

Dog Training by PJ
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CATS ARE TRAINABLE - POSITIVELY!

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Your cat brings you joy as she curls up on your lap and purrs herself to sleep. She provides you with endless entertainment while chasing a feather wand, ball or other soft toy. However, without training she may also drive you crazy when she scratches your favorite piece of furniture, leaps at your ankles or stops using her litter-box.

Whatever issues you or your cat may have, training her can help solve problems that could threaten your relationship with your cat. Consider this - we as humans enjoy praise and try to avoid punishments. Your cat is the same. If you give positive reinforcement to her for something you want her to do by giving her something pleasant or rewarding she'll more likely repeat that "rewarded behavior." It is far more effective to teach her what she should do rather than try to teach her what she shouldn't.

Unfortunately, there's a disservice to owners when it comes to cat behavior with outdated or inaccurate information - just *search the internet*. Simply, physical punishments don't work. Cats have a somewhat limited concept of punishment. Please, don't assume your cat "knows when they are bad." There are ways to help positively train the cat without yelling or striking your cat. Try following the San Francisco SPCA's four step plan called PURR to encourage your cat to be well behaved:

1. Prevention: Give your cat an appropriate outlet for "normal" feline behaviors
2. Use correction, but *only when appropriate*
3. use Remote punishment to discourage undesirable behaviors
4. Reward to reinforce good behaviors

Timing is essential when using positive reinforcement or punishments and must occur immediately, or your cat may not associate it with the proper action. Try

putting pieces of dry cat food in your pocket and when your cat uses her scratching post, you can throw a piece for her to chase as a reward. Often, cats enjoy chasing their food. A bonus for the cat is it is good exercise. However, if you throw the food when she has stopped scratching the post and she walks toward you, she will think she's being rewarded for coming to you. Consistency is the key to training a cat.

USING POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Positive reinforcement can include food treats, praise, petting, or a favorite toy or game. When your cat is first learning a new behavior, she should be rewarded every time you catch her doing the desired behavior. If it is teaching her to scratch the post, you'll reward each time she shows interest in the post. On the other hand, avoid taking her over to the scratching post, positioning her paws on the post, and raking them along the post to show your cat what she's supposed to do. This will likely have the opposite effect and make her less likely to use the post.

Once your cat reliably offers you desired behaviors, you may reward her with treats intermittently—for example, three out of every four times she does the behavior. Then, over time, reward her about half the time, then about a third of the time, and so on, until you're only rewarding her occasionally with a treat. Continue to praise her every time. Your cat will learn that if she keeps offering desired behaviors, eventually she'll get what she wants—your praise and an occasional treat. You won't be forever bound to carry a pocketful of goodies.

Remember, cats do not act out of spite or revenge. Physical punishment that involves discomfort or pain should never be used. In addition to it being inhumane, it could cause your cat to bite or resort to other undesirable behaviors. For example, holding your cat's neck skin and shaking her may result in a frightened cat whom then scratches or bites to defend herself. In addition, your cat could associate the punishment with other stimuli, including people, who are present at the time the punishment occurs. For example, a cat punished for coming too close to a new baby may become fearful of, or aggressive to, the baby, or to other babies.

REMOTE PUNISHMENT

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Punishment is most effective when it does not come directly from you. For example, if your cat enjoys scratching the couch, you may apply special double-sided tape to those surfaces. Cats rarely like sticky paws. Thus your cat perceives the couch, and not you, to be delivering the punishment. In this way, too, your cat is more likely to avoid the undesirable behavior even when you're not around. However, it is critical that while discouraging undesirable behaviors, you help your cat understand what you want her to do and provide appropriate outlets for her normal cat behaviors, such as an appropriate place to scratch.

One of the reasons cats are such fun is when they are not sleeping, many of them enjoy playing. Play with your cat. It will help her physical and behavioral development and as a bonus teach her desirable behaviors while reducing undesirable behaviors. Be sure your cat has safe toys to play with by herself, and don't underestimate the power of play. Play can strengthen the bond between you and her while enhancing the quality of life for both.

If things don't go smoothly - contact a Certified Pet Dog Trainer (CPDT) or call Dog Training by PJ, 775-828-0748.

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"Just say No! Cats and the Crime of Punishment"

http://www.sfspca.org/behavior/cat_library/JustSayNo.pdf

"Positive Reinforcement: Training Your Cat with Treats and Praise"

http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet_care/our_pets_for_life_program/cat_behavior_tip_sheets/positive_reinforcement_training_your_cat_with_treats_and_praise.html

PJ Wangsness, CPDT, is a Certified Professional Dog Trainer & Behavior Consultant, member of the Association of Companion Animal Behavior Counselors, member of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers, member of the International Animal Behavior Consultants, AKC CGC Evaluator and a trainer with Dog Training by PJ, located in Reno, NV. For additional information on group classes or behavior modification, please visit www.dogtrainingbypj.com or call 775-828-0748.