



Cats and Children

Bringing a new cat or kitten into a home with children can be the beginning of wonderful friendship. However, it is important that kids understand how to interact with cats and kittens to avoid injury or discomfort for the cat and the child, and to help build a lasting, healthy relationship. Set the following ground rules for kids before they meet your new cat:

- ❖ Do not squeeze a cat, pick them up by their neck, or pull their tail.
- ❖ Do not chase or lunge at a cat. Cats are sensitive to loud noises and sudden movements, and will feel threatened if they are chased or lunged at.
- ❖ Do not disturb a cat while they are eating.

Teaching children how to introduce themselves to a cat and how to read their behaviour can help them learn respect for animals and to appreciate that cats are sensitive, complex creatures. Review these tips with children to help them build a good relationship with the household cat:

- ❖ Approach a new cat slowly and quietly. Cats sometimes feel threatened or nervous when someone new approaches them.
- ❖ Talk to the cat in quiet, gentle voices.
- ❖ Sit down and wait for the cat to come to you.
- ❖ Hold out your hand slowly for the cat to smell.
- ❖ See if the cat will let you scratch them gently under the chin or on the top of the head.
- ❖ Do not pet the cat's belly because this is considered a threatening action by many cats.

Even a friendly cat will scratch or nip when anxious. Adults and children should learn how to recognize when a cat is irritated—most cats give “signals” that they are irritated, such as a hiss or long, drawn out meow, flattened ears, wide open eyes, or a twitching tail. Also watch out if a cat refuses to make eye contact, tightens or flattens their body, walks away or refuses to sniff your hand. If you notice any of these signals, stop and give the cat some space.