

Multiple Cat Households

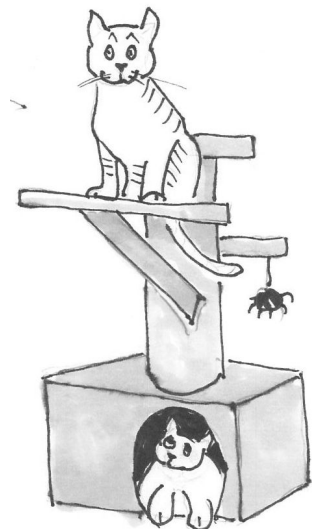
Has your multi-cat household devolved into an arena of squabbles, disagreements or full-blown cat fights? Does one of your cats hide and slink about, avoiding her housemates whenever she can? Does another cat act like she is walking on eggshells when moving about her home--ready to dart away at any moment? What is it that your cats are feeling that you don't know? What makes them act this way? Why can't they all just get along?

Some things to Consider:

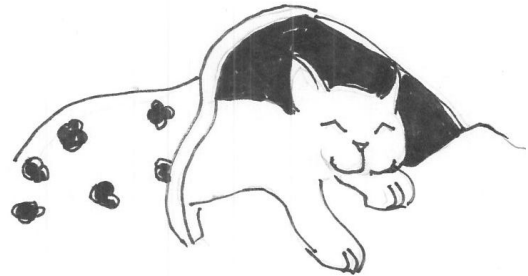
- Much like their ancestors, domestic cats are solitary, territorial hunters and hence are concerned about how much territory they have and having enough resources. Competition for shared resources can cause cats to be stressed, anxious or aggressive. They can and do live together when resources are plentiful --for example--feral cat colonies. As a feral cat though, they have plenty of space to avoid fighting, can expand their hunting territory at will and have the option to seek out new territory if not accepted into the colony. In your multiple cat household your cat has none of these options.
- Cats are both prey and predator. They need places to perch and hide.
- Multiple cat household guardians made the choice to bring new cats into the home, the cats did not make the choice themselves. If you do not properly introduce them using controlled gradual techniques, your chances at success are greatly reduced. Even if both cats have lived happily with other cats in the past, it is no guarantee that they will become fast friends.

What can you do to ease tension between cats?

- Veterinary visit - If you have two or more cats that have been getting along well for years and suddenly are not, make sure they are not coping with disease or pain.
- Increase available territory by adding multiple cat trees, cat shelving, window perches and additional resting spots. It is instinctive for cats to climb and perch. It is both a predatory behavior and a protective prey behavior in that they are able to scan their territory from above and it keeps them safe from everything below. Make these places as open ended as possible—a way to get up and a separate way to get down—with no dead ends, so they cannot be cornered.
- Increase shared resources by adding multiple resources dispersed throughout your home. Extra food and water dishes, litter boxes, sleeping areas and toys need to be separated and not grouped together side by side. Asking cats to compete for all of these things can cause intimidation and tension. The point of adding extra resources in separate areas is to limit the possibility that one cat is unable to access a resource because of another cat's presence, she will be able to go to another room to find an additional identical resource.
- Increase hiding spots. Although there generally are many great hiding spots for cats in your home (under beds, couches and chairs), if you have multiple cats it can help ease tensions by adding more. Make sure they are as open ended as possible with a way in and a separate way out.



- Use uncovered litter boxes. A covered litter box is a perfect place to ambush a cat. Inside the box the field of vision is limited and she has only one route of escape, the same way she came in. The same can be said if litter boxes are only in one room, one way in and one way out of that room can also be a perfect ambush site at the doorway.
- Add environmental enrichment to your home. See the handout on [Environmental Enrichment](#) or come to the [Feline Environment Enrichment](#) workshop.
- Individual interactive playtime and bonding time with you—make sure each cat in your household gets the amount of play and affection that meets her needs. Cats who are very bonded and get along together well may enjoy this time as a pair.
- Use Feliway MultiCat Diffusers. This will help take the edge off for cats who mostly get along and will enhance the steps you are taking. It generally will not solve multi-cat house tensions on its own.
- Make positive associations when cats are in the room together. Do not let cats practice unwanted behaviors such as staring, blocking, hissing and growling. Preempt the behavior so that the sight, sound and smell of the other household cat means something good is going to happen, treats, yummy food or playtime can be used as rewards. Clicker training can be a great tool if you have cats that are food motivated.
- In extreme cases veterinarians can provide anti-anxiety medications or supplements that can help calm the cats while you are working on behavior modification techniques and management of their home. Anti-anxiety medications alone do not solve the root problem and should only be given in tandem with behavior modification and management.
- In some cases, there are irreconcilable differences and the cats will need to either have separate territories in the home or be rehomed.



Seeing things from the cats' perspective and providing for their individual needs will go a long way in lessening tension in the multiple cat household. Most cats can learn to live in peace if you are willing to help them by applying these behavior modification and management skills.

Feline Resources:

We are here to help. Marin Humane's Behavior & Training department conducts various [cat workshops](#). Sign up on our Cat Behavior (MarinHumane.org/catclasses) page. We also have Cat Behavior Consultants who are available for private training or [consultations](#) (phone, online or in-home) at 415.506.6284 or CatBehavior@MarinHumane.org. More information about cat behavior is available on our website at MarinHumane.org/cathandouts.