

## People and the Cats that Bite Them

**Behavior learned in kittenhood may explain these cats' biting habits.**

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Q. My cat just turned 2 and when I pet him or pick him up when he's asleep, he grabs my hand and nips at me. What should I do?

Q. My 1 12-year-old female tabby has been very moody ever since last summer when she spent a week at my sisters house. When I try to pet her she bites my hand. She also growls and hisses. I try to teach her not to do it by pulling my hand away, but she still tries to get it. How can I teach her not to do these things?

Q. Our 2-year-old female Burmese is very sweet. However, on several occasions she has turned and bitten our hands while being petted. She seems to do this most when on her climbing tree or in bed. We pet her a lot at these times. Are we over stimulating her? How can we fix this problem?

A. The first step in addressing cats that bite is to recognize the pattern. The cats described in these letters are 1 12 to 2 years of age and bite when being pet. We don't know if the cats did this from kittenhood. If so, the cats probably learned to play too roughly. This is a common situation in cats that are hand-reared, orphaned early in life or exposed to rough play with humans at an early age.

Each letter identifies triggers associated with the biting. The triggers include continued petting and disturbing the cat when it is asleep. The cats are not the initiators in any of these situations, nor do they control the situations.

Finally, notice that in at least one case, the cat begins to hiss and growl as the behavior progresses. Enhanced arousal, especially when control over the stimuli or freedom to avoid it are absent, becomes upsetting and makes the cat more reactive.

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