

CAN YOU TRAIN YOUR CAT?

Of course you can. Cats are solitary animals, they do not "need" us as family, but sometimes like to have us around. As solitary animals, social interaction is minimal and rules or manners are largely self chosen. The basic training process is the same as for dogs. The nature of cats just means it may take a little longer. Behaviour is largely at the control of the owner, particularly when you start young.

The basics:

To get the behaviour you want, you need to be calm, clear, consistent and ALWAYS patient. If you get cross, your cat will not listen.

When training, always start with your cat's name so he/she knows you are talking to him/her. Always wait for the desired response, if it does not come, calmly and gently help them to do it, then reward them. The reward is bigger when they respond without assistance. Reward can be food, a pat, a game - whatever your cat loves to do most. Once the behaviour is set, the reward can be changed if needed eg changing from food reward to a pat.

Always use a calm but firm voice - volume can change but do not use angry tones.

If you are having trouble training your kitten or cat, please call the clinic for a behavioural consultation. There are ways we can try to help.

The suggestions following are ways I have taught various cats of mine. The actual word you chose for each command is your choice (you can have them sit to "orange juice" if you like), the words used in the examples are for convenience only.

No claws/teeth

Kittens practice with claws and teeth as they learn the techniques to hunt. The techniques are instinctive, but the order is usually wrong. Kittens want your attention. The easiest way to teach no claws/teeth is to say "no teeth" or "no claws", put them down and walk away. They will quickly learn to curb use of claws and teeth, rather than losing your attention. Adult cats will also learn this way, you just need to be firmer and be prepared that it may take longer. Reminders are often necessary (as with all training) as your cat gets older, particularly when they get excited or trapped by children.

If you want to do play fighting games with your kitten/cat, I suggest you always cover your hand with something so hands do not become associated with fighting.

Cage training/car travel

This is best started young, but is simple. Have the carry cage in a general area so it is not new/scary. If your kitten enters voluntarily, reward him/her. If not say "in" and then gently guide them in and close the door, remembering to reward. If you do this a few times daily, your cat will quickly get used to entering the cage. When they balk, particularly older cats, be gentle but firm. Once in the cage, short drives in the car are good. Most cats do not travel often, so it is a stressful experience. If you take your kitten for lots of drives, he/she will become accustomed to it. In my experience this training lasts life long for calm travel of any length.

"Off"/Table Training

First decide what surfaces you do and don't want your cat to jump on. Jumping is natural and

necessary for cats, so here you are directing the behaviour to suitable surfaces, not stopping it. When your kitten is on a "no" zone, lift him off while saying your command (off/down etc). Once they are used to the command, you will be able to use it from a distance. I sometimes find a loud noise such as a clap or stomp on the floor helps get my cat's attention from a distance - so much so that he has taken that as a command to get down.

For surfaces you have particular problems with, try water in shallow trays or contact sticky side up so the surface "tells them off" even if you are not there.

"Come"

Your cat wants you, so come is easy to teach. Simply say "Tommy come" with an appropriate gesture and a visible reward in your hand. When your cat arrives, it gets the reward. The reward **MUST** come no matter how long it takes them to come or how frustrated you are. **NEVER** tell them off for taking too long - if they are going to be told off, then will learn **NOT** to come. Over time they will come whether they can see the reward or not.