

How Can I Stop My Kitten's Early-Morning Activity?

CatChannel expert Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, has some ideas to modify kitty's behavior.

By Marilyn Krieger

Posted Dec. 26, 2008, 3 a.m. EST

Q: I have a 7-month-old female kitten who starts attacking my bedroom curtains every morning around 4 a.m. She knows she is not supposed to do this because as soon as I sit up she runs off. She always comes back five minutes later. This will go on until about 6 a.m. She's been doing this since she was about 3 months old. We have tried spraying her with water, but she'll run off and then come back five minutes later. We tried locking her out of the bedroom but she will cry and wake up everyone in the house. We tried putting her in the garage and locking the cat door. After she head-butted the cat door and clawed and meowed for more than an hour I let her back in. I was afraid she was going to give herself a concussion. We then used Velcro to attach a pillow over the cat door. We did that so that we wouldn't hear her hitting the door and she wouldn't get hurt. She figured out how to pull the pillow off. So now we are back to square one. How can I break her of this?

A: Cats by instinct are crepuscular, active at dawn and dusk. Dawn and dusk were the ideal times for our cats' ancestors to find prey quaffing their thirsts at the local watering holes. This instinct lives on in our domestic house cats. The good news is that the behavior can be channeled and modified to fit into our diurnal lifestyles.

Instead of leaving food in a bowl at night for your little huntress, make her work for her nighttime meals. If you feed her dry food, put it in treat balls. In order for her to access the food, she will have to roll the ball around until the food falls out the holes. Also, you may want to consider investing in a timed feeder that will allow your kitten access to small amounts of food multiple times during the night.

Your kitten is also a little energy machine. She wants to play and interact with her favorite human, regardless of the time of day or night. Be careful that you don't unconsciously reinforce her untimely behaviors by interacting with her while she is in demand mode. Instead provide her with other fun activities such as interactive toys, tall cat trees and pre-bedtime play.

Before going to bed every night, use a fishing pole toy to play with your kitten in a manner that imitates the hunt. Move the toy in such a way that the stuffed animal on the end of the pole behaves as if it is wounded. Have the fishing pole toy speed up, slow down and jump under the couch and into bags. When it's time to stop playing, slow the toy action down, imitating a wounded, tired animal who is on the verge of dying. Finally, let your kitten catch the toy for the final time and then immediately feed her something delicious. She will eat, groom and go to sleep. To find out more about this effective method of play/hunt imitation, check out Pam Johnson-Bennett's book "Think Like a Cat."

Patience and the combination of these activities will gradually modify your kitten's early-morning activities. Don't expect an instant change; instead expect to see the unappreciated behavior decreasing in frequency over time and finally stopping.