



HUMANE SOCIETY OF BROWARD COUNTY Behavior Modification Handout

Feline Playbiting and Predatory Behaviors

Normal cat play is predatory in nature and important in a kitten's development. Cats are stimulated by sights and sounds. If structured appropriate play is not facilitated then the owner can become a big mouse in their own house and may be under constant assault. Being aware of your pet's physical and mental needs and having realistic expectations when dealing with this type of behavior will cause less frustration for you and your pet. Providing a stimulating and interactive environment for your cat or kitten will help you to build a happier and healthier relationship.

Starting Off on the Right Paw / Managing Your Environment

Set your ground rules early to ensure everyone in the family is interacting appropriately and playing the right games with your new pet. You should always have the right toys to play with your kitten and never use your hands or feet as toys. Redirect your pet to his toy to play whenever he bites at your hands or clothes. Have toys handy so you can toss them for your cat to chase and catch. Always praise your pet for accepting petting without playbiting. Time spent petting may need to be delivered in short intervals as the attention may be exciting for your pet and result in playbiting. Games and activities with your pet should be kept within acceptable arousal levels. If your cat or kitten becomes overly-excited during play, take a break and let him calm down. Roughhousing and wrestling with your pet may be great fun but if you are having a problem with playbiting or your pet is too rough during play these activities will only make the problem worse. Play should be kept low key and under control.

Correcting Mistakes

Most stalking and playbiting problems can be brought under control with redirection, sufficient exercise and providing an interactive environment. There are some cases where playbiting has been left unattended long enough to become a stubborn habit and adding a time out exercise may be necessary to curb the behavior. If biting occurs during play or petting stop playing and walk away and ignore your pet. This removes the attention your cat wants from you and acts as a negative punisher (removing the play – something good to reduce the undesired behavior – the biting). The time you spend ignoring your cat should be brief, only about 30 to 60 seconds and then resume the play. Your cat or kitten will probably resort to scratching and biting during play again and you should repeat the exercise. It may take a while for your pet to get the idea that if he bites, you won't play. Always remember it is also very important to use positive reinforcement thru verbal praise and food treats when your cat or kitten is allowing petting and play and not using his mouth or claws.