

My Cat Has Become Aggressive After Attack

CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger discusses redirected aggression and what to do about it.

By Marilyn Krieger

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Q: Our 4-year-old cat was briefly attacked by a stray cat in our yard this weekend. She was unharmed, but immediately became very aggressive toward us and especially our 11-year-old son. Since then she has calmed down but she still becomes very aggressive toward our son. I had her checked out by the vet yesterday and she appears fine physically. The vet recommended isolating her for a few days but she is very miserable being locked up in the bathroom. However, I can't really release her into the house as she keeps attacking my son. Do you have any advice?

A: Sometimes cats react to stress or altercations by becoming aggressive with another animal or human who happens to be nearby. The unhappy victim of the cat's aggression isn't the cause of the original altercation but just happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. This is called redirected aggression. Unfortunately your son, and to a lesser extent, you, became the recipient of your cat's angst with the stray.

You can help your cat calm down by putting her in a quiet, comfortable room that has everything a cat would want, including food, water, cat boxes, her favorite toys and her bed. Darken the room by closing curtains or shades. Additionally, provide her with a couple of paper bags without handles, or boxes placed on their sides, for her to retreat in. She should be left alone during her cooling off period. Depending on the situation, it could take hours or a few days until she's back to her usual sweet self.

After the cat has cooled off, she can be let out of her room. Your son can start winning back her affections by tossing favorite treats to her when they both are in the same room together. He should not try to pick her up or approach her to pet her; instead he should let her come to him. Watch her body language; if she is displaying any signs of anxiety or aggression your son should leave the room and try again later, fully armed with her favorite treats.