Feline Intercat Tension Treatment and Training Strategies

Jennie Fiendish CVT, VTS Behavior, CPDT-KA, FFCE, FFCT, LSHS, CFVP


440
I'M BACK!

Jenn Fiendish

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- Veterinary Technician Specialist at Synergy Veterinary Behavior
- Certified Professional Dog Trainer
- Fear Free Certified Professional Elite
- Fear Free Certified Trainer
- Low Stress Handling Silver
- Cat Friendly Veterinary Professional
- Certified Trick Dog Instructor
- Equine enthusiast, avid crocheter, mother to strange animals.







Agenda



Review of Intercat Tension

Prevention

Management Strategies

Behavioral Modification

Medications

Referral Options

Feline Intercat Tension (F.I.T.) Review

- Common; affects 62.2%-87.7% of multi cat households
- Majority occur upon introduction of new cat
- Second most common behavioral complaint
- Offensive and defensive
- Can occur in both male and female cats
- Intact males more likely

- Cases if F.I.T. often have many factors and need many different treatment options
- Non-recognition aggression, poor resource allotment, overt/covert aggression, medical, etc.
- Clients often have a lack of understanding of feline behavior
- Danger to the HAB and to the welfare of the animal

Check for updates

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PRACTICE GUIDELINES

2024 AAFP intercat tension guidelines: recognition, prevention and management



Abstract: Social tension or conflict between household cats is common but, because it often manifests as subtle behavioral changes, it can go unnoticed; it is precisely because most signs are subtle and unrecognized that the term 'tension' is used. Where associated tension-related chronic fear–anxiety leads to more overt behavioral concerns and stress-associated disease, cats may face relinquishment by caregivers or even euthanasia if the tension is not relieved.

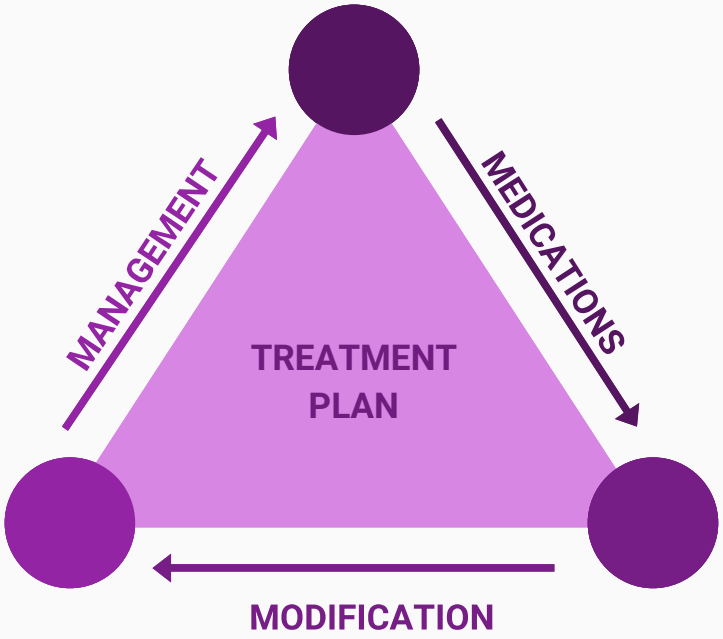
The '2024 AAFP intercat tension guidelines: recognition, prevention and management' have been authored by a Task Force of board-certified veterinary and applied behaviorists and clinical experts in feline medicine and behavior convened by the American Association of Feline Practitioners. The aim is to support veterinary professionals in understanding social behavior between cats and, more specifically, in recognizing intercat tension, preventing or minimizing its occurrence and managing the stressors. In developing the Guidelines, the Task Force has modified the five pillars of a healthy feline environment to provide a framework to assist the prevention or management of intercat tension in households with two or more cats. Because feline social behavior is often misunderstood, the Guidelines debunk 10 common myths that have the potential to negatively impact the wellbeing of companion cats. Extensively illustrated with visual examples of intercat tension and an Appendix detailing a number of case studies, the Guidelines also include

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Treatment Plan



Give Them Medications!

- IMHO, meds are awesome!
- Fluoxetine (SSRI), venlafaxine (SNRI), gabapentin
- Supplements; Zylkene Anxitane, Calm & Confident
- Start early if possible
  - If not, reassess often so that meds can be started when ‘needed’ or wanted.



Management

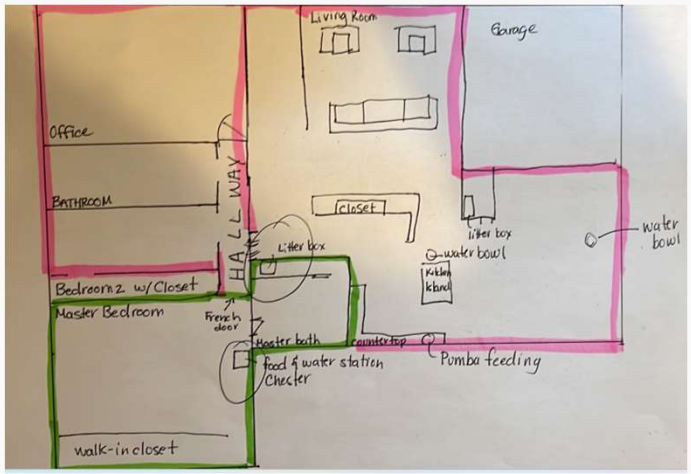
- Start immediately after PE
- Prevent, Prevent, Prevent!
- “Stimulus vacation”
- Remind clients: it’s not forever, just for now
- Separation
  - Temporary or long term
  - Full or supervised
  - Visual or non
  - Cat gates & screens, not baby gates
- Use of pheromones
- Resources AKA 5 pillars
  - 1 Safe places
  - 2 Provide multiple resources
  - 3 Opportunity for play and natural behavior
  - 4 Provide consistent positive human cat interaction
  - 5 Provide environment respectful of feline senses
- If things go bad: Quick, Quiet, Calm
  - Teach them how!



Video; Jennie Fiendish, Synergy Veterinary Behavior

Modification

- Marker training
- Recall, target, station
- CCDS with full barriers to open barriers
- Using engage/disengage, also play
- Harness training
- Large cat enclosures for aggressor if comfortable
- Feeding treats and high valuefoods, but not meal feeding
- Don’t forget a house map!!







A Few Ounces of……

- Prevention is our friend
- Proper early socialization
- Resources
  - More = less tension
- Choosing new additions wisely
- Proper re-introductions
  - Be realistic about introductions of new cats
  - Your cat didn't choose to have a new roommate
- Follow AAFP 2024 F.I.T. Guidelines



"I'll have an ounce of prevention."

Should you refer?

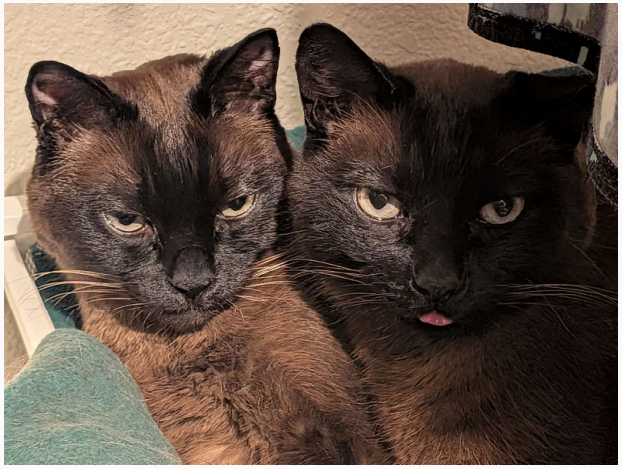
- Lack of progress
- Not in your wheelhouse
- Moderate to severe aggression
- If safety is a concern to anyone in the home
- Chronic problem

A Typical Plan

- Management and Safety
- Initial Phase- learning of foundation skills
- Working Phase- active classical counterconditioning and desensitization skills
- Reintroduction Phase- use of learned skills for controlled reintroduction
- Maintenance Phase- use of learned skills, management, and any additional training to maintain comfortable coexistence between cats

Argo & Zeno

- 11 ½ yr, MN, Tonkinese, siblings
- Recent increase in fighting (has occurred periodically for 4-6 years)
- Normally fights are mild, occur monthly (normal)
- Fights are more intense, can’t be in same room now. Argo is aggresser
- Argo PE- arthritis in hip and knee (Solensia injections), recent dental, plans to start amantadine and Onsior then Adequan. Diet; Purina Calm (both cats)
- Zeno PE normal.



Argo & Zeno

- Separated for a short period only
- Sleeping in separate rooms(switching back and forth)
- Clients want them to stop fighting yesterday!
- Both are clicker trained
- Can sometimes be called away when Argo goes after Zeno
- Zeno is starting to be afraid of Zeno

Argo & Zeno: Treatment and Training

- Management
- Resources (chef's kiss!)
- Beh Mod (ssn 2-4)
- Already knew the basics
- Added stationing, Engage/disengage (ssn 4)
- Started Argo on venlafaxine
- Began CCDS with visual and physical barrier (ssn 4-9)
- Started open interactions (ssn 10-13)
- Mostly reintegrated by session 13 (4 months)



Friends Again!



- Feline Intercat Tension is manageable and preventable but clients must be realistic
- The timeline for solutions may be months long
- Clients will need to be dedicated to the process
- Use medications and supplements to support progress
- Refer out when needed

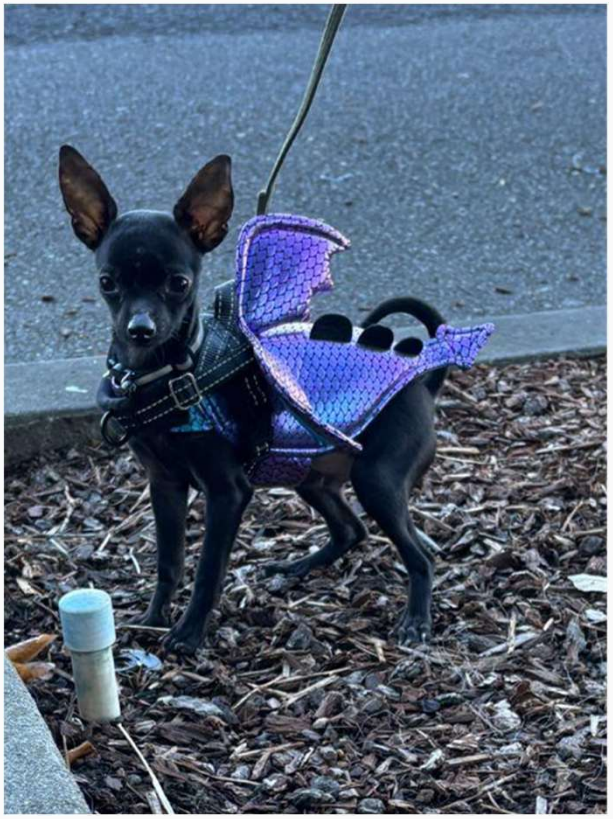
Thank You!

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SYNERGY VETERINARY BEHAVIOR



Marbles Elizabeth Pound Cake

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