

## ***When cats bite or nip.***

There is any number of reasons why your kitten or cat has learned to be a little nipper.

Kittens will bite because, along with scratching and wrestling, it is a form of play for them. As many of you are likely aware, using your hands or feet as playthings is not a good idea. We know it's tough to resist a little lighthearted tickling of our kitten's fuzzy tummy, but those little teeth grow up along with that kitten.

I recommend always using a pole type toy (A short wand with a string attached and a feather or other target at the end of the string.) when playing with your kitten/cat to avoid as much as possible any association between your hands and play. And save the furry toy mice and other small toys for your feline to enjoy on their own.

It is important for us to send a clear-cut message concerning what is and isn't an acceptable target when biting. Cats have a natural hunting instinct which needs to be managed in some kittens. We need to give our pussycat opportunities to satisfy their urge to hunt but teach them what targets are appropriate. Those targets can include feathers, string, or paper bags with a little ball inside -- anything that's not attached to your body. Even older cats benefit from regular play sessions, which help them blow off steam. It's important to give a cat or almost any age an appropriate outlet to release energy. This will help cut down on "ambush biting," where a cat suddenly dashes out and bites, usually around your ankles. It's a "chase the prey" game, and providing more appropriate games will help control this behavior.

A common form of biting is called petting-induced aggression. This is when a cat lashes out at its owner during what seemed to be a pleasant session of petting. This form of aggression is one of the most confusing cat behaviors because it seems so sudden and unpredictable. My research indicates that it is most likely caused by the cat or kitten becoming "hyper-stimulated" and they become very sensitive and uncomfortable. On reaching a saturation point they lash out at what is causing the stimulation... our hand. Usually, they show us one or more, of several signals that they've had enough. Some of the common warning signs that occur just before biting include; tail-lashing or thumping, skin rippling, growling, cessation of purring, ear flicking or rotation sideways [or] shifting of body position.

If we watch our cat's body language, we can learn to tell when they've had enough petting and we can stop before they react. I recommend that folks always keep petting sessions short and sweet. As the great showman P.T. Barnum said; "Always leave em' wanting more."



Some kittens/cats will suddenly starts nibbling your hand when they are sitting in your lap, without you having touched them at all. Was she the one who moved on to your lap or had you picked her up and placed her in your lap? They might sit still for a time but then bite at your hands, albeit gently, to let you know that, at the moment, they feel uncomfortable where they are or perhaps they are so very stimulated by being in your snuggly lap that they becomes hyper-stimulated without being petted.

### ***If your pussycat is a little nipper, I recommend the following:***

- Try to avoid those more predictable circumstances when your cat is inclined to nibble or bite. If a behaviour doesn't have the opportunity to repeat itself; eventually the behaviour will extinguish.
- Use a pole type toy (short pole with a string attached and a feather or other target on the end.) when playing with your kitten or cat to avoid as much as possible any association between our hands and play. Furry toy mice and other small toys are for them to enjoy on their own. Leave those small toys out for your cat rather than offering them to him or her by hand.
- Pet them (briefly) in a variety of circumstances other than in your lap or when they are laying close to you. Take care not to surprise them with a petting and startle her by your sudden touch, which might provoke a defense response and biting.
- When your cat is in your lap and it is obvious that they feel comfortable about being there, keep your hands out of reach from them so not to provide them with an opportunity to nibble.
- Be aware of the length of time they are in your lap. It would be best; for the time being, that **you** end the snuggle time before they do.
- When you need to remove your kitten or cat from your lap; rather than using your hands to pick them up and remove them, it would be best to simply start standing up so that they start to tip off and then move off your lap on their own. This avoids your cat from making any possible negative association with your hands.

If ever your does nip or nibble, I recommend that you make a startling sound of pain and immediately stop interacting with them. Using aversive tools such as spray bottles, shake cans and such can be useful but great care has to be taken that the kitten or cat does not directly associate the very scary spray bottle, shake can, etc. with you. The kitten/cat will very likely learn to fear you by association. It will take pussycat some time; perhaps a few weeks, to learn this new pattern of behaviour and their natural inclinations are redirected and diminished.

As you see a distinct lessening of their nibbling or biting, then you can experiment by giving them a few brief pets at those times when they were inclined to nibble or bite in the past.