

FELINE AGGRESSION

Types of Aggression

As with other species, there are several different ways of classifying aggression. One describes aggression as instrumental, fear-induced, territorial, sexual, irritable, maternal, predatory, petting-induced, pain-induced, or idiopathic. Some cats demonstrate offensive aggression, which could involve striking out at another animal to achieve some “selfish” goal, i.e., he likes to be the boss. A cat could otherwise demonstrate defensive aggression, which is self-protective and occurs in response to some real or perceived threat.

Body language for Offensive Aggression:

- Ears forward or sideways
- Pupils slit or slightly rounded
- Body posture with the rump higher than the shoulders, giving a slanting-forward impression
- Eyes riveted on the target and head moving slightly from side to side
- Low pitched growl
- Tail held horizontal or vertically down with the tail tip swishing from side to side.

Body language for Defensive Aggression

- Ears held flat against the head pointing backwards
- Pupils of the eyes widely dilated
- Piloerection – hair on the body standing up on end giving the cat a “puffed up” appearance, including a large, bushy tail
- Crouching body posture or arched back
- Tail curved under or to the side
- Open mouth with hissing and spitting
- Claws unsheathed and ready for action

Aggression is a natural behavior for the cat and was a survival-related behavior for the cats’ wild ancestors.