



Children and Your New Cat

Starting Off Right

Below are some guidelines to help you start off on the right foot with your new cat, creating a safe environment for your children and cat. Remember, children should never be left alone with a cat or kitten without adult supervision, and need to learn that if handled roughly, scared or teased, cats may bite or scratch to protect themselves.

Holding: Because kittens often squirm and wiggle they can easily fall out of a child's arms and become injured. If held too tightly or forcibly restrained, the kitten may respond by scratching or biting. It is safest for everyone if your child is sitting down whenever he wants to hold the kitten.

For adult cats, have your child sit in your lap and let the cat approach both of you. This way you can control your child and not allow him to get "carried away" with pats that are too rough. You are also there to teach your new cat to treat your child gently.

Some cats do not want to be held, but will sit next to you and your child if offered treats or petting. Keep in mind that the cat should always be allowed to leave when it feels like it. Always try to end on a positive note.

Petting and giving affection: Children often want to hug cats or grasp them too firmly. Your cat may view this as a threatening gesture rather than an affectionate one, and may react with scratching or biting. You should teach your child to let the cat approach on his own terms and pet lightly, using an open hand and petting with the grain of the fur. You should also teach your child to avoid staring at, or looking directly into, your cat's eyes.

Giving treats: When children offer a treat from fingers held together as a pincher the cat may accidentally bite fingers instead of only taking the treat. Have your child place the treat in an open palm, rather than holding it in his fingers. You may want to place a hand underneath your child's hand to help guide him.

Supervising play: Cats interpret quick and jerky hand movements as an invitation to play. It's important that cats learn how to play appropriately, without putting their teeth or claws on human skin. Encouraging a cat to play with hands and fingers may result in scratches or bites. Teach your child to offer the cat or kitten a toy on a string in order to maximize the distance between the child's hands and the toy. Other fun toys include cat teasers, feathers and laser lights.

Be patient: Your new cat may take some time to feel comfortable with your child's actions and sounds and will approach when he feels ready. Your cat must also learn which behaviors on his part are appropriate and which are not. Discourage rough play and encourage appropriate play. Punishing your cat for inappropriate behavior will not help. If he learns that being around children always results in "bad things" happening to him, he may become defensive in their presence.

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