



Curb Your Cat's NAUGHTY Behaviors

BY RITA REIMERS

For those of you at home more now because of the pandemic, have you noticed your cats can be, well, rather destructive? Yes, you always knew they had a little demon inside them — they like to unroll your toilet paper (a precious item these days!) and lie across your laptop while you're trying to work. But living with them 24/7 while you're working from home, these little behaviors might start getting on your nerves. Right?

Take the case of one of my clients, Lisa. She recently moved from her upstairs master bedroom down to the first-floor bedroom. Her cats now think 2 a.m. is party time in the new digs, with Lisa caught in the middle as they run and bounce all over her bed. Who could sleep with all that going on?

Why cats behave badly

Usually when cats start behaving in ways that we term as “bad,” it’s because they didn’t get enough activity throughout the day. In nature, cats spend a great deal of time hunting and roaming about, expending energy on activities that ensure their survival.

Of course, our spoiled cats don’t need to hunt and forage. Plus, they spend most of the day sleeping, whether we’re home or not. If your cat hasn’t had enough mental and physical stimulation throughout the day, he now has

lots of pent-up energy that he intends to use. Once your own head hits the pillow at night, you’re a captive audience. And your cat knows it.

Engage in positive play

One of the ways we get our kitties to behave in acceptable ways is through engagement in positive playtime. What does that mean? Simply stated, positive play is when your cat gets a reward while interacting with you during structured play. That play needs to occur without your cat biting, chasing his feline friends or exhibiting other naughty behaviors.

For example, pick up a wand type toy or feather on a stick. Mimic your cat’s need to hunt by enticing him to chase whatever is at the end of the wand or stick. You can use feathers, toy mice or toy birds that have movement. The goal is to get your cat to chase —

and catch — his prey. Not only are you helping him use up his pent-up energy and satisfy his need to run and chase, but by allowing him to catch his prey, you are also sharpening his appetite.

This interactive playtime triggers your cat’s natural body rhythms, uses up stifled energy and gives you and your cat playtime that strengthens the bond between you. If you don’t help your cat in this way, you may not like what he decides to play with around the house instead, and there’s likely to be more kitty arguments if there are other cats in the household.

Nip naughty in the bud

If you catch your cat doing something naughty, distraction is the best way to go. Yelling at your cat or squirting him with a water bottle will not accomplish what you intend and may even make him afraid of you. A fearful cat who

has nothing in the household to keep him engaged in positive activities may become stressed out, anxiety ridden and mean. Bad behaviors could arise as a direct result of his boredom and/or fear of being scolded.

I have a brat cat. His name is Boo-Boo. All he needs to do is sit by another cat, tilt his head at a certain angle while staring at the other cat, and the object of his attention begins to shake, growl and run off. He just LOVES to stir up trouble when he is bored. Just like the human child who causes trouble with his siblings, a cat will do likewise if he has no other focus. Your cat may also get into your things, scratch the furniture and generally run amok in the house if no other activities are going on.

Providing playtime will help nip these behaviors in the bud, so these occurrences become less frequent. Also, provide plenty of self-play activities for your cat. Enrich his environment with cat trees to climb, cat cubby holes to hide inside, catnip plants to nibble

and toys to play with when you're not home. Cats also love to watch the world outside, so a cat seat near a window provides hours of entertainment. It's even better with a birdhouse at cats-eye level to keep his attention on daydreaming about catching the birds, instead of on shredding your rug!

Engaging your cat in positive activities with you, providing environmental enrichment to keep him active and paying attention to your cat's natural body rhythms are some of the keys to keeping him away from naughty behaviors. Reward his positive behaviors, replace negative ones with structured playtime, and you will have a peaceful, happy cat in your household. 🐾



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PLAY, EAT, GROOM, SLEEP!



PEGS is an acronym I've coined to help people remember what a cat's instincts require him to do on a daily basis — these four simple activities:

PREY/PLAY: In nature, cats need to hunt for their prey, otherwise they don't eat. Therefore, engage your indoor cat in play activities to satisfy his ingrained hunting instinct.

EAT: Next, your cat would eat the spoils of the hunt. Play with your cat before mealtimes, like with a wand toy. This way, your cat feels as if he has caught his prey and is now enjoying the rewards of the hunt.

GROOM: After his meal, your cat will groom himself spotless. Cats do this to prevent predators from catching scent of their meal remnants. In nature, that could mean a predator can find them easier.

SLEEP: With energy spent from hunting, a full belly and freshly bathed, kitty can now go to sleep.