

# Training Your Cat—The Basics

By Diana Guerrero

Copyright© 1996 By Diana Guerrero



Here is a hotly debated topic. Many long-time cat owners will ask WHY? However, with the changes in cat ownership, household composition, desire for psychological stimulation, and other concerns many owners are interested in this topic.

Most cat owners will want to know about training, or rather un-training, certain behaviors. This is actually considered solving problem behaviors. Training in the traditional sense is where you require certain responses to certain commands. There are some behaviors that would be advantageous to have for the fabulous feline's comfort and safety, such as "come," and others that contribute to day to day safety and management. That is what this article will discuss.

The four most important roles of training for any type of animal is that it should:

- Contribute to their well-being or peace of mind
- Stimulate their thinking
- Occupy them constructively
- Create proper understanding or communication between the pets and their humans

Most behavior problems faced by pets and their humans comes from a lack of all/some of these four things. To prevent problems, how do you provide these? Ideally you will start from the time you bring the new pet home, but this is not always as easy as it seems.

How do you contribute to their well-being or peace of mind? Well socialized animals are more confident and content than those who are not. Exposure to people, other animals, travel and a variety of activities help to build a more stable animal. Taking the animal out to visit the Veterinarian or groomer for a treat rather than a shot is a good way to start. Setting consistent rules for them is another good idea. Don't forget to give your visitors or family some rules too. It is a good idea to allow the animal to instigate interactions first, if your pet is a bit fearful, treats or toys given by the guest can add to making visitors a good experience. You can also plan feeding time around visits or feeding the pet in close proximity to the guest.

Most animals get into trouble because they find ways to occupy their minds or get our attention in ways that seem inappropriate to us. Training games stimulates their thinking and can lead into occupying them constructively rather than destructively. Rushing around the house during "riot hour" (usually early in the morning, at dusk, or late at night) is not something many humans enjoy! Teaching the cat appropriate play or scratching behaviors can get rid of this challenge before it starts!

Training also creates proper understanding or communication between the pet and their humans. Many animals get attention when they misbehave. The pet learns, that to get attention, they have to be rambunctious! Giving a pet attention when they are quiet and calm creates more of that same calm behavior. Unfortunately, most owners only give their animals attention when they misbehave! The following behaviors are those I recommend to all cat owners. Due to the length of this article, specific methods of training will not be discussed. Cat owners may want to do some additional reading or consult with a behaviorist for specific steps. Here is my list:

COME  
LEASH & COLLAR TOLERANCE  
CRATE TRAINING  
GROOMING  
PROPER PLAY  
LITTERBOX ETIQUETTE  
PROPER SCRATCH ITEMS  
NO AND OTHER IMPORTANT WORDS  
COME

This is a very important behavior for any animal. Calling the name and using a consistent word such as “come” or “here” or a combination of those words is important. Some people like to use a bell, whistle, or clicker to train this. The easiest way is to use the word or tone with a treat or around feeding time. It is a critical behavior to have trained, especially if you pet ever escapes or is lost.

#### LEASH & COLLAR TOLERANCE

Many people do not like to use collars, leashes, or harnesses on their cats. This training is especially recommended for safety and for times of emergency. If you can safely control your cat when you go to the Veterinary office or other little trips then you will have more peace of mind. In emergencies, these behaviors are critical and can mean the difference between life and death or being with you instead of separated elsewhere.

#### CRATE

This is a very important behavior too. Transporting any animal in a vehicle is dangerous. Pets, like kids, should either have seatbelts on (their pet seatbelts); or the other option is to be confined in a crate. (No, I am not recommending you crate your kids!) If you are ever in an accident with your pet in the vehicle, they will have a better chance of survival in a crate and will not be able to bolt off in a panic if they are confined in this way.

When traveling, there are some great little collapsible houses being made which can be taken out and set up easily and safely in a garden or in hotel rooms. They expand nicely, have room for litterbox and food/water dishes and allow the cat to see and enjoy the fresh air while confined.

#### GROOMING

To help with hair-ball management, prevent scratching on furniture and other related challenges, you should perform some sort of grooming training on a daily basis. Brushing and combing your cat, Gently handling and pressing on the paw pads to look at the nails, examining the ears, and tail, will all contribute to the proper care of your fabulous feline. Later you will be able to clip the tips of those nails, gently swab the ears, and keep the excess fur under control without a struggle.

## PROPER PLAY

Animal interactions with you are important. Play can be started by you at appropriate times instead of allowing the cat to pick the middle of the night for their rambunctious romp! Balls, catnip toys, suction cup toys or fishing pole toys are some of the best to have on hand. Aluminum foil balls, the tops off of the milk jugs, and paper bags still remain the most favorite of toys! Don't forget about those thin boxes that contain a ball inside and are cut with a narrow slit in them...cats luv'um.

## LITTERBOX ETIQUETTE

Most cats learn this instinctively at a young age. You must keep your part of the bargain to maintain this behavior. That means you must clean the box daily (twice daily is better) or have more than one box (one per cat is ideal). Most people don't like to use a toilet that has not been flushed...cats don't like using dirty boxes either!

Other tips: keep the box in a safe place where the cat won't get ambushed, keep the litterbox cleaned by scrubbing it out once a week, don't use scented sprays (it overpowers the cat's sensitive nose), be consistent in the type of litter you use, keep the depth of the litter about two inches deep, and be aware that illness, medication, or trauma can contribute to temporary litterbox problems.

## PROPER SCRATCH ITMES

Providing proper scratch items is important! Many cat owners find they will have problems with shredded curtains, raked furniture legs, and tattered sofas because they neglected this. Proper scratch items will include: corrugated cardboard, rope-twined or parpet-covered cat postes; attaching catnip scented toys or burlap bags pieces with catnip can also help.

## NO AND OTHER IMPORTANT WORDS

Praising the cat for the right things and scolding them for the wrong things teaches them "right from wrong". The words "no", "leave it", and "be gentle" or "stop" are good words to teach an animal. Reprimands and reinforcement are skills you will need to properly learn how to administer to do this correctly... in another article!

Training your cat can be pleasurable and easily accomplished. Practice something everyday and be consisten. Look for more articles on this topic to help you learn how to have the purrrfect pet. Your feline will enjoy learning and being a well-behaved pal to you, and to your family and your visitors. With quality attention and guidance you can accomplish things that many pet owners only dream of...and have fun in the process!

