



# It's Not Jealousy, It's Rivalry

By RITA REIMERS

**T**he other morning, I was peacefully lying in bed, waking up with my sweet Gigi kitty girl curled up beside me; we were both very comfy as we fell back to sleep for just a few last moments. That is, until Pinky tried to join our cuddle.

Suddenly, the normally sweet Gigi leaned over and gave Pinky a couple of very hard smacks on the head, letting her know that I was hers at that moment, and she had no intention of sharing. Poor Pinky was stunned as she slowly slinked away.

## Do cats get jealous?

This experience could be interpreted as jealousy for my attention, although that is putting the cats' behavior in human terms. In the cat world, is it really jealousy that Gigi was feeling, or was it something else altogether?

As we know, cats are creatures of predictability and habit. They prefer a stable environment without a lot

of changes and challenges, and they prefer to claim certain toys, places and spaces in their home for their very own. Things they claim include you and your attention, too. What we think of as jealousy is actually cats rivaling one another for the same things.

In nature, what drives cats to rival one another is scarce resources, such as food and clean water. Male cats will run off other males to keep their resources (food, water, shelter and female cats) to themselves. Females keep their territory even smaller, as they would in nature if they were raising kittens. The kitten nest becomes their domain and, unless one is part of the colony, they are not inclined to

share their space. It's not jealousy but competition for finite resources.

Of course, our spoiled indoor kitties are not competing out in nature; however, their instincts to be protective of resources is deeply ingrained in how cats behave. Even when living indoors with access to a seemingly endless supply of food, water and cozy places to sleep, some cats just don't want to share their abundance. It's a throwback to nature's scarcity.

As I mentioned, you are one of their primary resources, and at times they do not wish to share you with other cats. Consequently, the behavior we term as "jealousy" (but is actually rivalry for territory and resources) will occur from time to time.

## How to handle rivalries

The easiest way to handle rivalry is to ensure there is plenty of everything to go around. Scarcity and lack of anything can cause fighting and anxiety in your cats, so know what your particular cats need. Plenty of food, fresh water, clean litter boxes and cozy napping spots are a good place to start. If you live in a small apartment and space is tight, add cat trees and shelving to give your cats more vertical spaces to claim as their own. Lots of cozy nooks and bedding will help, too.

Perhaps one of the most important resources cats need is quality time with you. This can be a challenge when you have multiple cats, but it's important to give each cat some one-on-one time with you, as well as group playtime with one another. Attention giving can be as simple as sitting on the sofa with a cat or two next to you while you pet them both or what I am doing right now: writing with one cat on my lap (Peanut Butter) and one cat watching as I type on my laptop (Punkin). Of course, I pause for occasional head scratches and kisses while

I am writing, so they get my attention.

Whether you call it jealousy or rivalry, understanding what drives your cats to behave in certain ways, and which situations in your household may evoke rivalrous feelings, gets you one step closer to keeping it at bay. Avoiding situations that may instigate kitty feelings of competition is one of the keys to achieving lasting harmony in your multi-cat household. 🐾



Devoting her entire life to cats, **Rita Reimers** is founding owner of JFCATS.com, a feline health and wellness company. JFCATS has been providing cat behavior services and cats-only pet-sitting for the last 15 years. Rita and her business partner, Linda Hall, are also starting a line of USA-made cat toys and bedding called Gracie & Esther. You can reach Rita directly on Facebook and Twitter @TheCatAnalyst and on Instagram @RitaReimersTheCatAnalyst.

## SIGNS OF RIVALRY

### FIGHTING:

Disagreements that are as simple as glaring at one another can escalate into vocalization, slapping and chasing. Usually this is harmless if your cats get along well at other times.



**HIDING:** A cat feeling displaced by the actions of a more dominant cat may hide after being challenged for resources.

**SCOLDING:** My tiny, three-legged cat, Smoochy, will scold my big boy cats if they try to join us on the sofa when she isn't willing to share, and they back down as soon as she chatters at them.

**ELIMINATING IN INAPPROPRIATE PLACES:** A cat feeling extreme anxiety over resource rivalry may start eliminating outside the litter box, especially if you have a bully cat who likes to guard the box and not let other cats use it in peace.

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