



How to Help Your Fearful Cat

It is normal to want to love the fear out of your cat or punish him when he hisses at you. However, forcing a cat out of hiding, picking them up and cuddling them or correcting them for hissing can make the behavior worse. Cats flee, freeze or fight if they are threatened or perceive a threat. Every cat is different and will respond to perceived threats or stress differently. Some will run away and hide, others will freeze, and some may display behaviors indicative of aggression. Cats can display fearful behavior for many reasons. They may be afraid of new spaces, loud noises, a particular person, a child, other animals... Fearful cats need time, positive reinforcement and patience from you.



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The following are ways to help your fearful cat:

- If the behavior has appeared suddenly, we recommend taking him to the vet to rule out any underlying medical conditions.

- Determine what your cat is frightened of and minimize your cat's contact with that stimulus.
- If your cat has been determined to be healthy, but hiding excessively. Do not force him out of hiding. Keep his food, water, litter box close by, and attend to them daily. Your cat will most likely come out on his own. You can offer high value treats or wet food to try to lure him out of hiding.
- Do not force interaction. Allow your cat to come up to you and begin the interaction by rubbing against you.
- Maintain a set routine for your cat. Cats do not like change and find comfort in predictability.
- Desensitize your cat to the fearful stimulus. First, determine the distance your cat can see the stimulus and not be fearful of it. Then introduce that stimulus at that distance while you are feeding him high value treats. Next, slowly move the fear-causing stimulus closer to the cat, continuing to offer high value treats. Do not go too quickly. If the cat becomes fearful of the stimulus, he is not learning.
- Cat bites and scratches can become infected easily. Use caution when working with your cat so you do not get injured. Seek medical attention if you are bitten or scratched.
- If your cat has displayed prolonged periods of aggression to people or other animals, contact a behavior professional for help.

If you have any questions or would like additional help please contact AWA's Behavior Department at behavior@awanj.org or call 856-424-2288 ex 114.

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