

Boroughbred Behavior Resources



Issue: Excessive Meowing

Cats typically communicate with other cats using body language, facial expressions, touch and scent. They also use these expressions to communicate with humans, however meowing is one way that almost always gets our attention. Cat lovers may think meowing is cute and endearing, but a cat that is meowing non-stop might drive you crazy! You've already given them food and attention – what more do they want? How do you get them to stop?

Despite your best efforts to keep your cat happy and satisfied, there may be a chance you've been unintentionally reinforcing this unwanted behavior. If your cat is meowing at you relentlessly and you pick them up for cuddles to get them to be quiet, your cat has learned that persistent meowing results in attention. We've unknowingly allowed them to train us!

Before we start discussing methods of re-training your cat, it's always a good idea to have your cat checked by a veterinarian to rule out any potential medical causes. They might be trying to tell us that something is wrong. Cats can become more vocal if they are:

- In pain or if they feel ill.
- Stressed. This meow sounds stretched out like they're whining. This type of meowing usually happens when they're in a stressful situation (e.g. a vet visit), if they feel confined, or when there's a change in their routine.
- Older in age. Cats may develop hearing loss and may feel disoriented as a result of Cognitive Dysfunction.



After you've ruled out possible medical reasons your cat may be vocalizing and you're positive that all their needs are being met (litter box is cleaned daily, food and water bowls are checked, they aren't trapped in a closet), it's time to re-train your cat to be quiet. Training your cat will require time and patience. The first thing you should do, and it may be difficult, is to ignore your cat and don't acknowledge them until they stop. Keep treats nearby so you can immediately reward your cat when they're quiet. It may take a while for your cat to adjust their behavior, especially if they've gotten used to getting attention before.

Make sure your whole family is involved in re-training your cat so they aren't getting mixed messages. If someone in your family is continuing to give attention whenever your cat meows, the behavior will most likely continue. Everyone in the home should be consistent, only rewarding with attention and treats when your cat is displaying behavior you want repeated, in this case – quiet. Your cat may only be quiet for a short period so try to reward whenever they are, and then gradually only reward whenever your cat is quiet for a greater period of time. Cats are very smart, they'll eventually learn that meowing doesn't get them anywhere and there's more benefits to being quiet instead.

Kitty Alarm Clock

Cats are crepuscular, which means they tend to be the most active at dusk and dawn. They also tend to sleep throughout the day when their owners aren't home, so they might have energy built-up by the time you get home. If your cat tends to be the most vocal at night or early in the morning, make some adjustment to your routine. Before you head to bed, conduct an interactive play session with your cat to help release any energy they've built up throughout the day. Wand-type toys are great for play therapy because you can use it to mimic prey-like movement, which allows for vigorous and stimulating exercise using their natural predatory instincts. A small meal or treats can be given after playtime so they can enjoy the rewards of their "hunt". They should be able to sleep more soundly once they're tired, thus is less likely to be meowing in the middle of the night.



If your cat tends to meow incessantly early in the morning, get some earplugs and remember - don't give in! Some cat parents get up to feed their cat in order to get a few more minutes of shut-eye, but that only reinforces the behavior. It may have temporarily stopped the meowing, but the cat has learned that non-stop meowing will get them breakfast and they'll likely do it again. Get up on your schedule, and instead of going straight to the pantry to feed the demanding cat, do something else first while ignoring your cat (brush your teeth, get dressed, and etc.), and then feed them after. Cats are creatures of routine, so try to break the one they've gotten used to and establish a new one. The cat will no longer associate their human getting up with feeding (or getting attention).

Resources:

<https://www.aspca.org/pet-care/cat-care/common-cat-behavior-issues/meowing-and-yowling>

<https://www.catbehaviorassociates.com/training-your-cat-to-be-quiet/>

For more information:

International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants: <https://m.iaabc.org/>

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists: <http://corecaab.org/>