

## Redirected Aggression

Sometimes when a cat is upset and aroused by something they can't access, they will turn their aggression towards something else. This is most commonly another cat in the household, but this aggression can be aimed at a human or another pet as well. These attacks can be quite intense and often seem unprovoked. The offending cat can then become re-aroused at the sight of the victim, even without the presence of the original trigger. Redirected aggression is a common cause of inter-cat aggression, especially when the two cats previously got along.



### Visit your veterinarian

If you suspect your cat is exhibiting redirected aggression, a trip to the veterinarian might be warranted. This is especially true if the behaviour is new or presents with signs of pain. 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

There are several strategies you can use to reduce or eliminate redirected aggression.

#### Identify the trigger

Unfortunately, this is often easier said than done because the cause may not be obvious, or the original incident may have occurred while the owner was absent. It is possible that you might be able to figure it out from contextual clues. For example, if there is a broken bowl on the ground, perhaps this incident startled your cat and led to redirected aggression. A veterinary exam may reveal a painful condition that led to the problem. However, most commonly redirected aggression is caused by something your cat saw out the window, such as another cat or a raccoon.

#### Prevent exposure to the trigger

While it is not possible to prevent accidents such as dishes breaking, it is possible to influence other scenarios outlined above. Medications or other treatments can help with pain. If redirected aggression is caused by something seen out the window, you can discourage animals from your property (by using humane deterrents, removing bird feeders, and keeping your garbage secure) or prevent your cat from seeing out the windows (try decorative, translucent window film).



### **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 redirected aggression is common, or for the unsettled behaviours that often precede it. Try distracting them by throwing toys/treats. Trick training can be a great way to interrupt this behaviour as well. It is best to teach tricks that do not involve physical contact and that involve cats making a choice to move away from things likely to elevate arousal or common targets of aggression. 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 you or another pet 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.

### **Reducing fear created in other pets**

If the target of the redirected aggression is another pet, it might be necessary to keep them separated for an extended period of time, depending on the severity of the attack and the reaction of the “victim.” After you have done your best to prevent exposure to the trigger in the future, it is likely you will have to repair the damage to the relationship between them. 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. It is also a good idea to put a bell on the cat predisposed to redirected aggression, so that other pets will have a warning if they are approaching.

### **Pheromone therapy**

Feliway™ is a synthetic feline facial pheromone thought to have a calming effect on cats. There is some debate as to whether or not it works<sup>1</sup>, but some owners claim that it has had a profound impact on reducing their cat’s fear.

### **Do not punish**

It is 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.

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#### References:

<sup>1</sup>Frank, D., Beauchamp, G., & Palestrini, C. (2010). Systematic review of the use of pheromones for treatment of undesirable behavior in cats and dogs. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, 236(12), 1308-1316.

