

Boo, hiss! I have a mean cat!

Human-directed aggression from cats can be a scary problem. Use these tips to understand your cat's aggressive behavior.

There are several types of aggression in cats and they are typically defined by the target of the aggression. Each type is managed differently and all aggression issues must first prioritize the safety of all concerned. Cats can be antagonistic to other cats, animals of other species and toward humans, their owners or strangers. Aggression toward humans is the most serious issue.

Human-directed aggression

Human-directed aggression is just what the name describes—a cat is acting hostile toward a human being. Because this issue involves the protection of a human being, it is the one that is the most important. This type of antagonism produces the most harm to the human-animal bond and can be the most hurtful, emotionally and physically. Because safety is at stake, involving your veterinarian is critical in these cases. There could be a medical cause for your cat's behavior and your veterinary team will be able to get to the bottom of it.

What can you do?

In the meantime, try to avoid situations that are likely to precipitate aggression from your cat. Never punish your cat physically, as this can either teach him to fear you or escalate a confrontation. Don't wait long before seeking help because early intervention is critical to avoid a long-term habit. If you see that aggression is developing, do something to startle the cat and redirect him without touching him. Sometimes making a sudden noise is enough to redirect aggression from your cat. Rattling a can with pebbles or crinkling a grocery bag might do the trick.

What will the veterinarian do?

Underlying reasons for your cat to lash out at you or a family member can be from pain—things like arthritis, dental disease or injury. There can even be chemical or hormonal causes of violent behavior, like hyperthyroidism. Your veterinarian will describe a plan of diagnostics and examination to rule out many common cat disorders that can lead to aggression and then formulate a plan to treat it.

Aggression is no fun for either of you. To address it, eliminate possible underlying diseases before you immediately assume that your cat has a behavior problem. Once the medical contributors are addressed, if the problem persists, there are behavior modification protocols and medications that can restore harmony to both of your lives.

