

Profile of a Spoiled Cat

Are you encouraging your cat's bad behavior? Learn how to avoid spoiling your cat.

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Pavlov was excited when his owner, Judy, came home from work. He sat by Judy as she typed some important data into her computer. Before she could save her data, Pavlov walked across the function keys crashing the computer. Judy was angry: "You spoiled rotten animal, this is how you repay me!"

Judy reinforced Pavlov's behavior by allowing the cat to walk on her desk at any time. Had she set guidelines as to where her cat was allowed, this may not have happened and Judy wouldn't have lost her temper and data.

When cat owners reinforce the "cats own us" myth, everything we do seems to be in accordance with feline wishes, which takes a step in spoiling the cat in a negative way.

"Allowing cats to walk across your computer any time is only problematic if it's an issue to you. You have to realize there are consequences," said Vint Virga, DVM, a veterinary behaviorist at Ocean State Veterinary Specialists in Providence, R.I. "If your cat is waking you up to be fed early in the morning and you get up to feed her, you're encouraging that behavior."

Teaching Right and Wrong Just as children become spoiled from parental neglect, cats will misbehave without human interaction. "You can't cast children or cats off as inconveniences," said Judah Battista, co-manager of the cat clinic at Best Friends Animal Society in Kanab, Utah. "A lot of cat-spoiling comes from our guilt of being away at work all the time. They'll do annoying things because they're bored. A pet owner needs to think about how much time and energy to put into the relationship."

When people understand the childlike personality of cats, they're apt to draw standards for how they'll improve behavior," said Karen Overall, VMD, an animal behaviorist at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine in Philadelphia.

"If they're jumping on a counter and you don't approve, don't feed them on the counter." Overall said. "It's not cute when they're eating from the garbage. They're showing what they can do, so meet their needs and help them exhibit those skills in an arena that's not injurious."