



Polite Pets Month

An initiative of the Australian Veterinary Association



Creating a courteous cat

Many people think that you can't train a cat, but you can. In fact training should begin as soon as you bring your feline friend home, whether it's a new kitten or an older cat that you're introducing into your household.



Cats like company

Cats have a reputation of being quite solitary creatures, but the truth is they're actually social animals and love company.

To help your kitten become a happy member of your household it will need to learn that people will want to pick it up. Because being restrained and elevated does not come naturally to cats, the earlier kittens are picked up and handled by people, the better.

As well as feeling comfortable with people, cats also need to feel comfortable with other cats, so the earlier you can begin socialising your cat with others the better. Kittens often like a playmate and two kittens together are usually good for each other. Kittens from the same litter are more likely to get along with each other than if they are from separate litters.

Kitten Kindies® are ideal for kittens under 14 weeks of age. They allow kittens to explore and develop confidence in being in new surroundings and learn to interact with each other.

Polite Pets Month is proudly supported
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Training your feline friend

Start training your cat as soon as you bring it home so that it starts behaving in a way you want it to. They enjoy praise and many will work for tasty treats. Like dogs, cats are intelligent and trainable animals, provided you:

- are patient
- keep the training sessions short (less than 2–3 minutes), and
- use rewards such as praise and food.

Small tasty morsels, such as cooked chicken, butter or vegemite on fingers or spoons, work very well as training rewards.

Here are some techniques to try with your own cat:

- To train kitty to come – call its name in a bright, friendly tone and say the word “come”, especially at meal times. Reward immediately when your cat approaches and never punish your cat if it is slow to respond.
- To teach kitty to sit– hold a tasty treat in front of your kitten’s nose and move your hand slowly up and back over your kitten’s head towards its back. As the kitten follows the treat, the head will go back and the bottom goes down. There is no need to push on its back. Repeat the exercise often. When your kitten is sitting consistently, then start to use the word “sit” and soon your kitten will be sitting on cue!

There is no point in punishing a cat if it’s not doing what you’d like it to do. Smacking or yelling at cats is never needed, usually doesn’t work and can actually make some problems worse.

If you do catch your cat doing something you don’t want it to do, distract it by clapping your hands, quietly ask your cat to come and give a reward straight away.

As long as you have realistic expectations and are patient and consistent, you can train your cat.

Learning to use a litter tray

Cats usually take to using a litter tray easily, but there are also things you can do to reduce the chance of having problems:

- Get a litter tray that is big enough for the cat. About 1½ times the length of an adult cat is the minimum size.
- Put the litter tray somewhere easily accessible and place it away from a high traffic area such as a passageway or kitchen. Cats do not want an audience!
- Place the litter tray well away from the food bowl.
- Clean the tray daily. This is especially important for covered trays.
- If you have more than one cat in the household the general rule is one litter tray per cat and one extra if possible. This also applies to single cat households, especially if you are away for long periods of the day.
- Place each litter tray in a different location or room (not side by side) to prevent one cat blocking another cat’s access to the area.

Safe scratching

Scratching is normal behaviour for cats used for communication. It’s a visual and a scent marker that allows messages to remain long after the cat has left the area. A good way to stop your cat scratching in unwanted places such as your furniture is to provide it with a scratching post.

To encourage use, scratching posts need to be:

- covered with a suitable loose-weave material such as hessian
- tall enough (or long enough if it is horizontal) to allow your cat to really stretch
- placed where the cat will use it, usually a prominent area or in front of where the cat has already started to scratch.

Don’t replace your cat’s scratching material once it’s worn and torn – as that’s when it is full of meaning! You should cover areas you don’t want scratched with thick plastic as most cats don’t find it attractive.

For more advice about training your cat to become a courteous member of the household talk to your veterinarian or veterinary behaviourist.

This information is from ‘Your new kitten – a bundle of fun’ brochure written by Dr Kersti Seksel BVSc (Hons) MA (Hons) FACVSc DACVB CMAVA DECVBM-CA Registered Veterinary Specialist, Behavioural Medicine – for the Australian Small Animal Veterinary Association.

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