

CREATING HARMONY IN MULTIPLE CAT HOMES

The domestic cat is a social animal; however, not all cats will get along well together when there are multiple cats in restricted spaces. These techniques help promote harmony. Serious aggression needs a more comprehensive treatment plan.

Resources:

■ Resources should be plentiful and dispersed throughout the environment.

Critical Resources include:

- _ Litter boxes (See the handout Litter Box Tips for more information.)
- _ Feeding and water stations
- _ Scratching posts/pads
- _ Resting perches at different vertical heights

■ Single cat-sized resting perches at different vertical heights throughout the home significantly expand the usable space.

■ Resting perches should be just big enough to accommodate one cat comfortably; larger spaces may allow for confrontations.

■ Avoid creating spaces where a cat can trap another cat easily; offer more than one exit route from an area/resource site.

■ Catnip toys can arouse certain cats into a highly reactive/aggressive state. If this occurs, the toys should be removed from the environment.

Techniques to prevent/diffuse tension:

■ Cats with high play drives often bother more sedate/elderly cats. Owners should channel this excess playful energy onto appropriate toys in short owner-initiated play sessions daily.

■ Cats who harass other cats in the house should be fitted with a cat-safe collar with bells to provide an advance warning system to other cats.

■ Daily short-term segregation of cats may provide restful periods; all cats should have access to a litter box and water at all times.

■ Blocking eye contact between two cats caught in a stare down can readily diffuse a tense situation—hold up an inanimate object (pillow cushion, paper) between the cats. When tension is reduced, the cats can be independently redirected onto another activity (e.g., play with a toy) or safely segregated.

■ The synthetic pheromone, Feliway, may help reduce overall tension in multiple cat homes.

■ Transfer of scent from one cat to another may help create an affiliation or familiarity between cats. This scent transfer may occur passively as the cats come in contact with the same inanimate objects or may occur actively as the cats rub or groom each other. Humans can augment this scent transfer by petting cats with a common towel/rag/glove on a daily basis.