

## Our Kitten Is Harassing Our Resident Cat

**CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger tells how to help kitten burn up energy while reassuring older cat.**

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Posted: July 3, 2009, 3 a.m. EDT

**Q:** We got a new female kitten about four weeks ago. She was 7 weeks when we got her. Our resident male cat is 11. The problem we are having is that the kitten chases the older cat throughout the day, biting his tail, legs, neck, wherever! The older cat is "not a happy cat" right now. He hisses, howls and runs around the house as she chases him although he is interested in what she is doing when she is not bothering him.

We don't know what to do to stop this. Usually we grab the kitten and try to distract her with a toy or sometimes put her in her room. We both work so we imagine it goes on several times each day when we can't intervene. Our older cat is a really nice guy and we don't want to upset his apple cart and for him to start having behavior problems.

**A:** This problem commonly occurs when a new kitten is brought to a home where the resident cat is an older adult. The youngster needs someone to play with who is equal in energy and loves to play. Your kitten is full of play and kitten antics, a typical kitten with high-energy kitten needs. Older cats typically don't appreciate the energetic antics of youngsters; they would rather sit and watch the world go from a comfortable spot next to the window.

It is important to keep your kitten occupied so that she won't annoy your older cat. You might want to consider bringing home another kitten for your youngster to play with. The one challenge to watch for when adopting another kitten is that both kittens may end up harassing the older cat in their efforts to play with him.

Multiple play sessions every day will also help dissipate some of the kitten energy. It won't be the whole solution, but it will give your older cat some down time away from the youngster's whirlwind play attacks. When playing with the kitten, use a fishing pole toy, playing with her in a way that imitates hunting. Encourage her to chase and attack the toy on the end of the pole. Toward the end of the play session slow the play down for a few minutes, pretending that the toy is tiring out or is wounded. Finally let your kitten catch the toy one last time and then immediately feed her something delicious. Typically, cats will eat, groom and then go to sleep, giving your older cat a breather.

Make sure that you have plenty of cat furniture for your kitten to climb and explore. The cat trees need to be tall, with sturdy bases, so that when she zooms around she doesn't accidentally knock the trees over and potentially hurt herself. She will also love to have interactive toys to play with when you are not around. Puzzle boxes, Turbo Scratchers and other toys with moveable parts that can be batted around are fun for youngsters. The Nina Ottosson Plastic Dog Brick is also popular with cats and kittens. Your kitten will also appreciate dental health chew toys to play with and chew on. Filling treat balls with her favorite treats will keep her busy as she works for her food. I recommend buying a couple of treat balls, so that your older cat isn't left out of the fun.

Whatever toys you do buy for your cats, make sure that they are safe without parts that can be chewed off and swallowed. Additionally, toys with strings need to be put out of reach of the cats when you aren't around to supervise because cats and kittens can hurt themselves with them.

Don't forget your older cat. He needs equal quality time with you as well. Set aside time every day just for him, where you do activities with him that he enjoys. The activities might be simply sitting in your lap, being groomed or played with. Spending quality time with him every day will help him feel secure and reassure him of his place in the household.