

Cats and Kids

What Parents Should Know

INTRODUCTION

Having an animal companion can be an extraordinary experience for children. It can be an opportunity to enhance a child's self-esteem, learn about responsibility, and to learn to respect life. But bonds between children and animals don't occur naturally. Parents should be willing to teach their children (and cats) what behavior is acceptable to ensure the relationship between children and cats remain a positive one. Below are some tips to promote a positive relationship between your kids and cats:

- Take the time to teach your children how to handle a cat properly. Keep in mind that cats are comfortable when held close to your body with their hind quarters and chest supported. Additionally, cats do not typically like being held on their backs (like a human baby).
- Teach your children not to chase or corner your cat. These two activities can scare the cat who may scratch and/or bite if they feel threatened.
- Remind your kids to leave cats alone when they are sleeping, eating or using the litter box.
- Help your children play gently with your cat. Encourage them to play with appropriate toys (never hands, fingers, or toes).
- Declawed cats are not as secure about their abilities to escape, making them more likely to bite. This can make young children and declawed cats a bad match.
- Teach your children the difference between teasing the cat and playing. Your children should never be allowed to tease your kitty.
- Teach your children the importance of indoor kitties (they live longer, healthier lives with fewer vet bills).
- Have your kids share in the responsibilities of caring for your cat.

STARTING OFF RIGHT

Below are some tips for helping your kid and cat get off on the right foot:

- Small kids should not be left alone with pets.
- Proper holding techniques are important for your kids to learn. A squirming, wiggling cat or kitten can easily fall out of a child's arms and become injured. Teach your children to sit down whenever they want to hold the cat.
- Kids love to hug cats, but this sometimes leads to holding or grasping the cat too firmly. This can be terrifying to a cat. Therefore, it's important to teach your children to pat and touch the cat gently.
- Teach your children that cats should be allowed to approach them on the cat's own terms. Cats can get frightened if they are forced into doing something they don't want to do.
- To a cat, quick and jerky hand movements can be an invitation to play. Be sure to teach your kids to play with your cat with cat-appropriate toys.
- Have lots of patience. It can take time for a cat to feel comfortable in any situation, but especially in situations that include loud sounds and unpredictable behavior.

- Remember that if a cat is hissing, growling, swatting or biting at your child for any reason, the situation needs IMMEDIATE attention. In situations like this, punishing your cat can make matters worse. Make sure to separate child and cat as safely, quickly and calmly as possible. Give both child and cat time to cool down and relax before allowing any further interaction.
- We're here for you! If you have any problems, feel free to give us a call!



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