

Newcomer Turns Bully

An aggressive new male cat continues to harrass a resident female cat, which may require the services of a cat behaviorist.

J. Veronika Kiklevich, DVM

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Q. We have two cats, a male that is about 19 years old, and a female that is about 5 years old. Five months ago we adopted a young, neutered and declawed male cat. The new cat constantly stalks and torments our little female, keeping her away from food and the litterboxesliterally keeping her trapped in a bedroom. We have tried everything, but he will not leave her alone. What should we do?

A. This type of behavioral problem is difficult to assess without a very detailed history and more information about the environment and temperament of the individuals involved. I suggest that you seek out the services of a boarded animal behaviorist as soon as possible to discover exactly how to go about treating this problem. In the meantime, here are a couple of suggestions. First, separate the two cats. This behavior will only escalate without supervised interactions. Also, the more this behavior is allowed, the more difficult it will be to change in the future. You must determine when the fighting is likely to arise and whether stimuli and situations can be identified and prevented. If you can identify and avoid potential triggers that lead to the aggressive interactions, try to slowly reintroduce them using a program of desensitization and counter conditioning.

Some cats benefit from pharmacological intervention as wellat least in the initial stages of behavioral modification. Your veterinarian can help you there. With time and patience, it is likely that these cats will cohabitate peacefully.