

Correct timing is essential when using positive reinforcement. The reward must occur immediately— within seconds—or your cat may not associate it with the proper action. For example, when your cat uses their scratching post, you can throw a piece of dry cat food for them to chase as a reward. Many cats enjoy chasing (hunting) their food and it's good exercise too. But if you throw the food when they have stopped scratching the post and is walking toward you, they will think they've been rewarded for coming to you.

Consistency is also an important element in training. Everyone in the family should reward the same desired behaviors.

Using Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement may include food treats, praise, petting, or a favorite toy or game. When your pet is first learning a new behavior, such as clawing the scratching post instead of your couch, they should be rewarded every time you catch them using their scratching post. You may even help shape their behavior of using the scratching post by spraying it with catnip (if they react positively to catnip) or enticing them with a toy that you dangle on the post. Taking your cat over to the scratching post, positioning their paws on the post, and raking them along the post to show them what they are supposed to do will likely have the opposite effect of encouraging them to use the post. They may interpret your actions as frightening and uncomfortable. It's important to look at the world from their point of view.

Once your cat reliably offers the desired behavior, you may reward them with treats intermittently, for example, three out of every four times they do the behavior. Then, over time, reward them about half the time, then about a third of the time, and so on, until you're only rewarding them occasionally with a treat. Continue to praise them every time. Your cat will learn that if they keep offering desired behaviors, eventually they will get what they want—your praise and an occasional treat. You won't be forever bound to carry a pocketful of goodies, but it's fun to surprise your cat from time to time.

The Pros and Cons of Punishment

Punishment can be verbal, postural, or physical and is meant to make your pet immediately associate something unpleasant when they do something you don't want them to do. The punishment makes it less likely that the behavior will occur again. To be effective, punishment must be delivered while your pet is engaged in the undesirable behavior—in other words, "caught in the act." If the punishment is delivered too late, even seconds later, your pet will not associate the punishment with the undesired behavior. The punishment will seem unpredictable to them.

Remember, cats do not act out of spite or revenge, and they don't have a moral sense of right and wrong. Never use physical punishment that involves discomfort or pain as this may cause them to bite, defend themselves, or resort to other undesirable behaviors. Holding your cat's neck skin and shaking them may result in a frightened cat who scratches or bites to defend themselves. And punishment might be associated with

other stimuli, including people, that are present at the time the punishment occurs. For example, a cat who is punished for getting too close to a new baby may become fearful of, or aggressive toward, that baby—or toward other babies. That's why physical punishment is not only bad for your cat, it's also bad for you and others.

Punishment delivered by you may erode your cat's trust and frighten them. That's why punishment is most effective when it does not come directly from you. For example, if your cat enjoys scratching the couch, you may apply special double-sided tape to those surfaces. Cats rarely like sticky paws.

Your cat will perceive the couch, instead of you, as delivering the punishment. In this way, too, your cat is more likely to avoid the undesirable behavior when you're not around. However, it is critical that while discouraging undesirable behaviors, you help your cat understand what you want them to do and provide appropriate outlets for their normal cat behaviors.

One of the reasons that cats are such fun companions is that when they're not sleeping, many of them enjoy playing. Playing helps your cat develop physically and behaviorally. Providing appropriate play outlets for your cat can reduce undesirable behaviors. Be sure your cat has safe toys to play with by themselves, and don't underestimate the power of playing with your cat to strengthen the bond between you and enhance the quality of life for both of you.

A Cat Years Calculator

How cats age: A FREE cat years calculator plus information of interest to cat lovers. Convert cat years to human years and vice-versa.

<http://www.calculatorcat.com/cats/cat-years.phtml>

About Cats: A Cat Years Calculator
www.calculatorcat.com

Converting between cat years and human years isn't as simple as using a factor of 7 (as some people erroneously think with dogs, and sometimes cats). The main reason is that cats mature quickly in the first couple of years of life. To convert cat age to an equivalent human age, an accepted method is to add 15 years for the first year of life. Then add 10 years for the second year of life. After that, add 4 years for every cat year. This means that by year two, a cat has matured to about the same as a 25 year old human. Follow the link above to utilize the calculator to calculate cat years.



Auburn Valley
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The Auburn Valley Humane Society is dedicated to providing shelter, quality care and love for all the lost, mistreated and abandoned animals in Auburn. AVHS utilizes all available resources to ensure each animal is placed into a loving and forever home and promotes responsible pet ownership through education and outreach.

Adapted from material originally developed by applied animal behaviorists at the Dumb Friends League, Denver, Colorado.
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**Positive
Reinforcement
Training
Your Cat**



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