

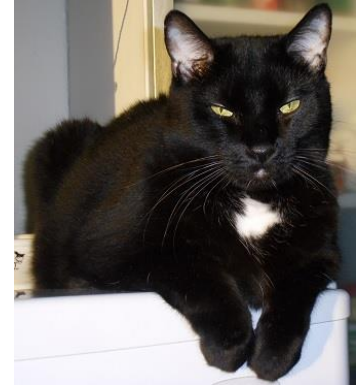


The Advocate for Animals
SINCE 1867

Cats – Five Grand Ideas

There are a few key concepts – grand ideas really – that, if understood, can ensure the happiness and well-being of your cat...

Cats are solitary hunters. They are happiest when their lives and their environments support their natural behaviors – vertical space for “spying” on their territory, concealed routes of movement for hiding and hunting, toys and games that facilitate hunt-like play, etc. They, in the wild, would hunt for small game six or more times a day, each hunt being a burst of energy. So arranging a cat’s day around multiple short bursts of activity and interactive play, followed by feeding after their successful “hunt”, will offer the most satisfying lifestyle. And giving them outlets for solo play (novel toys, window access to watch animals outside, even kitty TV) as well as interactive play with their human(s) can accomplish this.



Cats are territorial. Their sense of safety within their territory is essential to their feeling of well-being and also to their “good” (from the human perspective) behavior. Stressors can be caused by changes in their routine as well as changes in their environment (either internal or external to the household), reducing their sense of control and therefore safety. For instance, human visitors to the home can be viewed as a threat to safety if a cat does not feel that there are places to hide or to seek vertical distance and safety. Or outside cats viewed from a window perch can give a cat a sense of unease to their territorial safety and boundary.



Cats have fixed social hierarchies which, with an enriched environment that supports the needs of multiple cats, can promise peace in a multi-cat household. Because they are solitary in nature, having multiple cats in a deprived environment can be very stressful and unhealthy and cause turmoil and behavior issues. While cats should not be allowed to fight things out for themselves, we should allow them to negotiate their hierarchy for themselves, and enriching the environment with enough vertical space, litter boxes, feeding stations, hiding places, toys, scratching surfaces and cat trees with window access, is essential to this happening peacefully. This works in concert with their territorial nature in the sense that an abundance of resources expands the territory, while a scarcity of resources diminishes the territory being shared.

Cats are master communicators, expressing their internal state through body language and cues, so it's important to have at least a rudimentary understanding of what a cat is expressing physically in order to correctly interpret their internal state. Scent is also a means of communication and it is essential to understand this when trying to decipher a cat's motivation for "misbehavior". For instance, urine marking near access points to the home territory can indicate their sense of unease due to outdoor cats encroaching on their territory; urine marking within the territory can be an expression of covert aggression towards other feline (or canine) residents; marking or scratching a new piece of furniture can be a way of making sense of its arrival in their territory, and so forth.

A sense of confidence is very important to a cat. When inter-cat aggression occurs, for instance, the victim has lost a sense of confidence with herself in relation to the other cat as well as a feeling of confidence in her environment. Allowing her to reestablish confidence in the company of the other cat will be important, but so will giving her time to re-establish her level of comfort and confidence in the territory. In other situations, when a cat expresses territorial marking due to the presence of outside cats, or when she expresses aggression towards human visitors entering the home, she may be feeling a lack of confidence and safety in her own environment. Giving a cat an opportunity to explore her territory, build her confidence within it, and an enriched environment that supports her feeling of safety are essential to a happy, confident cat.