

## Inter-Cat Aggression

Tension between cats in a household can be stressful not only for the cats, but for their human caregivers as well. This tension can be a long-standing issue or can seem to appear “out-of-nowhere” between cats that used to get along. Sometimes this tension takes the form of posturing, avoiding, and staring but sometimes it results in actual aggressive encounters.

There are many things that can contribute to a tense relationship between cats, such as medical issues, environmental changes (e.g., recent vet visits, renovation, moving), boredom, competition over resources, or previous negative experiences. Identifying the cause of the aggression is the first step to eliminating the behaviour and achieving harmony in your home.



### Visit your veterinarian

As with most behaviour concerns, it is always wise to begin with a trip to your veterinarian. This is especially true with inter-cat aggression if one or both of your cats are not spayed or neutered. If your cat is intact, spaying or neutering can dramatically reduce a host of behavioural and medical conditions. Even if your cat is not intact, it is important to visit your veterinarian so they may run tests to rule out chronic underlying conditions that may be leading to the aggressive behaviour. A veterinary visit may also be necessary for the “victim” cat. Behaviour medications may be recommended for both cats, to reduce arousal and/or anxiety.

### Reducing the behaviour

If there are no underlying medical concerns and neither cat is intact, the next step is to reduce the behaviour by addressing the cause.

### Enrich your home

Enrichment helps to ensure a cat is provided with everything they need to exhibit their normal range of behaviours. In cases of inter-cat aggression, enrichment can be particularly important. Specific types of environmental enrichment that may help to reduce inter-cat aggression are:

- **Hiding opportunities.** Ensure “victim” cats have safe places to go. These spots should have two entrances so they can escape if pursued.
- **Climbing opportunities.** These can help “victim” cats get away, and provide active cats more opportunities to expend their energy.
- **Toys and feeding puzzles.** Again, both of these can keep active cats engaged, keeping them from pursuing “victim” cats out of boredom.

Also, consider trying Feliway™ Multicat – a synthetic feline facial pheromone. There is some evidence<sup>1-2</sup> that it can help reduce inter-cat aggression. See [Enriching Your Home](#) for more information!



## Multiple resources, multiple locations

In multi-cat homes, aggression can sometimes occur in competition for valuable resources (resting spots, litter boxes, food bowls, etc.). Adding multiples of each of these resources can help eliminate the need to “guard” these resources and prevent other cats from accessing them. Importantly, multiples of each resource must be kept in separate parts of the home. For example, if one cat is guarding a litter box and not letting another cat use it, putting a second litter box next to the first will not solve this problem. Instead, add a second litter box in another part of the home.



## Reintroduction: Back to basics

If the above measures do not eliminate the aggression, the cats should be separated and reintroduced slowly. This will help to repair the relationship between the two cats and can eliminate future instances of aggression. A gradual reintroduction paired with food is the best way to facilitate this. See [Introducing Your New Cat to Your Resident Cat](#) for more information.

## What to do when you see the signs

### Interrupt the behaviour safely

It is best to interrupt this behaviour before any actual aggression takes place. As your cat becomes more aroused, it will be harder to distract them. Watch for situations in which the aggression is common, or for the unsettled behaviours that often precede it. Try distracting the aggressor by throwing toys/treats. Trick training can be a great way to interrupt this behaviour as well. Consider target training or go-to-station training. See [Trick Training Your Cat](#) for more information.

### If an attack occurs

If your cat is showing aggression towards another cat in your home, it is important that you stay calm. Block this cat from their intended target with a thick blanket, and then usher them into a darkened, quiet room and give them time to calm down. This may only take a few minutes, but often takes much longer.

### Do not punish

It is very important that you do not punish this behaviour. This may reduce the likelihood of your cat exhibiting warning signs in advance of this behaviour and/or elevate the intensity of their reaction in the future.

