VOKRA

VANCOUVER ORPHAN KITTEN RESCUE ASSOCIATION

How to Handle Redirected Aggression

So redirected aggression isn't really random but it can be completely unexpected and scary. Your first response can have a big impact on how your cats recover.

Right Away

Immediately put the offending cat in a safe space with the lights turned down low, curtains closed, no loud noises, and no other pets and people in the area. This is to minimize the risk of continued aggression while they calm down. Remember, they aren't being randomly terrible, they're reacting to something that has made them very upset or fearful. They can't learn any lessons in that state so there's no point in punishing them.

If you can't move the cat to a quiet place, move everyone else out. Don't try to pull a stressed cat out of a hiding place or otherwise force an interaction. Just do whatever is possible and least stressful to put some distance and doors between the cat who had the aggressive reaction and their victim.

After Things Have Calmed

Once everyone has calmed down, give any pet involved a play session and some treats to help them feel normal again. Don't move forward until all humans and pets have had a chance to completely relax again.

Let the offending cat come back to where the incident occurred but keep all other pets and people away. Keep curtains or blinds closed if there was any chance that something outside triggered the aggression. Allow them to explore and offer play and treats in the areas where they had the reaction. Now put this cat in a separate room and allow the victim to come back into the space and explore or play too. Again, you're waiting for everyone to return to normal.

Slowly bring the family back together. First allow the offending cat to interact with any other people or pets, one on one, with the victim being last. Use play and treats to keep the interactions positive and be ready to redirect and/or separate the cat if things seem at all tense.

Repeat As Needed

Depending on the intensity of the aggressive incident and how quickly all family members seem to be returning to normal, you may need to repeat these steps several times over the next few days. Supervise your cat when they are with other pets and separate them if you can't. It's extremely important to prevent further incidents during this recovery phase so don't be afraid to be proactive.

Longer Term

Some cats bounce back right away with no issues. Others don't. If your cats are still having issues after a few days, you may need to do a more complete reintroduction. First separate the cats into different parts of the house, each with everything they need to live happily but with no way to get to one another. Give them time to settle in and behave normally (think days, not hours). Then beginning a slow and controlled introduction process as described here. If your issue is between a cat and dog, you can do the same thing (give the pets a break from each other) and then refer to this page for more information.

An Ounce of Prevention

Finally, take a moment to consider whether you can proactively prevent this type of problem in the future. Some things can't be eliminated (accidentally dropping a stack of pans) but you could work on desensitizing your cat to loud noises so they don't react as strongly in the future. Desensitization requires the noise never be loud enough to frighten your cat even as it is very gradually increased. Now that you know your cat has such negative reactions to triggers, proceed with desensitization very carefully!