

## Play-Attacks May Lead to Aggressive Behavior

**A kitten may playfully attack her owners because she missed social interaction with her littermates.**

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Q. My daughter has a precious kitten that she bottle-fed since birth. Our concern is that the kitten attacks us whenever we walk past. How can we break this little one from the play-attack behavior?

A. Although the general term for this behavior is aggression, many factors can trigger aggression in cats, so determining an exact diagnosis will play an important role in curbing the behavior. I can give you some general tips on how to curb play-aggression, but if the kitten's behavior continues or escalates, consult a boarded behaviorist who can collect a complete history to make a diagnosis and institute a behavioral treatment plan.

Because this kitten was hand-raised, she missed the socialization that occurs between parents and their offspring, and between the siblings as they grow up together. This socialization teaches most cats what constitutes appropriate play-behavior. You must start training the kitten proper etiquette immediately. Do not play with her using your hands. Initiate regular playtimes throughout the day using multiple toys, such as a pole toy, in each session until she is satisfied. End each session with an alternative outlet, such as a food toy or treats, to direct the cat's attention away from you.

Also, keep spray bottles around your home and spritz the cat with water immediately if she shows any negative behavior. Many people can tell just before an attack occurs by the cat's body language. A spritz before the actual incident occurs can be very effective. You also need to reward the cat with a treat when she is being good and acting calm, to help reinforce positive behavior.