



Resolving Conflict Between Cats

Multiple cat households are common and keeping the peace is important for the emotional well-being of all cats in the home.

While many cats form strong bonds with their fellow housemates, social conflict is one of the most common reasons for health and behavior problems in multiple cat households; conflict causes stress that can lead to behavior changes.

Social conflict between cats can occur when a new cat is introduced into the home without a slow and positive introduction to the resident cat. It can also develop among cats that used to get along; a single traumatizing incident can cause a cat's behavior and attitude towards another cat in the household to change. For example, cats can become upset by a stray cat outside their home or startled by a sudden noise and that becomes associated with the other cat. In other cases, relationships can change as the cats mature.

Social tension between cats can be obvious or subtle.

The easily recognized signs include:

- Growling, hissing
- Turning sideways, arching their back to make themselves look larger
- Stalking or chasing the other cat(s)
- Physically fighting, swatting or biting
- Blocking another cat from the food dish or litter box
- Spraying urine or eliminating outside of the litter box
- Excessive grooming or scratching

Some subtler signs include:

- Moving away from a food dish whenever another cat enters the room
- Leaving their favorite resting spot when another cat gets close
- Spending more time hiding
- Sleeping more



It can be challenging to completely eliminate all conflict among cat housemates. However, it is possible to reduce unhealthy conflict to a manageable level thus increasing their happiness! You can help avoid and resolve cat conflict with these tips:

- **Space.** Provide enough real estate for each cat to enjoy his/her preferred resting, playing, and eating activities while still avoiding potential stressful encounters with other cats.
- **Separate their resources.** Reduce competition between the cats by providing multiple, identical food bowls, beds and litter boxes in different areas of your house.
- **Try pheromones.** You can purchase a product, [Feliway](#), that mimics the natural happy cat pheromone (which humans can't smell), that may help reduce tensions.



- **Don't force cats to interact.** Each time the cats experience an aggressive encounter, they are learning to fight next time. Patience is essential.
- **Provide environmental enrichment!** This can be done by creating additional territory such as cat trees, kitty condos, perches to look out the window or cardboard boxes they can hide in. Add sufficient toys and playtime to help expend their energy.
- **Never use punishment.** Never punish or startle cats that are in conflict. Yelling, squirting them with a spray bottle, or chasing them can increase the tension and negative association with the other cat.
- **Guide cats to move away from an aggressive or tense encounter.** Encourage either cat to move away by using a sweet, gentle tone of voice. Coax your cat using food, treats, or toys. Make noises that you know cause your cats to happily investigate (i.e., go to the kitchen and open a can of tuna).

- **Scent is absolutely critical.** Rub a couple drops of cooking vanilla on your hands, a washcloth or paper towel and then rub that onto all the cats, focusing on the base of their tails. This helps confuse everyone by making them all smell similar!



- **Reward desired behavior.** Give praise, toss treats to reward your cats when you see them interacting in an appropriate manner.
- **Health.** Be sure your cats are healthy and see their veterinarian regularly. Underlying pain or discomfort such as arthritis or dental disease can contribute to irritability and social tension.
- **Be realistic.** It's important to recognize that your cats may never be best friends. Some cats will achieve a state of indifference at best. However, with time, patience and environmental management, it is possible that they can live together without showing signs of conflict or conflict-related stress.