



Cats are very special creatures and despite man's best efforts are not that far removed from their wild ancestors. They have a large range of behavioural patterns and a secret language of their own. So whilst we bring them into our homes and try to tame them they do tend to continue to know their own mind and 'do their own thing'! This can be very frustrating for cat owners but the truth is you have to learn to live with cat rather than them learn to live with you. Understanding why they behave the way they do can help you develop strategies to persuade your cat to do things the way you want.

### Can cats be trained?

Dogs are probably easier to train than cats because dogs are keen to please their owners. Cats, on the other hand, are highly motivated by their own pleasure. The key to cat training is to make sure that you make whatever you want your cat to do highly rewarding. Behaviours that you don't want should be unpleasant for the cat. Punishing cats does not work - they will just learn to misbehave when you cannot see them! Some cats misbehave to get attention and this attention is a reward that encourages your cat to continue this behaviour.

### How do I train my cat to use a litter box?

Cats are naturally very clean and litter training is easy in most cases. After feeding or waking take your kitten to a clean litter tray. When your cat gets to the box, scratch the litter to get her interested. The litter tray must always be kept clean so that your cat learns it is a great place to be. If your cat uses the tray let her know how pleased you are.

### Can I stop my cat from hunting?

Many owners find it difficult to get used to the fact that their cute pet is also a cruel hunter. It is especially difficult to live with a cat that insists on bringing his prey home. Hunting is a very strong instinct in cats and they will continue to chase and catch prey even when they are well fed. Kittens instinctively use hunting behaviour in their play and as they get older they develop the techniques through practise.

You will not be able to stop your cat hunting unless you keep them indoors all the time. Fitting a bell on a collar may reduce the number of animals that your cat catches.

### Why does my cat scratch the furniture?

Claws are an important part of the armoury of cats in the wild. They use them for hunting, fighting and climbing. It is important therefore that the claws are kept sharp and in good condition. Scratching conditions your cat's claws by removing the old layers of the nails. Cats may scratch at furniture in order to keep their claws sharp but usually you can teach them that this is unacceptable behaviour by making the experience unpleasant, ie by shouting when they do it. However, you will need to teach your cat where they are allowed to scratch and provide something for the purpose such as a scratching post. Cats may also scratch furniture in order to mark it and define their territory. If your cat persists in this behaviour you may need to get some advice from your vet to help you deal with it.

**If you need any other information on health issues concerning your cat, please contact Briarhill Veterinary Clinic on 091 38 00 00 and we will be happy to advise you.**