

# Feline Socialization

Cats are very social beings and have very interesting interactions in groups, whether human or animal groups. It has been previously stated that the cat is not a social animal. This statement could not be any further from the truth. We are recently discovering that most cats, big or small, live in a very cooperative and social environment. Although cats are not domesticated in the classic definition, they may get the opportunity to socialize with humans and cohabitate our homes. Cats have a strict period of possible human socialization. If a kitten reaches 5 months of age with little human contact, that cat will be feral throughout life. Bonds can be made with these cats, but proper socialization is not possible after that critical age. Cats cannot be tamed down, nor can they ever be domesticated like dogs. Any bonds made with a feral cat are very special and against the odds.

Socialized to humans, or to other cats, is the more appropriate terminology for cats. As we all know, cats can live without humans very effectively. They are not robbed of this skill by living with humans, even for extended periods of time. Many of our pet cats would be fine without us tomorrow. Of course, many exceptions exist, but cats always stay a little wild. Most pet cats are properly socialized very early in life. Most cat owners see the similarity in their pet and wild cats, whether large or small. Every pet cat has a lot of Tiger and Lion in them, which is one of the cooler aspects of living with a cat.

Cats live in a matriarchal society and girls are usually very obviously running the show. Although male cats are often bigger and more physically dominant, they are most often well aware of how the females want things to proceed. Most cat social environments are very similar to the lions of the African plains. A group of related females is the core social unit. The young females will stay a part of the group and become the matriarchs after the established females are "retired." There is rarely a struggle here, but more often a very peaceful transition from generation to generation. The females do need a couple of males around for protection and breeding purposes. The males are not subordinate, and often do little to no work, unless there is a serious problem. Females will establish the territory and are very resistant to new comers, whether they are male or female. Two adult females that are not biologically related, rarely will get along and rarely work cooperatively together. Female cats (Queens) rarely roam like Tom cats. The male cats have very different interests and needs from day to day.

Male cats are the true hedonist of the cat world. They like to play and have a true need for socialization. Their day to day needs are not met without some sort of play behavior. They are almost solely responsible for the "curiosity killed the cat" legend. Male cats will do better in the pet world if they are either allowed outdoor access, or live in a multiple cat home. If someone wants one cat only, they will be better served with a female cat.

Female cats are certainly more complex as pets. They are almost solely responsible for the aloof and indifferent reputation of cats. Some female cats are very social, but most will have a friend or two, maximum. Again, if female cats are not biologically related, and meet as adults, a cooperative or even positive relationship will be against the odds. They will form better bonds as an adult with male cats and especially male kittens. Male and female cats are both very interesting. If you are socialized with a pet cat, this article should be amusing and insightful. If not, we certainly can fix that problem in a hurry!