



BEHAVIOR  
SERIES

# Reducing Your Cat's Fearful Behavior

**F**IGHT, FLEE, OR FREEZE. No, it isn't the latest game show sweeping the nation. Instead, these three "f's" describe the ways that cats usually respond to objects, persons, or situations they perceive as a threat.

It's normal for you to want to help and comfort your cat when she's frightened. However, that isn't necessarily the best thing to do from your cat's point of view. It's normal for a cat to feel insecure or frightened in a new environment. Often, your new cat will hide for a day or two when you first bring her home. Sometimes a traumatic experience—such as taking her for a car ride to the veterinarian or introducing a new animal into the home—can disrupt her routine and send her under the bed for a few days.

Each cat has her preferred way of dealing with a crisis. You'll notice that your cat probably tends to try one option first, and if that doesn't work, she's forced to try a different option. For instance, if your cat is afraid of dogs and a friend brings his dog to your home to visit, your cat puffs out her fur to make herself look big, then hisses and spits at the dog. If the dog doesn't retreat, your cat may flee the situation, find a hiding spot, and freeze until she deems the situation safe.

Your cat may show the following behaviors when she is fearful:

- Fleeing
- Hiding

- Aggression (which includes spitting, hissing, growling, swatting, biting, scratching, puffing fur and tail, arching back, swishing tail, and flattening ears)
- Loss of control over bladder or bowels
- Freezing

Although some fearful behaviors are acceptable, overly anxious or fearful cats may need help from you in the form of training, patience, and love.

## What Causes Fearful Behavior?

You'll need to observe your cat closely to determine the trigger for her fearful behavior. Keep in mind that just because you know that the person or animal approaching your cat has good intentions doesn't mean your cat shares the same view. The trigger for her fearful behavior could be anything. Some common triggers are:

- A particular person
- A stranger
- Another animal
- A child
- Loud noises

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