



# ADOPTER GUIDE 2023



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## 1. Set Up For Success

### **Congratulations!**

Congratulations on bringing home a furry new family member! There is nothing quite like the joy of sharing your home with a beloved pet! We are grateful to you for adopting a rescued cat or kitten(s) from Nine Lives and giving them a new start in a loving home.

This guide should provide you with useful information to get you started. If you have questions or concerns please call Nine Lives at (650) 368-1365.

**Shopping List:** Here's a list of must-have supplies for a great start with your new cat:

### **Basics**

- ✓ Food – dry and canned\*
- ✓ Water and food bowls (metal or ceramic)
- ✓ Cat bed
- ✓ Scratching post
- ✓ Cat carrier – hard-sided, top-loading plastic carriers are recommended
- ✓ Litter box
- ✓ Litter – We recommend clumping litter with NO clay (especially important for kittens!)
  - Example: World's Best Cat Litter (green bag), which is a corn-based clumping litter
- ✓ Litter box
- ✓ Litter scooper
- ✓ Breakaway safety collar & ID tag with name and phone number (for indoor/outdoor cats)

### **Cat Care**

- ✓ Nail trimmer
- ✓ Grooming brush
- ✓ Flea control treatment

### **Training and Mental Stimulation**

- ✓ Food dispensing toys (KONG® Cat Wobbler, treat balls)
- ✓ Interactive toys (wands, laser toys, feather toys, mitt toys)
- ✓ Play-alone toys (squeaky toys, fluffy balls, crinkle/crackle balls)
- ✓ Soft treats, crunchy treats, freeze-dried meats

- ✓ Catnip, catnip spray, catnip toys
- ✓ Pheromone spray (e.g., Feliway) if your cat is anxious

\* At Nine Lives, your cat has been eating the following foods. If you change brands, we recommend you gradually mix in the new food over a few days so the cat doesn't get an upset stomach:

- Canned food:
  - Fancy Feast pate, Friskies pate
- Dry Food:
  - Kitten (up to 1 year old): Hill's Science Diet Kitten
  - Adult cats: Hill's Science Diet Adult 1-6

## Setting Up Your Home

### Safe Haven

As tempting as it is to give your cat the run of the house right away, moving into a new home is a stressful experience for cats. Having a safe, confined area instead – a safe haven – allows your cat to make a gradual transition to her new home. The safe haven is where your cat will stay until she is completely comfortable with her new home (which could take days or even weeks), as well as a place she can retreat to anytime she needs a little space and alone time.

The ideal safe haven is small, quiet, and easy to close off with a door. The best places for a safe haven are a bathroom, a small bedroom, or a large, well-ventilated closet.

Furnish the safe haven with a bed, water and food bowls, some play-alone toys, a scratching post near the bed, and a litter box as far away from the bed and food as possible.

### Household Hazards

Remember, cats are curious by nature. Keep your cat safe from these common household hazards:

**Plants.** Many plants (such as plants of the lily family, onions, and garlic) are toxic to cats. Put your plants in areas your cat can't access.

**Poison.** Human medications, veterinary medications, insecticides, rodenticides, household cleaners, chemicals, and paints can all cause severe injury or death to cats, as can chocolate. Secure all cupboards, closets, and cabinets – use child proof latches when possible.

**Chemical rub-off.** Use natural, nontoxic cleaners in your home. Cats are fastidious groomers and easily pick up chemical residue on their fur and paw pads from contact with harsh cleaning agents. Ammonia-based cleaners and phenol disinfectants are particularly dangerous.

**Strings.** Cats love string games and are quick to pounce when they see an opportunity. But swallowed strings can cause intestinal damage and may require expensive surgery to remove. Keep tinsel, thread, dental floss, rubber bands, cords from blinds, necklaces, dangly earrings, and anything similar out of your cat's reach as they can be fatal.

**Cords.** Bundle up and hide any electrical wires or cords. Cats find them tempting to chew on, and they may try to pull out plugs.

**Bags.** Cats love the way plastic bags sound and move; however, plastic bags are not safe for cats since they often try to chew on them or climb into them. Paper bags are a safer option, but make sure to cut off bag handles as cats can get caught in them.

**Unsafe hiding places.** Block access to dangerous places for cats, such as behind stoves, refrigerators, motors, washers, dryers, etc.

**Open windows/doors.** Make certain all your windows are cat-proof (screens should be tight!) and can't be pushed open.

## **2. Arriving Home with Your Cat**

Territory and a predictable routine are key elements of feline happiness. Cats thrive when they know a) which part of the world is theirs and b) what to expect from their human family. That's why it's best to resist the urge to lavish your cat with attention the moment you bring her home, and instead let her adjust to her new home (and territory) in her own time. A calm, unhurried transition at a feline-appropriate pace can prevent many stress-related behavior problems, such as digging, biting, scratching, excessive grooming, and litter box aversion.

Here's how to do it:

### **The First Hour**

When you arrive home, take the cat carrier into your cat's safe haven, which should have a litter box, food and water. If you haven't set up a safe haven yet, do so before opening the carrier. Open the carrier and let your cat decide whether she wants to come out to explore. Please note your cat may stay inside the carrier for hours. Whether or not she comes out of the carrier, leave your cat in her safe haven.

### **The First Few Days**

Let your new pet become acquainted with that limited area for the first few days. Be sure to spend plenty of time with her in that room, but if she's hiding under the bed, don't force her to come out. If necessary, sit on the floor to talk to her and offer treats. Let her sniff all your belongings and investigate all the hiding places. Sit on the floor and allow the cat to approach you first. Cats usually begin exploring at night, making brief excursions into new territory, followed by rapid retreats to the safe haven. Once your cat is scratching to come out of their haven, you can let her explore the rest of the home.

Your new kitty may be full of self-confidence and itching to get out and make herself at home. Or she may need a bit more time to adjust. Either way- both reactions are normal! It's common for a cat to take a few days to adjust to her new home, but it could take several weeks, or even months.

### **Going Forward: Creating a Routine**

- Feed your cat the same brand of food at the same time every day
- Set aside some time to play with your cat mornings and evenings (when cats are most active)
- Groom and pet your cat every day
- Clean the litter box at approximately the same time every day
- Establish a noise and activity level for your household that isn't stressful to your cat
- Reward your cat consistently for behaviors you like, such as using her scratching post

### **Registering Your Cat's Microchip**

Don't forget to register your cat's microchip right away by following the Microchip Registration Instructions in your Adoption folder. (If you decide to change the name of your cat, you can register using her new name.) This will ensure that if your cat gets lost and taken to any veterinarian or shelter, she will be in the national database and you'll get a call to bring your cat home! Please call Nine Lives if you have any problems registering your chip.

## **3. For a Happy and Healthy Cat**

### **Play and Training**

Environmental enrichment through play and training means a healthier *and* easier-to-live-with cat. Active cats with a stimulation-rich environment are less anxious, sleep more, and are more likely to maintain a healthy weight.

Here are some suggestions for activity sessions:

- Play with your cat using interactive toys like wands, laser pointers, or feather toys
- Set up an obstacle course for your cat to navigate to reach her food
- Provide a multi-limb climbing tree or jungle gym
- Train your cat to walk on a leash with a harness and stroll in a quiet, safe area
- Train your cat to fetch, sit, shake, come when called, and other tricks

### **Mental Stimulation**

Bored cats are a lot like children. Unless you give them something fun to do, they will make their own fun. An energetic cat might climb the curtains; a more sedate cat may take over a windowsill and not move at all. Encourage your cat to be physically and mentally active by giving her a variety of toys, puzzles, and other brainteasers. Here are some options for exercising your cat's mind:

- Brain teaser toys (of the pick-a-prize, play-n-squeak, or seek-a-treat variety)
- Play-alone toys (cat mobiles, toys that move or squeak, ball toys, feather toys)
- Homemade jungle gyms, e.g., using cardboard boxes, paper bags, and cushions
- Visual stimulation, e.g., fish tanks (securely covered), screensavers, Cat TV videos
- Food-dispensing toys, cat KONG, treat balls

## **Cat Care**

### **Grooming**

Cats have a lot of fur and despite meticulous self-grooming, they do shed. Brushing and combing are excellent ways to bond with your cat, keep all that fur under control, and deal with any fleas. Frequent brushing can help lessen hairballs. Use a soft- to medium-bristle brush and groom your cat regularly. To make sure she enjoys the experience, give her little tasty treats while you groom her.

### **Food and Water**

Have one food bowl (use ceramic or stainless steel, never plastic, which can cause an allergic reaction) or food-dispensing toy for each cat in the household, and ditto for water bowls. Pay careful attention to how much food your cat eats. It's crucial for her health that she eats well and any loss of appetite should cause concern. Discuss feeding with your veterinarian the first time you visit with your cat.

**Tip:** Milk is a no-no for cats and kittens! Milk makes many cats ill if they drink it, because they don't have the enzymes to break it down, which results in upset stomachs.

### **Medical Concerns**

Cats hide illness very well, so watch carefully for signs of illness. Some things to watch out for:

- Is your cat not eating, drinking, and using the litter box regularly?
- Is she lethargic?
- Does her coat look less healthy? Has she stopped grooming herself?
- Does she strain or cry when using the litter box?
- Does she have diarrhea?
- Is she sneezing? Does she have watery eyes?
- Is she shaking her head a lot or scratching at her ears?

### **Veterinary Care**

**Importance of veterinary care.** Selecting a veterinarian is very important to the health and happiness of your cat. You should take your new feline family member to your vet within a few weeks after bringing them home. This allows your vet to establish a baseline of medical information, which helps them evaluate your cat's health in the future. Your vet also can provide advice on preventative care, feeding, grooming, nutrition and healthy play.

Even healthy cats need at least one annual wellness exam and vaccinations. (Senior cats, like older people, need more frequent visits to keep them in tip-top shape.) Many illnesses can be detected and treated in their early stages.

And of course, your cat needs a relationship with a vet for prompt treatment for injuries and illnesses along the way. So be prepared for emergencies. Register your cat with a local veterinarian for primary care. Have the name of emergency veterinary services handy, and know how to get there in a hurry if necessary.

**Finding a vet.** Family, friends, co-workers, neighbors and the internet are great sources of information to help find a veterinarian. Vet practices should provide the background and experience of veterinarians on staff, as well as services provided by the practice. When considering different vets, determine what's most important to you, e.g., location and hours, size of staff, staff experience, services, ease of communication, costs, etc.

**Paying for vet care.** Budget for your cat's health care once you have chosen a vet, including annual exam fees, vaccinations, food, litter and a cushion for unforeseen medical issues.

Never delay a visit to your vet if you suspect your cat has health problems - small problems have a way of becoming bigger rapidly and more expensive. Some vets may work with pet parents on paying for care. Other options for more major expenses include CareCredit, ScratchPay and charitable organizations, such as The Pet Fund and RedRover.

Consider pet insurance also! Similar to our own health insurance, there are many plans out there—many with low-cost payment plans, acceptance of pets with pre-existing or chronic conditions and/or emergencies. Search the internet (e.g., best pet insurance plans) for the best plan for you and your cat. Examples include: Spot, Lemonade, Trupanion, Embrace, Pets Best, Figo and Healthy Paws are just a few. Also, some employers even offer pet insurance as an employee benefit.

## **Multi-Pet Households**

### **Introducing a Cat to a Cat**

Even if the cat you are adopting is good with other cats, there is always the possibility of problems when introducing strangers to each other. There are several steps that you can take to reduce the likelihood of problems. Before bringing your new cat home, create a separate "territory" for her. This area should be equipped with food, water, a scratching post, a litter box, access to natural sunlight, and comfortable resting places.



Your other cats should have their own separate, larger territory. Make certain that both areas (the space for the new cat and the space for the other cats) contain multiple hiding places so the cats can easily retreat if necessary. Large cardboard boxes with holes cut in two sides make great hiding places. The second hole allows the cat to escape if cornered by another cat. The boxes will come into play once you start allowing the cats to interact directly, but it can be helpful to introduce the boxes first, so that the cats become accustomed to using them. Keep in mind that cats like to hide in high places, so remove fragile items from shelves or block access to the shelves.

Place your new cat in her space as soon as she arrives home. Spend a little time with her each day, but spend more time with your other cats. They need to feel special right now, so they see the new addition as something that improves their lives. Play with all the cats regularly and watch them closely for signs of stress or anxiety, such as hiding, aggressive behavior, decreased appetite, and/or excessive vocalization. If you see any of these signs, your cat could be suffering from stress. If the signs persist for more than several days and/or if your cat stops eating, consult with your veterinarian.

If any cat is showing mild signs of stress, give her time to acclimate to the new situation. If all the cats appear comfortable in their spaces, place the new cat in a different room (equipped with the same amenities) after two days, and allow your other cats to enter the new cat's original territory. This will allow each cat to become accustomed to each other's scent in a non-threatening way. Allow the cats to acclimate to their new areas until they seem comfortable there.

Here's another way to introduce cats to each other's scent: Cats have glands in their cheeks that produce pheromones. When your cat rubs her cheek against a wall, chair, or your leg, she deposits pheromones, which are chemical substances that can help to relieve anxiety and provide information about the cat who is producing those pheromones. Exposing each cat to towels that were gently rubbed on the other cats' cheeks is a non-threatening way for them to start to get to know each other. Some cats respond very well to a synthetic pheromone (a spray or diffuser), a product that can be bought online or in pet supply stores.

Next, you can start allowing the cats closer access to each other by feeding them on either side of a closed door so that they can smell each other directly. Start feeding them several feet from the door on each side and gradually move the bowls closer to the door as the cats seem comfortable. The next step is to allow them to see each other through a baby gate or a door that is propped open two inches. If the cats are interested in each other and seem comfortable, allow them to meet. Open the door to the rooms between the cats about an inch and observe them closely.

If any cat shows signs of significant stress or aggression, separate them again and introduce them more slowly. Once the cats have acclimated to being allowed to sniff each other through a door, bring each cat into a large room, on opposite sides. If you have a willing helper, each person should play, pet and/or give food treats to one of the cats. The goal is to keep both cats occupied and happy, so they don't have time to focus on each other. You want them to enjoy their time separated but in each other's presence.

Over multiple sessions, gradually bring the cats closer to each other. This exercise teaches the cats that they get special rewards in each other's presence, and that nothing bad is happening. With time, the cats will learn that they are not a serious threat to each other.

Since cats feed off our emotions, if you act calmly and use patience in the initial stages of the introduction process, you will probably increase your chances of having a harmonious household.

**For information on introducing Cats to Dogs,** we suggest the following resources:

<https://resources.bestfriends.org/article/how-introduce-dog-cat>

<https://www.jacksongalaxy.com/blog/living-with-cats-dogs-kids-and-more/>

<https://be.chewy.com/is-this-normal-my-cat-is-afraid-of-my-new-dog/>

## 4. Litter Box Overview

The best way to introduce your cat to her new home is to confine her to one room or area — her safe haven. A further benefit to this approach is that it helps prevent litter box problems. However confident and ready to explore your cat is, keep her confined to the safe haven until she has used the litter box at least once.

### Litter Box Do's and Don'ts

#### DO

- Have enough boxes. You need one litter box per cat in the household, plus one extra
- Experiment to find a litter your cat likes: clumping, non-clumping, pellets, etc
- Keep the litter box immaculate; cats are extremely fastidious
- Use mild dishwashing liquid or hot water and vinegar to clean the box. Never use harsh chemicals like bleach or ammonia
- Scoop the box every day
- Clean the box every two to three days, or at least weekly
- Place the litter box in a quiet, private area away from food and water bowls
- If your cat pees outside the box, clean with an enzymatic cleaner (e.g., Nature's Miracle spray) to eliminate the smell and discourage her from peeing in the same place again

#### DON'T

- Use scented litter; perfumed smells tend to repel cats
- Get a box that's too small; your cat needs space to turn around, dig, and cover
- Leave waste sitting in the litter box; nobody likes a dirty bathroom.
- Use strong chemicals or disinfectants to clean the box
- Use a litter box liner or a restrictive box
- Place the litter box near anything noisy, like a washing machine or furnace
- Place the litter box in a high-traffic area in your home

**Tip:** If you have a multi-story house, have litter boxes on each level.

### Litter Box Problems

First, it's important to know that your cat isn't eliminating outside her litter box out of spite. She has either not learned to use the litter box reliably, is stressed, is ill, or is avoiding it because she doesn't like it. Cats can form aversions to the litter box for a variety of reasons, so do a bit of sleuthing. She may object to the smell, litter texture, or may prefer a covered/uncovered box. Litter box problems are common and usually very fixable.

## Troubleshooting Litter Box Problems

1. Always begin by consulting your veterinarian to rule out medical causes.
2. Check all the dos and don'ts above to make sure you're following the guidelines.
3. If the problem could be stress-related (new cat in the area, construction outside), deter stray cats from your yard and restrict your cat's view/access to windows, noisy areas, etc.
4. Could it be roommate squabbles? Confine your cats to separate areas of the house.

**Tip:** Never yell at or punish your cat for not using her litter box. It will only make her afraid of you, and it will usually make the problem worse.

## 5. Entertaining & Training Your Cat

To be physically and behaviorally healthy, your cat needs outlets for her innate feline abilities. That means opportunities to stalk, hunt, pounce, climb, hide in safe shelter, and watch interesting small-animal activity like fish in a bowl, birds outside a window, or screensavers with moving critters. She also needs plenty of respectful attention from and interaction with you.

### Indoor vs. Outdoor

We recommend keeping your cat indoors. This may sound like an unnatural life for a cat - and in a sense, it is. But like it or not, we humans have created a world that isn't safe for cats to roam in, whether in cities, suburbs, or the countryside. Outdoor cats can get lost, get injured, or catch diseases and parasites.

You may be concerned that your cat will get bored indoors – but you can give your indoor cat a fulfilling and safe life by playing with her, enriching her environment in various ways, and cat-proofing your home.

However, if you decide your cat should have outdoor experiences, here are ways to do so safely:

- Wait until your cat is completely settled into your home, generally a few weeks to a few months, before letting her go outside
- Install the CAT FENCE-IN™ backyard netting system
- Build an enclosure or “catio”(many cat magazines have plans and ideas)
- Train your cat to wear a harness and walk her on a leash
- Help to protect wildlife! Cats naturally want to hunt – to protect at-risk songbirds, please get your cat a “Birds Be Safe” collar that is highly visible to birds. Birds see reds and oranges especially well, and these collars have proved effective at significantly reducing the impact of cats on songbirds <https://www.birdsbesafe.com/>

### Preventing Escapes

For some cats, transitioning to an indoor-only lifestyle may be an adjustment, especially if the cat has lived outdoors in the past or is naturally adventurous. Here are some tips to keep your cat safe:

- Avoid getting into the habit of saying hello or goodbye to your cat right next to the doorway

- Instead, designate another spot away from the door for all greetings and departures. This should be a spot your cat likes, such as her cat tree or condo
- When entering the home, walk directly to the designated spot before greeting your cat
- Say goodbye here rather than at the door as well
- Distract your cat by leaving her with a treat or a toy.

## **How to Play with Your Cat**

Fun toys that encourage your cat to entertain herself are great. But truly stimulating and satisfying play involves a playmate - you. We recommend two interactive play sessions per day of about 10–15 minutes. Great times are in the morning before you leave or start work, and in the afternoon/evening shortly after arriving home or finishing work.

### **1. Set the Stage**

Create a jungle gym or obstacle course in your living room with cardboard boxes, chairs, and paper bags (never plastic) with the handles cut off as proxy bushes and trees. Create tunnels by rolling up area rugs. Add interest with egg cartons, shoeboxes, and paper tubes scattered along the way.

### **2. Provide Realistic Prey**

Over time, get an assortment of “prey” so you can vary the game. Great options are toys that resemble the look and movements of birds, rodents, insects, and snakes. For interactive play, nothing beats the fishing-pole variety of those toys. When you play with your cat, try to mimic the relevant prey animal’s behavior. Birds, for example, flap their wings, land occasionally, take a step or two, and then take off again. And give your cat time to plan her attack so her mind is engaged, not just her reflex to swat at anything that dangles.

### **3. Make It Fun**

Allow your cat to make many satisfying captures during a play session. Keep this in mind if you use interactive toy alternatives like laser light pointers or soap bubbles. Fun as they can be, don’t rely solely on these; it’s too frustrating for your cat to never actually get to catch her prey.

### **4. End the Game Gradually**

Always wind down a play session gradually, instead of abruptly. This sets off end-of-hunt responses in your cat, lowering her excitement and energy level. Put all interactive toys away between play sessions; they should be reserved for playtime with you. Instead leave out furry mice and other toys that are safe for solo play.

## Environmental Enrichment

Enriching your cat's environment is key to having a healthy, happy cat. Just as zoos provide toys, puzzles, and food challenges to alleviate boredom and stress in wild cats, you can use environmental enrichment to reduce urine marking, play aggression, cat-cat aggression, and fearful behavior in your cat.

- Cats are hunters. Have your cat forage for her food by using treat balls and other food-dispensing toys, and by hiding dollops of food in different locations throughout the house
- Get a cat fountain or use an old bowl for games that involve floating ping-pong balls or hollow plastic fish
- Have a variety of toys for solo play and rotate them so your cat doesn't get bored with her squeaky mouse or crinkle ball
- Cat videos of birds and small animals, and computer screensavers can entertain your cat for hours
- Use catnip in toys or simply as a stimulant once every two to three weeks to see your cat enjoy some silly antics. Stop if your cat becomes aggressive while under the influence of catnip
- Put a ping-pong ball in the bathtub; the slight slope toward the drain will help the ball stay in motion, and it won't be lost under the sofa.

## Training Your Cat

It's time to dispel the myth that cats can't be trained. Not only can you train your cat to come when called, do a high five, and go through an agility course, but you also can change unwanted behaviors, reinforce behaviors you like, and help her become less fearful and more confident.

## Positive Reinforcement

Training your cat through positive reinforcement means using your cat's natural motivations to teach her which behaviors you like and which you don't. The trick is to find the right motivations. Where dogs have been bred to work with us and respond well to praise and attention, cats are solo hunters and much less social. Determine your cat's favorite things, such as play, toys, and treats, and use those to motivate her.

## Punishment

**Never use physical punishment.** A cat's response to yelling or physical punishment is stress - and stress is the leading cause of behavior problems such as aggression and house soiling. It also erodes the trust between you and your cat and prevents learning.

## A Word on Declawing

Declawing involves surgical amputation of the first joint on a cat's paw and is most often done to prevent the cat from scratching furniture or people. The procedure comes with health risks and unfortunate behavioral consequences. We strongly advise against declawing, and instead recommend training cats to use scratching posts and trimming their claws regularly. We do not allow cats adopted from Nine Lives to be declawed.

## Unwanted Behaviors

Using positive reinforcement methods doesn't mean you never say "no" to your cat. You just say it in a way she understands instead of using human language. Either:

- **Avoid the situation.** Restrict your cat's access to a place, person, or object, OR
- **Redirect** her to an acceptable outlet for her behavior, for example pouncing on a toy instead of your shoe, or scratching her post instead of the couch.

## 6. When Problems Arise

Keep in mind that most of what we label “problem behavior” is normal feline behavior, and none of it is meant to spite or frustrate us. Your cat is simply being a cat. Cats do what they do because they want food, play, attention, social time with us, etc. Pleasing - or annoying - us isn't part of the picture. Fortunately, you can use what your cat wants to train her to behave in ways you like. With patience and consistency, most problem behavior can be changed for good.

### Troubleshooting Problem Behavior

**LITTER BOX ISSUES** can be due to:

- Undiagnosed illness
- Stress or anxiety
- Territoriality
- Soiled litter box
- Aversion to litter type
- Aversion to litter box location

**My cat goes to the bathroom in the laundry basket, on my bed, or on the carpet.** If your cat squats to relieve herself anywhere other than the litter box, your first stop is always the vet's office to rule out a urinary infection or other medical reason. After that, systematically go through the guidelines above to eliminate stress triggers and find the right litter, litter box style, and litter box location for your cat.

**My cat sprays urine on my front door/walls.** If your cat squirts urine on vertical surfaces, that's classic marking behavior most often set off by stress or territoriality. The triggers can seem innocent to us: new furniture in the living room, a strange cat strolling through the yard, or social tension between feline housemates. Clean marked locations thoroughly with enzymatic cleaners, and discourage stray cats from coming near your house. Try to identify stressors in your cat's life, then work to change or remove them, for example by blocking your cat's view of strange cats, confining your cats to separate parts of the house, etc.

If your cat's issues persist, consult a qualified veterinary behavior specialist.

**PLAY AND BITING/SCRATCHING** can be due to:

- Playful energy
- Attention-seeking
- Overstimulation

**When I walk through the house, my cat pounces on my ankles.** Painful as this can be for you, it is normal play behavior in cats. Redirect your cat's playfulness to an appropriate toy and consider having more interactive play sessions to give her other outlets for her energy. You can also put a bell on your cat's collar so you can hear her coming and redirect her before the assault.



**When my cat is curled in my lap, and I'm gently petting her, she suddenly bites/scratches.** This is called petting-induced aggression or overstimulation. Your cat is trying to tell you about her tolerance level for petting, and the best cure is to watch and listen carefully. Look for subtle body language that signals overstimulation, like tail swishing, twitching ears, cranky meowing, staring, body stiffness, or hissing. If you see any of these signs, stop petting your cat. Over time, you'll be able to recognize her signals, and she won't be forced to escalate them.

Also be careful not to pet your cat's belly or misinterpret the "elevator butt" (pushing the lower back upward) as an invitation to pet this area. Studies show most cats prefer petting on their heads and cheeks.

**SCRATCHING OBJECTS** can be due to:

- Nails that need trimming
- Territoriality
- Stress relief and mood boosting
- Stretching after a snooze

**My cat scratches my new leather couch/the antique rug/my wicker chair.** This is another normal feline behavior that can cause friction at home. The important thing to remember is that your cat has no concept of the value of things and isn't deliberately destroying your possessions. She's merely doing what comes naturally to her and feels good.

First, keep your cat's claws neatly clipped. Just like fingernails, claws grow continuously and must be trimmed every few weeks to every few months, depending on the cat. (We offer nail trims at our Vaccine Clinic – check the Nine Lives website for details)

Second, make sure your cat has several sturdy scratching posts of varying textures. Place them strategically around the house, near items you don't want her to scratch. Temporarily cover any furniture she's already begun to scratch with an unattractive surface like Sticky Paws. If necessary, use treats or play to entice your cat over to the post (never carry her there or physically force her), and praise her lavishly when she uses it.

If you suspect territoriality is the cause, a spray such as Feliway®, which contains a synthetic copy of the facial pheromone cats use to rub on their territory to feel safe and secure, can help. To learn more, visit [www.feliway.com](http://www.feliway.com).

**FEARFULNESS** can be due to:

- Lack of socialization
- Traumatizing events
- Genetic predisposition

**My cat hides when we have guests.** Many fearful cats do bond strongly with their caretakers over time, but many remain shy with strangers for life. If you have adopted a naturally fearful cat, she may never develop into the life of the party. To give a fearful cat the best possible life, follow these guidelines:

Provide plenty of cozy hiding places for her to hang out in when visitors come over. An option that works for many cats is a tall cat tree. Your cat might hang out in the same room as you and your guests if you give her a high spot to perch on while she watches the action. If you hold a big dinner party or have noisy work done to your house, confine your cat to her safe haven. Never pull her from her hiding place or force her to be held.

## **7. Common Misconceptions**

**Myth: My cat scratches the couch or pees on the carpet out of spite. I know because she looks guilty.**

**Reality:** When you return home to find scratch marks on the couch or a puddle on the living room carpet, it's easy to think your cat did those things because she's angry with you. But guilt is a wholly human concept. The "guilty" body language when your cat slinks away doesn't mean she feels bad about what she did - those were natural behaviors to her - it means she's reading subtle cues in your body language that tell her something is wrong.

Don't take her scratching or urinating personally. Instead, try to figure out the real reason. Stress? Territoriality? An aversion to her litter box? It could be many things.

**Myth: Rubbing my cat's nose in her urine or feces will stop her from soiling the house.**

**Reality:** Absolutely not true. The only thing your cat will learn from this experience is to expect irrational and unpleasant behavior from her human caretakers. In fact, just like newspaper swatting and scolding, it will likely teach your cat not to go to the bathroom in front of you, which makes it harder to persuade her to use only her litter box.

**Myth: My old cat needs a friend.**

**Reality:** While some cats are extremely social, many cats may prefer to be the only feline family member. Even if your cat has lived with a sibling or housemate for years, she may not want a new cat after losing a companion. Adding more cats to the household can be very stressful, particularly for older cats. If you do add a second or third cat, keep in mind that the best matches are made between cats of similar age, temperament, and energy level.

**Myth: Cats can't be trained.**

**Reality:** They most certainly can be. Cats are different from dogs and don't respond to many common dog training techniques. But just like chickens, dolphins, giraffes, and hippos, cats can indeed be trained. Integrating training games in your cat's everyday routine is a great way to enhance her well-being and quality of life.

## 8. If Your Cat Goes Missing

First, don't give up. Persistence is key, and you may need a combination of search strategies. Start with a thorough physical search of your immediate area, focusing on your home and property and working out from there. Most missing cats are found less than a third of a mile from where they escaped. Indoor cats who get outdoors are typically found less than three houses away.

Ask friends and neighbors to help with the search, and check under decks and porches, in garages and sheds, and other places where a cat could hide or get trapped. Keep in mind that a cat who is unused to being outside, or a cat lost in an unfamiliar area, will likely be scared and won't respond to your calls. It can take a few days before they relax enough to emerge from their hiding spot.

Knock on doors and hang large, colorful "lost cat" posters in your area (there are lots of templates online). Alert dog walkers, mail carriers, joggers and anyone else who regularly visits your neighborhood, as well as anyone nearby who feeds outdoor cats. Use local social media sites and missing pet registries to help get the word out. When people know your cat is missing, they'll want to help. Otherwise, they may assume the cat who showed up in their yard is abandoned and needs a home.

Submit lost reports to all the animal shelters in your area, and your local animal control agency, and ask if there are other local animal welfare organizations that may have your pet. Depending on where you live, the shelter may only be able to hold a lost cat for as little as 72 hours before placing them for adoption, so don't delay.

Alert the microchip company. The microchip company and your cat's microchip number is in your adoption folder.

Visit your local shelters as often as you can to check if your cat is there, keeping in mind that it can take weeks before a lost cat lands at a shelter. Go in person – don't just call – and ask to see the cats in case your cat is very shy and they were not able to check it for a microchip.

Most communities have Facebook and NextDoor groups for sharing information about lost and found pets. Search for groups in your area and post a notice of your missing cat. Share the post on your personal Facebook, Instagram or other social media accounts. Fellow animal lovers will likely want to help in your search.

Petco Love Lost is a national database that uses facial recognition technology to search thousands of found pet listings from users and shelters across the country – your cat was automatically registered by Nine Lives so go to [lost.petcolove.org/lost-pet-101](https://lost.petcolove.org/lost-pet-101) to register your cat as lost. You can also upload a more recent photo.

Cats can come home within days, or they may show up weeks later. So again, don't give up!

## 9. Additional Resources

We hope the information in this handbook will be helpful during your cat's transition into her new home.

If you are concerned about your cat's health or behavior, we strongly recommend you first talk to your veterinarian.

Below are some some great online resources:

Best Friends Animal Society:

<https://resources.bestfriends.org/resource-center-best-friends-animal-society>

Humane Society of the Americas:

<https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/>

San Francisco SPCA Resources library

<https://www.sfspca.org/resource-library/?resource-type%5B%5D=behavior-training>

Jackson Galaxy's Resources section and YouTube videos:

<https://www.jacksongalaxy.com/>



## 10. Reading Cat Body Language

# CAT LANGUAGE

