



The Do's and Don'ts of Cat Ownership

How can you not love cats? They are the most popular domestic pet. Cats are intelligent social animals who make great companions. However, there are some misconceptions about cats. In addition, cats are not dogs. They behave differently and are not as accepting of some common human actions. The following is a list of Do's and Don'ts to help you succeed with your new cat or kitten.

Do

Enrichment- give your cat plenty of environmental, auditory, visual, and tactile enrichment. This includes perches, cat trees, catwalks, toys, treat dispensing toys, white noise, soft music... The more enrichment the cat has the better!

Training-That is right, I said training. Cats are very intelligent animals and need training too. It keeps them mentally active and engaged. Teaching your cat tricks like sit, place, and high five is fun for you and your cat.

Safe space-give your cat a safe space or sanctuary room they can retreat to when they are tired of the hustle and bustle of daily life. All animals need time to themselves. A cat who is able to have more choices of where and when to hide will be a better companion.

Litter boxes- Give your cat plenty of litter boxes. The general rule is one litter box per cat plus one extra. Some cats may need additional litter boxes. Litter boxes should be placed in areas that have at least two escape routes. Cats feel vulnerable when going to the bathroom and may develop aversions to the box if it is not placed in a comfortable location. Most cats also prefer non-scented, fine-grained non-clumping litter. In addition, most cats like a clean litter box. The litter box should be scooped once a day at least and the litter should be changed once a week to prevent litter box aversion.



Don't

Scented products- Cats are sensitive to smells. They find strong smells, especially the smell of citrus, aversive. Smells can cause cats to have litter box issues, avoid people or spaces or even display behaviors indicative of aggression.

Aversive training methods- Cats unlike dogs are not very forgiving. They will hold on to negative events. This can make problem behaviors worse. Spray bottles, scat mats, physical punishment or aversive noises can turn a simple problem like scratching the furniture into aggression. Instead, prevent the unwanted behavior from occurring and redirect them to an appropriate alternative.

Invading space- You should try not to invade your cat's space. Cats do not enjoy being scooped up unexpectedly, forced out of hiding spaces, or jostled out of

resting places. Instead let your cat come to you. Cats enjoy affection when they solicit it not when it is force on them.

Hiding the cat tree-Cats need vertical spaces throughout their environment. Cats are social creatures so they do not want to be tucked in a corner away from the action. Keep your cat tree in an active area of the home where your cat can be engaged too.

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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