



**OPERATION
KINDNESS**

Working With Cats That Play Rough

Karen Reese, CPDT-KA, ACDBC, Fear Free Certified Animal Trainer

All kittens and young cats need a lot of play. Cats stalk, chase, pounce, swat, kick, scratch and bite when they play. Sometimes this behavior can be mistaken for aggression when it is directed at people. When kittens are removed from their mother or their litter too young they may grow up to be an especially rough player. If you use your hands or feet to play with kittens they will learn that rough play is okay and even encouraged. Even if it is cute when they are little, it can develop into a very nasty habit as they grow.

Cats and kittens have sharp teeth and claws. Cats carry a lot of bacteria on their teeth. If a scratch or bite breaks the skin be sure to wash the area thoroughly with soap and water.

Here are some tips to help train your kitty to play nicely:

- **Provide a variety of toys for your cat.** Cats enjoy solitary play with small toys like balls and fake mice. They also like to stalk, chase, and pounce on things that move like prey such as feather wands and other wand type toys.
- **Consider adopting two kittens.** Young cats will play with each other and can grow up to be a perfectly bonded pair. When you have two kittens they can play, stalk, and wrestle with each other keeping you out of the cross fire of inappropriate play.
- **When your cat starts to play rough, stop play immediately.** If your kitten bites you, be still and do not move. Engage your kitten with a toy or put your kitten in a cat safe area for a moment until you have time to play. If your cat is trying to play with you, even if it is inappropriate, it is expressing a need to get out some energy. You can also consider giving your cat some catnip so he can investigate and play with it for a while until you are free for some play time. If your kitten bites your hand and it is hurting you, gently push towards the kitten which will cause her teeth to disengage without causing you any additional harm.
- **Set up a cat safe room.** When teaching a cat to play more appropriately, there will be times when you may not be ready to play. During these times you can put your cat in a cat safe room filled with plenty of things that they enjoy until you are ready to play with them. Keep a litter box, fresh water, comfy bedding, and some toys in the cat safe room. Place your cat in the cat safe room if they are playing too rough and you are unable to successfully direct them into appropriate play or if you are in the middle of something and need to finish it before playing with your kitten.

For behavior and training advice, please contact Operation Kindness at behavior@operationkindness.org or visit www.operationkindness.org/training.