



A Quick Guide to Cat & Toddler Interactions

Supervision between cats and toddlers is essential to keep them safe and to prevent problems. When they're interacting, a curious toddler might unintentionally hurt a cat, or an overstimulated cat might unintentionally harm a toddler. Even when they're not interacting, an energetic toddler can scare a cat and cause a defensive reaction such as scratching or biting. Problems are easier to prevent than to resolve, so always be ready to intervene.

Observe Your Cat's Body Language	<p>Learn 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>Be ready to intervene when you see signs that your cat is anxious or overstimulated. Interrupt them with a treats or toys.</p> <p>Be aware that a toddler's movements can seem like the actions of prey to some cats. As this might provoke pouncing, swatting, nipping, or other hunting behaviors, be ready to redirect your cat with a treats or toys.</p> <p>Note the times of day that it is easier or harder for your cat (or your toddler!) to be calm. Schedule interactions for other times of the day.</p> <p>Pay attention to other triggers that might set off your cat or your toddler. Manage the environment to prevent problems.</p>
Teach Appropriate Interactions	<p>Allow your cat to approach and leave on their own, without being held. Show your toddler the "one-finger petting" method. Hold out one finger and allow your cat to sniff it. If your cat rubs your finger, gently pat your cat's face and cheeks, nowhere else. If your cat ignores you or doesn't favorably respond, allow your cat to leave. Encourage your toddler to allow your cat to rub their finger without expecting to hold your cat.</p>



WANT TO IMPROVE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR CAT?

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<h3>Teach Appropriate Handling</h3>	<p>If you want to hold your cat for a toddler to pet, pay close attention to your cat's body language. If you see signs that your cat is becoming uncomfortable, let your cat go.</p> <p>Teach your toddler that touching a cat needs to be done gently and with a flat palm. Working together, place your hand under your child's hand while petting to protect your cat's fur from any pulls.</p> <p>Always be the one to place your cat in your toddler's lap. Do not allow them to pick up your cat.</p> <p>Never allow your child to pull your cat's tail.</p>
<h3>Give Your Cat Breaks</h3>	<p>Schedule frequent breaks for your cat from your toddler.</p> <p>When your cat starts to become overstimulated, redirect them to a separate room to allow them time to decompress.</p>
<h3>Establish Safe Zones</h3>	<p>Put food, water, and litter boxes where your cat can use them without being bothered. Leave multiple exit paths available so your cat never feels cornered.</p> <p>Give your cat a safe space to escape. Options include raised perches, cat trees, or other vertical spaces.</p> <p>Make your cat's safe space inaccessible to your toddler. Some options include raised surfaces, behind baby gates, or even a pet door.</p>
<h3>Condition Your Cat to Like Your Toddler</h3>	<p>Teach your cat that your toddler is nice to be around by feeding or playing with your cat in the same room as your toddler.</p> <p>Don't use treats or toys to lure your cat close to your toddler. Instead, allow your cat to choose how close they want to be and reward them just for seeing your toddler.</p> <p>Play peek-a-boo. Give your cat treats when your toddler enters the room. When your toddler leaves the room, stop the treats.</p> <p>Reinforce your cat's calm behavior with treats or toys.</p> <p>Regularly reward your cat with play, treats, or attention on that spot to encourage them to hang out there. Especially reward when they are relaxed. If your cat's need for play is met in other ways and they are rewarded for relaxing on their perch, they are less likely to start an inappropriate game with your toddler.</p>

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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