

## KEEP YOUR CAT INDOORS

Many of our rescue cats were discovered outside after having been abandoned or living the rough street life. These cats are ready to enjoy the rest of their lives in indoor comfort. Keeping your cat inside protects them from further dangers and trauma. Outdoor cats are subjected to the dangers of traffic, poisonous substances, injuries from other animals and cruelty from humans, and diseases. By allowing your adopted rescue cat to go outside, chances increase of them getting ill, attacked, or lost.

## BRING THE OUTDOORS, INDOORS

Here are some easy things you can do to help your cat thrive inside:

- Plant an indoor garden. Purchase or grow a cat-friendly garden for your cat. This can include cat grass, catnip, and non-toxic herbs like parsley, mint, and cat thyme. There are also safe plants like bamboo, Boston ferns, and spider plants.
- Set up window perches. Give your cat lots of perches near windows so they can keep an eye on outdoor activity. Cats love to watch birds and squirrels. Make sure window screens are secure to eliminate the possibility of your cat falling or pushing their way through the window.
- Engage in playtime. Drawing out your cat's natural hunting instincts through interactive play time helps keep their mind and body engaged in what they were built to do: hunt.

*Action Volunteers for Animals (AVA) is an all-volunteer-run charitable animal rescue dedicated to helping stray and feral animals live healthy and happy lives.*

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# Playtime for Cats



*The information provided here is designed to help you prepare and welcome your new feline companion into your home and life*

Playtime is a vital part of your cat's daily activities. Physical and mental exercise are essential to a cat's health and well being. Without positive ways to expend their energy in healthy and appropriate ways, cats may get bored and engage in destructive behaviour.

Playtime can be therapeutic for rescue cats in particular. Engaging in play helps build their confidence by tapping into their natural abilities and strengths. Cats take pride in catching their prey and can quickly forget their shyness when they are on the hunt. Playtime can also be the first-line solution to behaviour problems. If your cat is acting out, try structured play sessions to give them a healthy and positive outlet for their energy.

## TIPS FOR APPROPRIATE PLAY

Play will provide your cat with an opportunity to practice the hunting skills that it would normally need for survival. Cats are natural predators; they enjoy hunting, stalking and catching their prey.

Reward any progress your cat makes. A small treat can go a long way!

## PLAYTIME WITH GUARDIANS

Interactive playtime will give you a chance to bond with your cat and allows your cat an opportunity to practice its instinctual survival and hunting skills. For cats who aren't used to playtime yet, patience may be required.

- Engage in at least two, 10-minute interactive play sessions every day for adult cats. For kittens this time should be doubled since they have a lot of extra energy. Make playtime a routine in your house.
- Find a variety of wand toys, such as those that mimic birds and mice, and role play with your cat.
- Every cat has their own play style. Try a variety of movements to see what your cats responds to best—
  - Does your cat like feathers teased up high or mice teased close to the floor?
  - Are they more engaged when the toy moves fast or slow?
  - Do they perk up when something disappears around a corner or behind a pillow?
- Many cats respond better to toys just outside their reach that they can chase, rather than toys waved close to their face.

Much like humans, cats can get bored of the same toy. Have a variety of wand toys and rotate them so that your cat stays engaged.

For shy or timid cats, even watching (called "tracking") a toy's movements means the cat is mentally engaged. Keep at it! As long as you have their attention, you have the potential to move them forward. Start with lasers or wands with long handles to give them a comfortable distance from you to play. As they grow more confident, they may graduate to playing at a closer distance.

Some toys — any wand toys, feather or string toys, and toys with pieces that can be chewed or swallowed — should only be used under guardian supervision and put away after playtime.

## PLAYTIME WITHOUT GUARDIANS

When you're not at home, ensure your cat has sufficient activities to engage them. Make sure you rotate out toys, puzzles, and activities for your cat regularly so that they don't get bored. Variety is key!

### • Cat TV

Did you know that cats actually spend most of their time looking out the window when you're not home, rather than sleeping? They enjoy the mental exercise of watching birds, squirrels and other happenings going on outside. Place a cat tree or other perch by a window with a view to give them the full experience.

While we should all limit our screen time, there are great online nature videos of squirrels, birds and fish made specifically for cats.

### • Self-Play

Ensure you have a sufficient number of mice, crinkle balls, bouncy balls, plastic springs, and "kicker toys" that they can play with.

### • Foragers

Cats like puzzles! Buy or build a puzzle for your cat where they have to forage for food through an obstacle course of toys or other safe objects. You can place healthy treats, like freeze-dried meat, in the forager, or use the forager to feed them a portion of their dry food.

### • Other toys

Tunnels, "turbo chasers" and crinkle mats can offer a new and interesting form of stimulation.

## GUIDE TO INAPPROPRIATE PLAY

Sometimes cats develop bad play habits, through lack of proper training as a kitten or acting out of boredom. As their guardian, help your cat stay on a positive track to develop healthy play routines.

- Hands are not toys! While this can be cute when they are small, those tiny claws grow quickly. Discourage kittens and cats from playing with your hands or feet, and always immediately disengage. Redirect their energy to an appropriate toy.
- Always try to redirect any aggressive behaviour onto toys by dragging, dangling, or throwing a toy.
- If after attempts to discourage inappropriate play you feel that your cat is playing too roughly, simply stop the play and leave the room. You must be the one to leave and disengage. Be consistent.
- Never physically punish a cat. Cats do not learn through punishment. It only teaches your cat to fear you (or your hands, or the water bottle).

Positive reinforcement is key: after successful play sessions, reward your cat! This is the most effective way to change behaviour.

Remember — a cat that plays is a healthier and happier cat!