

Cat Hates Men

CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, explains how to make a female cat more comfortable around men.

By Marilyn Krieger

Posted: July 25, 2008 2 a.m. EDT

Q: My female cat has a strange reaction to men. When a man comes into the house she hisses, growls and paces in front of him. I've never had a cat react like this. Could it be that she was raised in a home with only females? Can it be corrected?

A: Wouldn't it be wonderful if cats could tell us how they were treated in their previous homes? It sure would be grand if they could provide details about the other animals and the environments they used to live in. Unfortunately, usually we can only guess, basing our assessments on the behaviors we witness. Sometimes we can glean little hints from shelter workers, veterinarians, neighbors and others who might have known the cats in their previous situations.

In addition to the unknown past, there might be other factors that are influencing your cat's attitude toward men. Possibly, your kitty is resource guarding or being overly possessive of you. Or, there might be other events that are triggering her cranky responses.

Despite not knowing the initial triggers for your cat's male-bashing attitude, the behavior can be modified. You will need to recruit at least one male friend or neighbor who loves cats, is patient and is willing to help your cat feel safe and secure around men.

Arm your friend with treats that your cat loves. Ask him to come in, sit down and engage you in conversation. You both need to ignore your cat if she's hissing, pacing and growling. After she stops the display, your friend should nonchalantly toss a treat to her. It is very important that your cat does not receive a treat if she displays aggressive or anxious behaviors. She should be tossed a treat only when she's calm. The goal is for your cat to see your male friend as someone who provides good things.

Your friend shouldn't approach or try to pick up your cat. His job is to sit and talk with you, occasionally tossing a small treat in your cat's direction, without looking directly at her. If your friend happens to be visiting around your cat's dinner time, ask him to give your cat her dinner. If possible, your friend should come over multiple times during the week so your cat can become accustomed to him.

When your cat isn't acting aggressively toward your friend anymore, he can make the move to formally greet her by extending his finger toward her at cat-nose level. If she is ready to say hello, she will come over, touch his finger with her nose, then her mouth and finally move her head so that she can rub his finger with her cheek. After the formal greeting, your friend can gently pet her head, chin, cheek and neck.