

Appendix 3

Reducing Resource Competition in a Multi-cat Household

Conflict between cats that live in the same house is most often due to competition for important resources, such as food, water, resting places and even litter trays. How we provide and locate these resources can help greatly to minimize competition and reduce the risk of fighting and other conflict behaviours.

Food

Feed household cats separately with a good distance between their food dishes

Unlike dogs and humans who are affiliative hunters and food gatherers, cats are solitary self-reliant predators. In other words, each individual cat hunts only to provide food for itself, the exception being a mother cat with kittens. This also means that cats do not share their food and will choose to eat at a distance from other cats, who could potentially steal a highly valued and, for a wild or feral cat, hard-won meal.

If food dishes are placed close to each other or the cats are expected to eat from a single dish, they then will have no other option than to eat side-by-side, giving the false impression that they are happy to do so, but in fact this situation is a common cause of stress and increased antagonism in multi-cat households.

Provide extra feeding areas

It is common to provide just one food bowl for each cat, or possibly just one extra if the cats eat both wet and dry food. However, a wild or feral cat will prefer to use a few different hunting and eating locations, which not only increases the prospect of a successful hunt but also decreases the chances of conflict with a rival.

If food dishes or other important resources are located only in one area of the house it is not uncommon for one cat to sit in a doorway or corridor leading to that area and ‘block’ the other cats’ access to the resource, creating a conflict situation between them.

It is therefore advisable to provide extra food dishes, or puzzle feeders, in more than one area of the house.

Water

Provide water dishes in various locations away from food dishes

Water is another valuable resource so a sufficient number of water dishes needs to be provided. Some cats can be reluctant to drink near their food so it can be better that water is located at a distance away from food dishes. Some cats also prefer to drink running water so provision of at least one water fountain can therefore also be a good idea.

Resting Places

Provide ample, comfortable resting places at various levels

Cats that are closely bonded will usually sleep and rest in very close contact with each other. Cats that are not closely bonded may also sleep or rest on the same item of furniture but it is more likely to be a preference for the location rather than a desire to be near each other that draws them there. If warm, comfortable resting places are in limited supply this can force cats that are not closely bonded into unwanted close contact, which can lower their tolerance of each other and result in conflict.

Litter Trays

Provide at least one litter tray per cat plus one extra, with each tray in a separate location

A toilet might not appear to us to be something worth fighting over but it is a very important resource for cats. Many cats do not like to share litter trays and it is often the case that a cat will prefer one area to urinate and a separate area to defecate. Insufficient provision of litter trays, or litter trays placed too close together, can be a common cause of conflict between cats as well as house-training issues.

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