



HUMANE SOCIETY OF BROWARD COUNTY Behavior Modification Handout

Feline Vocalization

Twilight activity is normal for most cats as they are crepuscular by nature. This can be especially true if your cat is your only pet and you are gone at work all day. Your pet will most likely spend a lot of time sleeping and then when you get home be ready to start his day. Vocalization will often accompany your cat's early morning and nighttime escapades. A certain amount of vocalizing and playful behavior is expected however excessive and uncontrolled vocalizing and dusk / dawn activity can become a problem if left unattended. It is important to have realistic expectations about your cat's exercise needs and activity levels and providing appropriate outlets will help you to redirect and control any undesired behavior.

Why is My Cat Doing That?

Expressing these normal instincts allows your pet to experience his environment and to learn and entertain himself. Vocalization is also a common behavior and may be motivated by more than just instinct. Determining the reason or reasons for the vocalizing will be a critical first step in addressing this behavior problem. Some common reasons your cat may cry or meow:

- Attention seeking
- Food solicitation "feed me"
- Play behavior
- Compulsive behavior or cognitive dysfunction
- Sexually motivated behavior – if your pet is not neutered or spayed
- Medical problem
- Discomfort
- Fear / anxiety

Cats seldom meow in order to communicate with each other. The meowing seems to be exclusively reserved for you! Only in cases of excess or owner concern should this endearing communication tool be considered a behavior or possibly a medical problem.

Managing Your Environment

Set your ground rules early on and make sure everyone in the family is interacting with your cat appropriately. If you don't want to be disturbed in the middle of the night by attention-seeking vocalization then don't give in. If your cat meows and playfully swats to wake you up and you respond by getting up to feed him or play with him then you are helping your pet to start a bad habit of this behavior. If necessary, you may have to isolate your active feline in a part of the house that is away from your bedroom. Waking your feline friend up when you get home from work and not letting him snooze all evening will help him to use up some energy and be more likely to sleep well at night.

Providing adequate one-on-one time and exercise for your cat is critical in controlling unwanted dusk / dawn activity (see exercise handout and feline play biting handout for more information).

Correcting Mistakes and Avoiding the Pitfalls

Most inappropriate or nuisance behavior can be controlled by simply not reinforcing it. If you have been unknowingly reinforcing this behavior by giving your cat attention the behavior may take longer to extinguish. It is also extremely important to provide a stimulating environment during the day to help your cat burn off excess energy.

Any physical punishments like hitting or swatting will not only fail to eliminate the undesired behavior but may result in other behavior problems.

- Your cat or kitten may learn to be afraid of you.
- He may become defensive and develop aggressive behaviors.
- He could shy away from physical interactions; like not wanting to be petted.
- Fearful behaviors will influence future training and make learning difficult for your pet.