

Vets Can Remedy Cats' Bad Behavior

Early intervention is key, expert says.

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Bad behavior is the most common reason cats and other pets are surrendered by owners to other homes or shelters. It's also the most common explanation as to why cats and other pets are sometimes abused or euthanized, according to the California Veterinary Medical Association.

Owners sometimes seek advice without knowing that a veterinarian could help, and they're unaware that there are board-certified veterinary behaviorists trained to remedy such problems.

"We urge pet owners to see a veterinarian first when bad behavior surfaces, because a veterinarian can determine whether a medical problem is contributing to the behavior problem. Veterinarians can diagnose medical conditions and recommend proper treatment," said CVMA President Ron Faoro, DVM.

Melissa Bain, DVM, of UC Davis' Veterinary Medical Hospital, is one of California's six board-certified veterinary behaviorists. She says early intervention is essential for the owner of a cat or dog, when it comes to preventing behavior problems.

"Puppies need to be socialized and trained at an early age. After 14 weeks, socialization becomes more difficult. For cats, litter-training is also an important step in preventing problems," she said.

She adds that pet owners should live up to their responsibilities by: Selecting the right breed for the family's lifestyle and environment. Not confining pets to small places. Avoiding rewarding anxious behaviors and reinforcing good and relaxed behaviors instead. Allowing pets to view the world through a bright window. Sheltering cats and other animals from extreme heat or cold. Being mindful of a pet's behavior after a move or in the absence of a pet's favorite family member.