

Visiting Cat Picks a Fight

A feline behavior expert explains why a visiting cat wants to fight with resident cats.

Pam Johnson-Bennett

Q: I am watching Ashley, my inlaws' cat, for two weeks. This is the third time this year we have watched her. She has been here over a week. I have two cats of my own. All the cats come from the same cattery. I give Ashley her own sanctuary suite each time she visits and introduce her to my cats slowly. During past visits she has been very timid with us but friendly with the cats. This time Ashley has been very friendly and relaxed with us, but has picked fights with my cats after peaceful reintroductions earlier this week. Why would she not get along with my cats now, after being fine with them before and getting along all week?

Feline behaviorist Pam Johnson-Bennett, author of *Think Like a Cat*, says:

Although things have gone well in the past, Ashley may be trying to establish some territory now that she is familiar with the environment. At first, she was trying to get the lay of the land. And your kitties were assuming things were as they had been previously so they had no reason to think Ashley would become assertive. Once she got familiar again with the environment, she may have started trying to claim areas that Kisa and Shya own.

The fact that you told me Ashley was friendlier to you than during previous visits, also leads me to believe that it's not unusual for her to react negatively to your kitties. When she wasn't sociable to the humans, she probably found more comfort in bonding with your cats but now she has more "to lose" by having competition around.

Even though you did a terrific job in socializing the cats, it's not uncommon for there to be trouble during such a relatively short visit. I think you would be better off to keep her separated from your kitties so this visit doesn't impact negatively on Kisa and Shya. You certainly don't want them to start reacting negatively toward each other.

I'm sorry this visit wasn't as positive as previous ones. You didn't mention Ashley's age but if she's between 2-4, then social maturity may be kicking in as well.

Best,
Pam Johnson-Bennett, CABC
IAABC-Certified Animal Behavior Consultant

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