

Cats on the Couch: Tame an Aggressive Cat

An aggressive cat unleashes his energy on a person with a slight fear of cats. Will a new cat companion help tame him?

Carole Wilbourn

Posted: Thu Mar 22 00:00:00 PST 2001

Roscoe terrified Chrissy to the point of chasing her around the house and biting her on the leg. Marla, Chrissy's sister, asked me to help resolve their situation. Marla rescued Roscoe from a neighbor who abandoned him. At that time he was a scrawny kitten. Two years later, he was robust and a somewhat tough cat. Roscoe's aggression was never a problem before. If he became too rough, Marla distracted him with toys or sharply said, "No," and clapped her hands.

As much as Marla was an ailurophile (a cat lover), Chrissy was somewhat of an ailurophobe (someone who fears cats). Roscoe's dynamic demeanor frightened her, plus she had a physical problem that added to her discomfort. Chrissy moved in several months before our meeting, and needed to stay with Marla for an extended period until her health improved. Marla loved her sister but she also loved Roscoe, and she wanted to do what was best for both.

It was hard for Chrissy to avoid Roscoe in the three-room apartment. I explained to Chrissy that Roscoe picked up on her fear, which triggered his aggressive behavior. Her body language provoked him. "But this hasn't happened with other cats," Chrissy said.

"Perhaps, but you live with Roscoe," Marla replied.

A young, single cat, Roscoe didn't have an outlet for his high energy. His abandonment as a kitten probably added to his anxiety. Chrissy's fear turned his play into aggression. She became his tension target. I recommended adopting another cat so Roscoe could channel his energy into healthy play. This would relieve his single cat syndrome. The new cat had to be young, neutered or spayed and one preferring cats to people. Such a cat would bond immediately with Roscoe and relieve his frustrations. Chrissy would not have to worry about yet another enemy because Roscoe would capture the newcomer's interest. Consequently, Chrissy could relax more as Roscoe directed his attention to his new companion.

I told them to keep the new cat in a large comfortable carrier so the two cats could view each other and interact without physical contact. After they appeared to tolerate each other, Marla could open the kennel door so the new cat could emerge at will. This process would probably take a few weeks and then she could remove the carrier.