

# Multi-Cat Households



Cats can be social animals, however, not every cat will get along with every other cat. This can manifest itself in a number of ways from outright aggressive behavior to food issues, inappropriate elimination, scratching and overgrooming.

If you live in a multicat household you should become adept at reading the body language of the felines in your family. If there is a change in the social structure, it will become quickly apparent.

Many outside influences can impact on the interaction of cats. Some are: stress level of the human family, new family members or pets, parties, houseguests, job changes which impact time spent at home, illness or remodeling.

Another factor in the relationship of cats in your family is the relative health of each cat. Any change in behavior that does not have an obvious cause, should be considered worthy of a health check- up to rule out illness first.

All cats are territorial, and should have some space in the household that they can call their own. This can be as elaborate as a cat tree, secure outdoor enclosure, cat condo, or as simple as a cardboard box with a hole cut in it, or a bed on top of the refrigerator. If the cat feels secure in it's own territory, then communal territory is much easier to share.

## **The Snug Retreat**

For the smaller household, or the family with ongoing cat interaction difficulties, a “snug retreat” may be a solution to intercat aggression problem.

A snug retreat is a large enough enclosed space- usually a medium sized dog crate, which can house a cat bed, litterbox and water bowl. This space is used for several hours each day to allow the cat to relax in a stress free environment. When the cat is not in the retreat the door is kept closed so that no other cat has access to the litterbox inside.

Many cats look forward to sleeping in a snug retreat and will run to their bed at night. Some cats prefer to have their snug retreat covered with a blanket or the like to make it seem more “cavelike” other prefer to have the visibility of open sides.

A cat will be happier to use their snug retreat if it is also used as a place where they can get cat treats, or that is lightly scented with catnip.

If you have a cat who is older, or ill, or a young cat newly separated from it's mother and littermates, putting a hot water bottle or heated rice bag in the snug retreat will make it even more comforting. Electric heating pads should be used with caution to avoid burns with elderly or ill animals, or kittens who may chew on cords.

## **Multi-Cat Households Behavior Checklist**

- Does each cat have its own litterbox?
- Does each cat have some “private space” as their own territory?
- Are food and water accessible on neutral territory not claimed by any cat?
- Are cats rewarded with treats, extra attention when they interact calmly?
- Are all the cats healthy? If not, have special space been set aside for the ill cat to recuperate without stress?
- Are there acceptable scratching surfaces available for the cats?
- Are there any new changes in the family which could account for a change in behavior?
- Are there any new cats in the neighborhood that could be adding stress to a relationship? Even indoor cats notice outdoor cats in their yard.
- Do cats have opportunities for exercise and mental stimulation? Toys, birdfeeders and active play with human family members will provide a needed outlet for excess energy.