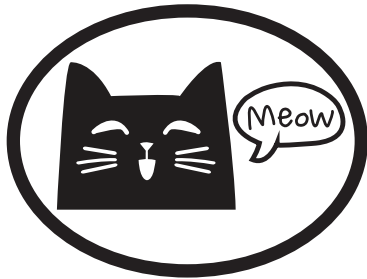


# Socialization and Reading Behaviors

A BASIC GUIDE TO DECODING YOUR CAT'S BEHAVIORS and  
UNDERSTANDING THE BEST WAY TO CONNECT AND COMMUNICATE

The love of a kitty that has been given a second chance is like no other. Sometimes we are lucky and they trust us right away, and other times we have to work to socialize them in order to build a strong bond. Both result in lasting friendships and lots of unconditional love! The socialization process starts with paying attention to all parts of your cat's verbal and non-verbal messages. These are seen and heard through your cat's body, posture, mood, and vocalizations - sent to us and to other animals. Practicing good observation and assessment techniques will connect you to the meaning that your cat is conveying. This offers direction on how to work with your kitty, and how THEY want to interact with you. This makes us better interspecies communicators. Through socialization and reading the cues our kitties give us, we prove to our kitties that we understand them, and that we can earn their trust and love.

## 1 VERBAL



Kitties have many different verbalizations! These cues can mean different things in different situations. They offer clues we can decode to better understand what they are communicating.

### HUMAN TO CAT:

- **TALK SOFTLY** - kitties respond well to this! Do your best baby-talk with your cat to show you offer a loving and nurturing environment.
- **PRAISE PHRASE** - Find an expression you can say in a soothing manner to use after a good encounter or when your cat shows positive reactions or behaviors. Try things like "good kitty". When said lovingly and softly, this reinforces your voice and you as a calming presence in their world.

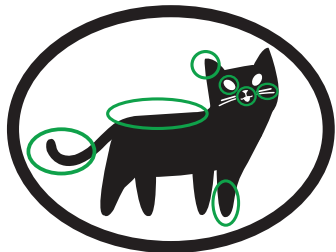
### CAT TO HUMAN and/or CAT TO CAT:

- **MEOWING** - Kittens meow to their mothers for attention. Some adult cats meow at their humans for the same attention-seeking reasons, because they need something from you. They may meow for food, playtime, attention, or access to a particular area.
- **PURRING** - This sound is made as a way to convey contentment, to self-soothe, or for attention. It occurs mostly when a cat is relaxed but cats also purr when they are stressed, sick or injured. A cat's purr falls in the 20-50 hertz range and extends up to 140 hertz. It is known to assist in bone growth, fracture healing, pain relief, muscle and tendon repair, shortness of breath, swelling reduction, and improved joint mobility!
- **CHIRRUPING** - This is a combination of a purr and a meow. Mother cats use this to greet their kittens, and adult cats use this to greet their humans.
- **CHATTERING** - This is when a cat clicks their teeth together rapidly, triggered by their predatory instincts.
- **YEOWLING** - This resembles a longer, extended meow, howl or moan. Female cats in heat yowl to attract males, and all cats yowl to show discomfort.
- **HISSING and SPITTING** - These are involuntary responses to stressors and show agitation.
- **GROWLING and SNARLING** - These are low-frequency, long vocalizations. A snarl is more intense, emphatic, higher-pitched growl. These show extreme agitation and signal aggression.

# Socialization and Reading Behaviors

A BASIC GUIDE TO DECODING YOUR CAT'S BEHAVIORS and UNDERSTANDING HOW THEY ARE FEELING

## 2 NON-VERBAL



Kitties can communicate many different feelings through their eyes, ears, nose, whiskers, and touch. Read below on awesome kitty sensory superpowers!

**EYES** - Cats rely on sight to survey their territory and have superior distance vision. Cats have a 200° field of vision and peripheral vision up to 30°. Dusk and dawn are like daylight for a cat. At night a cat can dilate its pupil up to 3x larger than ours to allow more light to reach the retina. Cats also have a layer behind their eye (called the tapetum lucidum) that reflects light back into their sight path at night making their eyes glow! Be aware that a lockstare with a cat is a direct sign to a cat that you do not trust them – predators do this to stalk their prey. So don't be a stalker! A cat will blink if they trust you. You may receive a "slow blink" -- a cat's way of saying they trust you and have nothing to fear. They appreciate this behavior back. If you approach a cat and they are wide-eyed, bow your head and close your eyes. Gently raise your gaze with a slow blink. Repeat this to create a non-threatening impression.

**EARS** - Cats have 32 muscles to control their ears -- humans have 6. Cats do a lot of ear communication. Ears held to the side or pinned back signify fear or aggression. Ears perked forward show curiosity, allowing them to receive information about their surroundings. If a cat is swiveling one or both ears, they are using them like radar to collect information on noises they hear in that direction.

**NOSE, WHISKERS, and TOUCH** - cats have 200 million olfactory cells -- humans only have ½ that! Cats have a Jacobson's organ which allows them to intake greater amounts of olfactory inputs. So, if your kitty's nose is twitching wildly and they open their mouth for a few seconds while breathing in deeply, those are signs they are curious and want to investigate. When approaching a shy cat, a bent knuckle is very similar to a nose of another cat, and they often recognize this as a sign to sniff and rub in order to assess and mark you. Cats have scent glands on their foreheads, cheeks, chin, lips, and front paws. They use these to deposit their pheromones that mark their territory. So when a kitty gives you head-butts, rubs your legs, scratches a post, or caresses you with his cheek, he's depositing his scent and marking you as "safe". You can also use sprays like Feliway to mimic a cat's own pheromones. You can also rub a small drop of wet food on your knuckle and let kitty sniff you and smell yummy food and neutralize your scent. A kitty's whiskers also take in many different sensory readings as well as convey their different moods. Whiskers are strategically located above the eyes, on the chin, on the forelegs, near the ears, and above the upper lip. Whiskers are more sensitive than regular hairs because the follicles from which they originate are packed with blood vessels and nerves, similar to a human's fingertips. Cats have special sensory organs called proprioceptors at their whiskers' ends. The proprioceptors send messages to the brain regarding the position of the body and limbs to keep the cat aware of what every part of his body is doing. This is part of why cats always land on their feet! Whiskers are reliable touch sensors, so almost 40% of the brain's sensory area aligns with parts of the body that have whiskers. Each individual whisker can be traced back to a specific spot in the brain, which means that whiskers occupy valuable neurological real estate in the feline body. When a cat is resting and content, the whiskers take a break. But when a cat is active, so are their whiskers! Whiskers show emotions of calm at rest and whiskers forward show signs of threats. Whiskers help cats "see" things that lie right under their noses by constantly sending information to the brain. Whiskers can detect very faint vibrations caused by these changes in air currents and act like radar detectors. Whiskers can alert a cat to the presence of prey, potential enemies, or the location of their community.

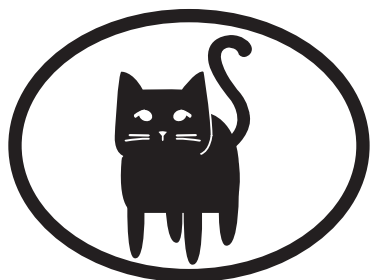
# Socialization and Reading Behaviors

A BASIC GUIDE TO DECODING YOUR CAT'S BEHAVIORS and UNDERSTANDING HOW THEY ARE FEELING

Being aware of a cat's verbal and non-verbal cues lays a solid foundation to better understanding their emotions and how they are feeling. Taking this further, we can read a cat's body language and expressions to make assessments of their emotional states.

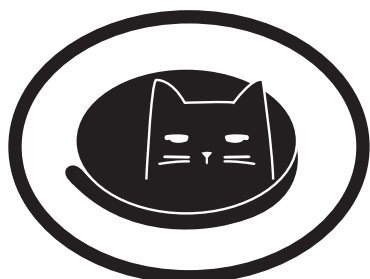
When we understand their emotional state, we are better able to work on socialization and create action plans that support their physical and emotional well being.

## 3 BODY LANGUAGE



### AFFILIATIVE - relaxed / friendly / playful

- Occasional blinking / "slow blink"
- Ears up
- Lying on side
- Playful pouncing or creeping as if to ambush a toy
- Tail up, usually a ? shape
- Stretching, rolling, pawing during approach - inviting interaction
- Head-butting and allorubbing



### NEUTRAL - observation / relaxed

- Either standing or lying down
- paws tucked under the body
- Neutral or partially dilated pupils
- Tail curled to the side of the body



### ANTAGONISTIC - fearful / offensive / defensive

- Arched back, hair raised
- Low, crouched or weight forward position
- bottle brush tail
- ears pinned to head
- licking their nose or lips
- whiskers forward
- dilated pupils
- direct eye contact, following you with their eyes
- unbroken staring

# Socialization and Reading Behaviors

A BASIC GUIDE TO DECODING YOUR CAT'S BEHAVIORS and  
UNDERSTANDING HOW THEY ARE FEELING

To summarize - a cat's communication through body language is categorized into three groups:

- **AFFILIATIVE** - kitty wants to be nearer to you
- **NEUTRAL** - kitty doesn't want to be further or closer to you
- **ANTAGONISTIC** - kitty wants to be farther away from you

## 4 APPROACH

Now that we understand the basics of a cat's body language and communication, it's time to think about how to approach her and build trust. To start approach, first determine if there are motivators or barriers from past experiences.

### **MOTIVATORS and REWARD:**

Food is a motivator for most cats so this is a great place to start building trust. They consider food rewarding. A delicious crunchy morsel or a wet food treat is a proven way to show your cat that you bring them awesome things. Other motivators and rewards can be attention and petting, play with humans, timed feeding, or gently spoken words. When kitty starts to exhibit desired behaviors such as allowing a pet, reinforce this by offering a reward. When kitty does not respond well to an approach or counter-conditioning, you must take away a reward - like leaving the room and not giving kitty any more attention or treats. Desired behaviors become more prevalent and unwanted behaviors minimize by using these techniques.

### **BARRIERS:**

Things that may repel a cat are loud noises, a quick approach, or raised arms. You can desensitize your cat to barrier stimuli by gingerly doing these, but also adding a reward to your movements. If kitty shows signs of anxiety, stop what you are doing and back up. Kitty will feel less threatened. Talk softly to them. Hearing a soothing voice will start to show her you bring a sense of calm. You can also take a break, try a new approach or reward, or simply stop. The key is to know when kitty is done. Even a few minutes of positive interaction builds trust. Lastly, when working with a cat that has not been well socialized, don't be discouraged if reactions or behaviors worsen before they get better. That is quite common. Remember to engage on their terms first. Until they recognize you as a good part of their world, you can't force them to change behavior. This is the biggest mistake in socializing cats - to mandate encounters that a cat is not ready to accept. If you understand how THEY want to interact with you, a strong bond will form.

Having patience and empathy will earn your kitty's trust and love!