

Cat Tries to Drum Up Attention

CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, offers advice for taming a wannabe rock star cat.

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Q: Our cat pounds on anything — mostly doors — all night long. It isn't a scratching behavior. She is making noise. She uses her paws to bang on walls and doors, and she even pounds on garbage cans so that they fall over. It keeps us up all night, and we don't know what to do.

We tried isolating her, but this seems to make it worse. She is a very aggressive cat with a not-so-warm personality. She has been that way since she was a kitten. She has calm, loving environment, but often lashes out in aggression. However, I do not think the pounding is aggressive. It seems as if she is saying, "I am here. Pay attention!" Please help. We can't take it anymore!

A: From your description, it sounds like your wannabe rock star is craving attention and interaction from her favorite people. This annoying behavior can be stopped through a few actions and one non-action from you.

Every night before bed play with your cat, using a fishing pole toy. The play should imitate the hunt. Pretend that the animal at the end of the toy is a wounded animal. Encourage your kitty to chase the toy by pulling it into bags, under sofas, into and over boxes and other objects.

When you are ready to stop playing with her, don't immediately stop the action, instead slow down the play activity gradually. Remember that you're imitating the hunt, and the animal at the end of the fishing pole toy allegedly is wounded and tired. Finally, after slowing the action down, let your cat catch the toy one last time. Then immediately feed her. She will eat, groom and then go to sleep. Please make sure to put the toy out of your cat's reach when you're not playing with her. You don't want her to get tangled up in it.

Providing her with treat balls at night that are filled with her favorite dry food or treat also will help alleviate the nighttime banging. Treat balls are hollow plastic balls that can be filled with treats or regular dry food. In order to eat the delicious treats, your cat will have to roll it around so that the food falls out of the holes. You may have to show her how it works at first.

Interactive toys such as puzzle boxes and turbo scratchers can keep her busy during the night. Tall cat trees also can provide entertainment for her.

The hardest part of stopping this behavior is not reinforcing it by reacting to it. Picking her up, yelling at her and other reactive activities play into her plan of interacting with you, her favorite human. Do your best to ignore her noise-making activities.

The combination of proper play, environmental enrichment, treat balls and not reinforcing the behavior will eventually extinguish the behavior. Don't expect it to happen over night. It takes times for all of us animals to break bad habits.