

Here's Why You Don't Give Your Kitty a Belly Rub

You may intend it for good, as a love demonstration to your kitty. But that's not how she's going to read it, no matter how noble your intentions. Here's what to do instead, to encourage her to develop a closer bond with you - even as independent as she probably is.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Some cats are more cuddly than others, but if you were hoping for a lap cat and instead you have an aloof cat, there is hope
- Tips for encouraging kitty to warm up to you include being calm around her, avoiding eye-to-eye contact and using treats as bribes
- If your cat is more shy than standoffish, there are things you can do to increase her comfort level in her environment and in your presence

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If you have a feline family member who is, shall we say, less than affectionate with you, you're in good company.

Interestingly, it often seems people who really, really want a lap cat wind up with a kitty who'd rather sit on hot coals, while people who'd prefer to admire Fluffy from across the room tend to attract little feline cling-ons. Life just isn't fair!

No one's entirely sure why some cats are social little cuddle bugs, while others are standoffish and even downright crabby, but heredity seems to play a role.

Feline experts have observed that friendly cat parents tend to have friendly kittens, which could be a result of role modeling (nurture) or genetics (nature), or a combination.

It's also well established that early socialization and handling are important in shaping the personality and temperament of kittens. This means giving them positive experiences with lots of different people, animals, unfamiliar cats, new environments and human handling.

Kittens exposed to these things during the critical developmental period of 8 to 15 weeks are more likely to be friendly and social adult cats. They're also better equipped to handle the everyday stresses of life, such as a change in their human's work schedule, or the arrival of a new member of the household.

If your kitty is an adult and for reasons either known or mysterious doesn't seem interested in being physically close to you — something you've always wanted her to be — there are some things you can try to help her learn to love being a lap cat.

5 Dos and Don'ts for Turning Kitty Into a Cuddler

1. **DO be a calm presence** — Most cats absolutely do not appreciate sudden noises or movements, or anything that can be interpreted as aggressive or even assertive. Speak softly and move quietly and slowly around your cat. Focus on being very zen and entirely non-threatening while you're in her environment.
2. **DON'T stare** — Many kitties are massively uncomfortable with eye-to-eye contact from their humans. This is because most animals view prolonged eye contact as an act of aggression, and staring at your cat can make him feel anxious and fearful.

A better approach when gazing at your cat is to close your eyes for a few seconds, then open them and look away, or simply glance away once kitty meets your gaze. This will show him you are not a threat.

3. **DO learn cat pet-etiquette** — Cats are exquisitely sensitive to touch, and are often quite particular about touching they enjoy versus touching they don't.

As a general rule, most kitties enjoy a nice scratch at the base of the chin, on the cheeks behind the whiskers and at the base of the ears. Some cats also like to be rubbed around the base of the tail.

Most cats (though there are exceptions) don't appreciate tummy rubs. This is because if your kitty lived in the wild, predators would be a constant threat. The most vulnerable spot on your cat's body is her belly. Just beneath the surface of that tender skin lie all her vital organs.

4. **DON'T forget the treats** — While you're working to convince kitty to sit in your lap, be sure to keep a supply of his favorite treats within reach at all times. When he approaches you, offer a treat. If he jumps up next to you, or better yet on your lap, offer another treat.

The trick is to help him associate being in physical contact with you with delicious snacks.

5. **DO help with grooming** — Cats are big into grooming. They groom themselves, other cats, the family dog, their humans and even the occasional inanimate object. Because they're so into grooming, many kitties also really enjoy a gentle brushing. If yours does, he'll show you through body language.

Make brushing sessions a time to quietly bond with your cat, and if you see his tail start to twitch or he suddenly walks away, he's telling you he's had enough for now.

7 Tips for Helping a Shy Cat Come Out of Her Shell

Some kitties who keep their distance from humans are simply shy, and as you might guess, shy cats typically do much better in relatively quiet homes rather than households with young children, rowdy adults or other large or dominant pets.

Of course, there are lots of feisty, fearless cats that thrive in households with kids, dogs and lots of noise and activity. However, this is far from an ideal environment for a timid kitty. Some suggestions for helping a shy cat become more social:

1. All **cats thrive on a daily routine** they can count on, and this is especially true for shy kitties. Feed and interact with your cat on a consistent schedule, and scoop his litterbox at least once daily.

It's important to gain your cat's trust, and caring for his basic needs on a regular timetable will go a long way toward helping him feel more comfortable.

2. Whenever possible, get down on kitty's level to interact with her. Never bring your hand directly toward her face, as this may startle her. Instead, gently approach her from the side or from behind. If your cat scurries away when you walk near her, try turning your back to her as you pass.
3. Use delicious, wholesome food to encourage your kitty to bond with you. Feed a fresh, nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet.

Offer yummy, healthy treats (such as gently baked bits of free range chicken) whenever you invite her to interact with you. The goal is to help your cat make a positive association between you and delicious food.

4. Never force anything on your cat. Don't pull him from his hiding spot or hold him against his will (unless there's an emergency of some kind and you need to move him). Let your cat choose to interact with you on her terms. Having consistently positive and gentle interactions fosters trust.

Cats are most comfortable when they feel in control of their surroundings and interactions, so keep that in mind whenever you approach your timid kitty. Encourage him to come to you, and until he does, sit quietly with him in his hiding place and offer soft conversation until he feels comfortable coming out to interact.

5. Schedule play sessions with your kitty as often as possible, especially if he's play-motivated. Use interactive, non-threatening toys that encourage his natural instinct to stalk prey. Bringing out the "inner hunter" in a shy cat can work wonders for his confidence.

Also, try walking around the house with a ribbon or string trailing behind you (you can hold it or tie it to a belt loop) and see if kitty chases you. If he does, stand still and let him investigate you.

6. Consider offering your kitty a natural stress relief formula such as a Spirit Essences remedy. You might also consider using Feliway pheromone spray. Also ask your holistic veterinarian about homeopathic remedies for shy kitties.
7. To improve the communication between you and your shy cat, learn to interpret his body language, facial expressions and vocalizations.

Remember that with a shy cat, time and patience are your biggest allies. Take the process of socialization one small step at a time, and repeat steps as often as necessary until your kitty is comfortable. Watch his body language carefully for signs of fear, including hiding, freezing in place and hunching down to appear smaller.

Sources and References

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