

When You're SCARED of Your Own Cat

By RITA REIMERS

©DenGuy | Getty Images

©Izusek | Getty Images

I can't imagine being scared of my own sweet kitties. As a catsitter, there are times when I'm greeted by a snarling Tasmanian devil of a cat, but these are not my own lovebugs. Are there people who are actually scared of their own kitties?

Well, all you need to do is watch the opening sequence to Animal Planet's *My Cat from Hell* to see that, yes, this really does happen, and it's not as uncommon as you might think.

What causes people to become fearful of their own cats? Mostly, this happens for one of these reasons:

Fear of your new cat: You've brought home your first cat and have no prior experience with cats, how to read them or how to handle them; or you've brought a new cat home, and — surprise! The cat has major anxiety issues.

Fear of your resident cat: Your current cat is exhibiting sudden behavioral changes that have come (seemingly) out of nowhere.

Fear of your new cat

Brand-new cat owners who have not spent much time around or had much experience with cats might sometimes act anxious around their new feline

buddy. Anxiousness often translates to a cat as intimidation and fear, which can raise the kitty's own insecurities and fears about being in a new place with strange people, and she may act out with aggression.

Even experienced cat owners might find themselves perplexed by the behaviors of a new feline addition to their household if they have adopted a fearful cat. A cat that has been mistreated, neglected or has lived her entire life in a rescue shelter might have poor socialization skills and more than a healthy fear of humans.

The aggressiveness some new cats exhibit usually settles down once the kitty has time to become comfortable

When your cat doesn't feel well, she'll not only get grumpy, but she may have to tell you to leave her alone by getting a little rough.



in her new surroundings with her new people. Yes, it can be quite intimidating to adopt a cat only to find her hissing, growling, spitting and lashing out once you get her home.

Fear of your resident cat

When a cat who has been in the home for a long period of time suddenly begins acting out with aggression, there might be a few reasons for this behavior:

- ❖ **Moving to a new home.** Being in a new place with new smells, sounds, sights and maybe even new people can be very intimidating to your cat. It's like you took away her security blanket, and now she doesn't know what is in "her" territory.

- ❖ **New cats, other pets or people.** An interloper suddenly enters your cat's domain. She might react with aloofness, or she might actually attack the new cat, other pet or even a new person in an effort to protect her abode. She might be so upset that her anger turns toward you if you try to calm a disagreement between your cat and another cat, pet or human.

- ❖ **Boredom.** If your cat is home alone all day with no toys, no cat tree, nothing to look at, nothing to play with, not even another cat, then yes, she is going to be full of pent-up energy and raring to go once you get home! Sometimes, that play energy can turn a little angry and aggressive. Certain high-energy breeds such as Bengals need mental stimulation, or

they will get bored and might even cause some damage to your home.

- ❖ **Undiagnosed illness.** When we humans don't feel well, we might get grumpy, but we can tell others why we're acting that way. When your cat doesn't feel well, she will most likely get grumpy, and the only way she can tell you to leave her alone is to get a little rough with you. I once was called to do a behavior session where one of the three cats suddenly began attacking one of his feline buddies. It turns out that the aggressor had arthritis, and the other cat had accidentally caused him pain during playtime. It took quite some time and effort to get them to become friends again.

What to do about aggressive behavior

- ❖ **Vet checkup.** Get to the veterinarian to make sure your cat doesn't have any underlying health issues that could be causing her angry outbursts.

- ❖ **Identify the cause.** If your cat gets a clean bill of health, try to figure out why she might be acting this way (see above).

continued on page 66



Rita Reimers' Cat Behavior Coaching has helped many cat owners better understand their feine friends. Visit RitaReimers.com to read her cat behavior blog or to book a cat behavior coaching session. Rita is also the CEO/owner of JustForCatsPetSitting.com. Connect with her on Facebook and on Twitter at [@the_catanalyst](https://twitter.com/the_catanalyst).

NEW CATTITUDE *continued from page 23*

❖ **Calming essences.** Try some herbal calming essences to help take the edge off your cat's anxiety. If those don't work, your veterinarian might be able to prescribe something to help calm the situation.

❖ **Spend some time with her.** Take the time to get to know your cat, especially if she is new, but don't force it. Playtime is a nice way to bond with your cat and also help her use up her energy and work out her frustrations.

❖ **Get her a buddy.** If you have a single cat, consider getting her a friend to keep her company while you're at work.



❖ **Catify your home.** As my colleague Jackson Galaxy says, one of the best things you can do for your cat is to catify her environment. Give her cat trees, places to climb, cozy places to nap, plenty of toys and things to do so her mind stays sharp, and she gets to be active in the way cats are in nature.

What not to do

❖ **Yell at your cat.** Yelling at your cat only causes her more distress, and she might actually attack you — or at the very least hide from you.

❖ **Punish your cat.** Punishing your cat will only alienate her. I once conducted a behavior session for a couple where the man was always getting nipped by one of the cats. The reason? He was yelling at the cat and smacking him to get him to calm down. Not cool!



❖ **Run away or act scared.** If you act like you're afraid of your cat, she'll sense this and have the upper hand. She'll use her aggression to keep distance between you, and you'll be stuck in a standoff situation, maybe for life.

❖ **Ignore her.** When your cat first gets aggressive, it's OK to walk away from her and withdraw your attention,

at first. But, if you just ignore her and leave her shut in a room all alone because you are scared of her, she will become an aloof, unfriendly, mad cat forever.

As you see, there really is nothing to fear. Meet your cat

on her terms and see things from her purr-spective. It won't take long before you both lose your fear of one another and become best pals for life. 🐾

