



A Quick Guide to Cat & Child Interactions

A cat's first few days in a new home are often stressful for it but exciting for any children in that home. Balance your child's enthusiasm for spending time with your cat with your cat's need to acclimate to their new home by allowing your cat to explore your home without your child present. Then ask your child to allow your cat to approach without paying attention to them or forcing attention on them. When your cat safely interacts with your child, reinforce with treats or toys.

Observe Your Cat's Body Language	<p>Teach your child how to read your cat's body language. Signs of anxiety include crouched or tense body, fast breathing, eyes wide open, ears partially flattened, whiskers back, legs bent or under body, tail close to the body, and plaintive meow.</p> <p>Encourage your child to mainly touch your cat around their face and back and to avoid touching the cat's tail and stomach.</p>
Teach Your Child to Respect Boundaries	<p>Instruct your child to wait for your cat to approach them before trying to pet them.</p> <p>Your child should never chase after your cat or force attention on them. Otherwise, your cat will begin to avoid your child.</p> <p>Provide a safe space for your cat and their resources. Explain the reasons to your child and make sure they understand to follow these rules.</p> <p>Watch for inappropriate behavior from your cat and/or child. Be aware of how they feel about each other. Take appropriate steps to help your family enjoy a positive and loving relationship with your feline friend.</p> <p>Allow your cat to hide. When your cat is in a high or low resting space, your child should never try to squeeze next to your cat or pull your cat out.</p> <p>Teach your child to allow your cat to come out on their own or to lure them out in a non-stressful way with treats or toys.</p>



WANT TO IMPROVE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR CAT?

Find answers to your cat's behavior from the comfort of your home through my services. I offer educational content, Q&A chats, webinars, classes, and consultations to solve your cat's behavioral needs. Contact me at allisonhelpscats.wordpress.com

Teach Appropriate Handling

Be a role model in how you handle your cat. Talk to your child about why you are handling your cat the way you are.

Encourage your child to spend time with your cat in ways that don't involve handling, such as playing with wand toys or training your cat.

Both will give your child the chance to play with your cat but will also allow your cat to keep their distance while having fun and burning off energy.

Keep your cat's claws trimmed to minimize the risk of scratches.

YOUNGER CHILDREN

- Minimize the stress to your cat of being handled by a child by teaching your child to sit on the floor or a couch and inviting your cat into their lap.
- Have your child lure your cat into interactions by using treats or toys.
- Reinforce your cat for calm behavior with petting, treats, or toys.
- Always allow your cat to leave when they want.

OLDER CHILDREN

Teach your child how to appropriately handle your cat.

- Place one hand under your cat's belly and slowly pick up your cat's front feet off the floor.
- Continue to pick your cat up as your other hand supports your cat's back legs.
- Hold your cat securely against your body as you support her feet and continue to pet her.
- If your cat wants to get down, lower your cat to an elevated structure or to the floor where your cat can walk off without needing to jump down.

Ensure Appropriate Play

When your child is playing with their siblings or peers, have them play in a room separate from your cat or outside. Normal children's play may frighten your cat.

Teach your child to use toys to play with your cat, and not to encourage your cat to nip at their hands or feet. Play with hands or feet teaches a cat that it's okay to use claws and teeth on hands, which could lead to your cat unintentionally hurting your child.

Never allow your child to roughhouse with your cat during playtime.

Involve Your Child in Chores

Invite your child to help with feeding, grooming, and cleaning the litter boxes. These positive interactions will make everyone feel good!

Remember that you are the adult and therefore are responsible for both your children and your pets. Always supervise any pet chores you assign to children.

Disclaimer: This checklist is intended to serve only as a starting point. A cat with inappropriate behavior should always see a vet for a health check. If your cat receives a clean bill of health, please consider contacting a cat behavior consultant. Many behavior modification techniques have detrimental effects if misapplied. A qualified professional will take a complete behavior history, develop an intervention plan customized for your cat, and guide you through its implementation.



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