



Blue Springs

# Animal Hospital & Pet Resort

"It's All About Caring"



## Play Aggression

The most common type of aggressive behavior that cats exhibit toward their owner is actually a form of play. Problems are likely to occur when a young cat or kitten is the only pet at home and the owner is away most of the day. Most kittens engage their peers in rough and tumble play. Anyone living with an active kitten can certainly sympathize with the cartoon character, Calvin, who is frequently the target of attacks by his feline friend, Hobbs. Damage from vigorous play attacks is usually minimal but may be serious if the owner has fragile skin, an immune-suppressive disorder, or if the play attack is directed toward the face. Less serious, but just as annoying, are those nighttime attacks. **Owners virtually offer themselves as sacrifices to these little beasts by playing with kittens in a way that encourages attacks toward hands and feet.**

**Teasing the pet with finger or dangling a foot for it to playfully attack are likely to lead the pet down the road of aggressive delinquency.** This is one of the few behavior problems for which a second pet might be recommended. A second cat of the same age and temperament will usually solve the problem by satisfying the pet's need for active play. It's very important that family members stop encouraging the behavior by engaging the cat in rough play. It's also crucial that the cat have an acceptable outlet for this normal behavior. All chase and attack behaviors should be directed away from people.

Play interaction with the cat should involve tossing or dangling toys for the cat to chase or catch. **Physical punishment, such as swatting the pet on the nose, should be avoided since this may cause the pet to become fearful and avoid family members.** It may even encourage some pets to become rougher with their play. A blast of air from a compressed air can, a water gun or an audible alarm may prove successful in discouraging the behavior.

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