



BEHAVIOR  
SERIES

# Solving Aggression Between Family Cats

**I**F THE BATTLES between your feline family members are anything like the struggle between Cain and Abel, there are a few things you can do to prevent the “sibling rivalry” from reaching biblical proportions. Of course, it’s almost impossible to guess how well any particular pair or group of cats will ultimately tolerate each other: Some unusually territorial cats may never adjust to sharing their house and may do best in a one-cat family. But many aggression problems between cats can be successfully resolved, even if the two don’t end up best friends when all is said and done. You’ll need to commit time and effort to solve aggression problems between cats—don’t give up without consulting the appropriate experts.

## Common Types of Aggressive Behaviors Between Cats

### Territorial Aggression

Territorial aggression occurs when a cat feels that his territory has been invaded by an intruder. Cats are very territorial—much more so than dogs—and female cats can be just as territorial as males. The behavior patterns in this type of aggression include chasing and ambushing the intruder, as well as hissing and swatting when contact occurs. Territorial problems often occur when a new cat is brought into a household, when a young kitten reaches maturity, or when a cat sees or encounters neighborhood cats outside. It’s not uncommon for a cat to be territorially aggressive toward one cat in a family yet friendly and tolerant to another.

### Inter-Male Aggression

Adult male cats normally tend to threaten and sometimes fight with other males. These behaviors can occur as sexual challenges over a female or to achieve a relatively high position in the cats’ loosely organized social hierarchy. This type of aggression involves much ritualized body posturing, stalking, staring, yowling, and howling. Attacks are usually avoided if one cat “backs down” and

walks away. If an attack occurs, the attacker will usually jump forward, directing a bite to the nape of the neck, while the opponent falls to the ground on his back and attempts to bite and scratch the attacker’s belly with his hind legs. The cats may roll around biting and screaming, suddenly stop, resume posturing, fight again, or walk away. Cats don’t often injure one another this way, but you should always check for puncture wounds, which are prone to infection. Neutered males are much less likely to fight in this way—yet another great reason for having your animal sterilized.

### Defensive Aggression

Defensive aggression occurs when a cat is attempting to protect himself from an attack he believes he cannot escape. This can occur in response to punishment or the threat of punishment from a person, an attack or attempted attack from another cat, or any incident that makes the animal feel threatened or afraid. Defensive postures include crouching with the legs pulled in under the body, laying the ears back, tucking the tail, and rolling slightly to the side. These responses are not the same as the submissive postures dogs show because they’re not intended to “turn off” an attack from another cat. Continuing to approach a cat in this posture is likely to precipitate an attack.

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Beartooth Humane Alliance  
PO Box 853  
Red Lodge, MT 59068  
(406)672-6960  
[info@beartoothhumane.org](mailto:info@beartoothhumane.org)  
[www.beartoothhumane.org](http://www.beartoothhumane.org)