhelming them. These cats may also choose to rub against you or your hands to the point where they get worked up and bite, even if you are not petting them. If the cat is rubbing excessively or “twirling”, try to stop the interaction by distracting the cat with a toy or move your hands where the cat cannot access them (under your legs, fold your arms across your chest). When and if the cat has calmed down, you can try petting, but again, use caution.

Playtime with toys can be a good way to help these cats relax and relieve tension. When a cat is showing signs of irritation, try switching to toys.

If you are bitten or swatted, follow our instructions for correction (see **Appropriate Correction/Response to Aggression**).

## OVERSTIMULATION/PETTING AGGRESSION

This is a cat’s normal response to petting or handling which the cat finds uncomfortable or feels has gone on too long. A majority of cats exhibit over stimulation or petting aggression to some degree. However, cats vary enormously as to the extent to which they like petting or handling and for how long they tolerate these without finding it aversive. They also vary greatly in the number of warning

signals and intensity of their resulting aggressive reaction if warning signals are not seen or are ignored.

- The first thing to keep in mind is that it is very important to avoid getting the cat to the point where it is overstimulated or irritated. **Even if you feel okay with the aggressive behavior, it is still quite stressful to the cat.** It also reinforces the biting behavior habit and may increase aggressive incidents and/or intensity, possibly due to the kitty feeling less trustful of the person pushing them. So, for example, if you know the cat may get overstimulated after about 5 minutes of petting, then only pet the cat for 4 minutes. Or, if you know the cat doesn't like to be petted in a certain way or in a particular area, avoid doing so as much as possible. After a while you can increase petting time a little and see how well the cat tolerates it.
- Observe for signs of impending aggression. Cats almost always give warning signals before biting or scratching. Cats are very subtle in their body posturing by nature, so these signals are sometimes difficult to pick up on at first. Common signals include: tail swishing or flicking, ears flat, staring, quick head turn to watch your hand as you pet, pupil dilation, stillness or tenseness, low growl, and walking away and lying down. Note that re-directed aggression can also be a reason for biting so pay attention to environmental triggers such as loud noises, animals and people present, other cat smells, and changes in the environment.
- Interrupt the behavior at the first sign of any of these signals by withdrawing attention. You can do this by just keeping your hands still by your sides. If the cat is very upset, you may want to walk away from the cat, or if on your lap, stand up slowly and let the cat gently slide off.
- Wait before attempting to pet again. Some cats only take a few minutes to settle down, others can take hours, even a day or two if very upset. At least give a 10 second break. Make sure that all signals of irritation have stopped. If the cat is still worked up, switch to playtime with quiet interactive toys such as feather toys or string. This can help relieve anxiety for the cat, while still allowing you to interact.
- If the cat does nip or scratch during overstimulation, use verbal correction such as telling the cat "No" or "Ouch", or you can blow lightly in the cat's face. Correction should only be enough to stop the aggressive action. It should never scare or frighten the cat and cause it to run away. If this happens, say the correction more quietly, or blow in the cat's face more softly. A correction that is too harsh may cause the cat to become fearful of you. This can increase the frequency and intensity of the biting behavior.
- Keep in mind that correction won't have an immediate impact. Some cats take months or even longer to show changes in their behavior. Realistic expectations are that the biting incidents will occur less frequently, and eventually with less intensity. Initially this will be



due to watching for signals of irritation, but eventually this may change because of a building of trust and lack of reinforcement. However, most cats will still exhibit this behavior to some degree for their entire lives.

## **APPROPRIATE CORRECTION/RESPONSE TO AGGRESSION**

Cats learn by trial and error. This is an area where we try to ensure consistent messages to the cats – they will learn that much faster. You want to use the least amount of stimulus necessary to interrupt the bad behavior. As we don't know the cats in our care very well, this means starting with very minimal correction and working your way up slowly. The corrective stimulus should not be so much as to scare the cat – then you have defeated your purpose and contributed to the beginning of a new problem – fear of people.

**Any type of physical punishment is recognized by all leading cat behavior experts as detrimental and counterproductive and should be avoided.**

First, try to avoid any situation likely to trigger an aggressive reaction – for example, if a cat is known to overstimulate, limit petting so that the cat does not get agitated to the point that it wants to bite.

If you are bitten, your response can determine if the attack escalates or ends. Your response will also determine if the behavior will improve or worsen. Consistency is important. Understand that it may take a little while to “train yourself” to act appropriately in these instances. Use only humane correction: withdrawing attention, saying NO – loudly if necessary, clapping your hands, blowing air on the cat's face as they

### **Don't**

- React with quick jerk away from the cat (this is how prey responds to an attack – this can trigger continuing aggression).
- Have a big reaction such as screaming and jumping (this may make the cat think you intend to attack him back which could increase the aggression).
- Use excessive correction that makes the cat run and hide or attack – use only enough correction to interrupt the behavior.
- React in anger – this can cause fearfulness and stress in the cat, can escalate the attack, and most certainly will not improve the behavior!
- Make “cat” noises – hissing or meowing at the cat.

### **Do**

- Use correction that causes the cat to stop the aggressive behavior and make sure to calmly withdraw from the cat.
- Use appropriate correction techniques: Verbally (a high-pitched “OUCH”/”NO” sternly), blowing in the cat's face.

- Make sure that correction techniques are not causing the cat to fear you. Also, make sure that other cats in the room are not negatively affected by the correction techniques used on the play aggressive cat.

**Unacceptable correction** includes tapping on the nose, pushing, scruffing or pinning down the cats, tapping with objects (such as a newspaper). This is true for kittens and adult cats.