

Frolicking or Fighting?

What looks like fighting may actually be social play. These six guidelines can help you distinguish between the two.

Posted: Wed Nov 20 00:00:00 PST 2002

It is not always possible to distinguish playing from fighting between cats. You may need to observe the cats' behaviors before and after such a bout to determine if it was play. The following guidelines can serve as a general guide.

1. Play is relatively quiet compared to fighting. Although cats may hiss briefly or make other sounds during play, the loud wailing and howling heard in serious fights are generally absent.
2. Play does not usually result in injury. If it does, it is usually minor and does not occur consistently. Fights often result in injury to one or both cats.
3. After a play bout, neither cat seems to be much afraid of the other. If the play gets relatively rough, fearful behavior may occur, but isn't long lasting. Avoidance behavior more commonly occurs after a fight.
4. Play appears more mutual and flexible. In a fight, there's usually an offensive and a defensive cat. These roles shift during play.
5. Cats that frequently play together also show friendly behaviors, such as resting near one another. Cats that fight frequently show fewer, if any, friendly behaviors.
6. Play is usually initiated by either cat. When cats fight, one usually initiates it, and the other just reacts.