

# Introduction and Bio



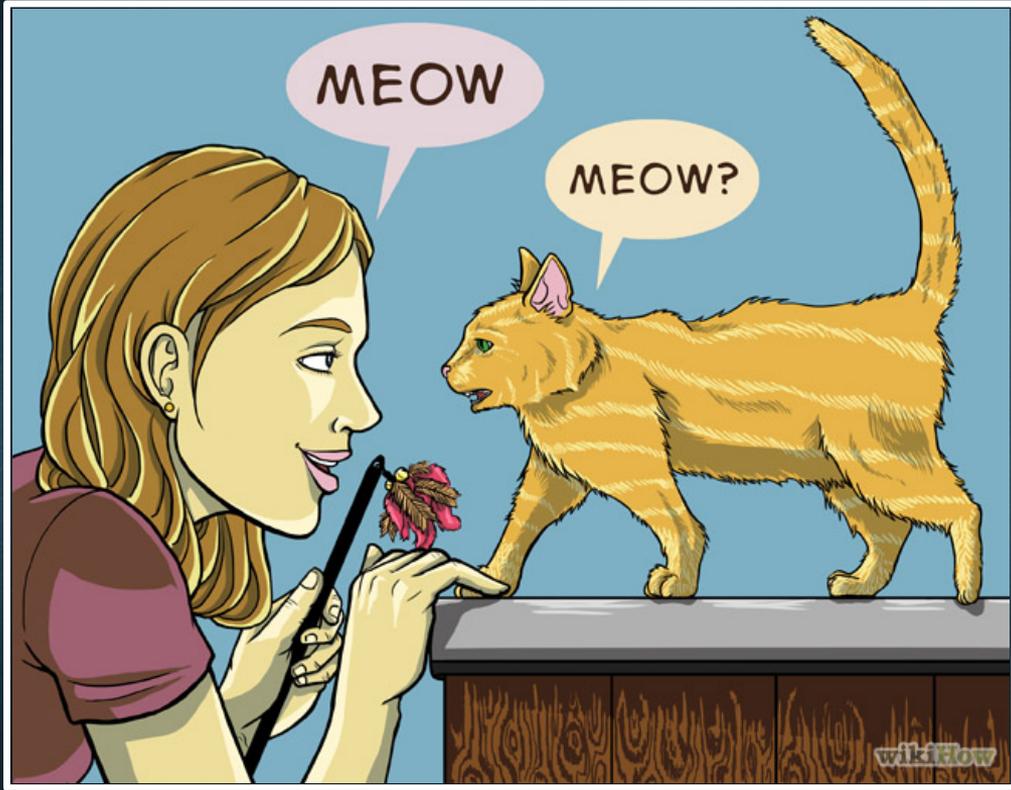
Rachel Geller Ed.D.





“I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL...”:  
EMPATHY AND EDUCATION FOR  
CLIENTS WITH CAT BEHAVIOR  
PROBLEMS

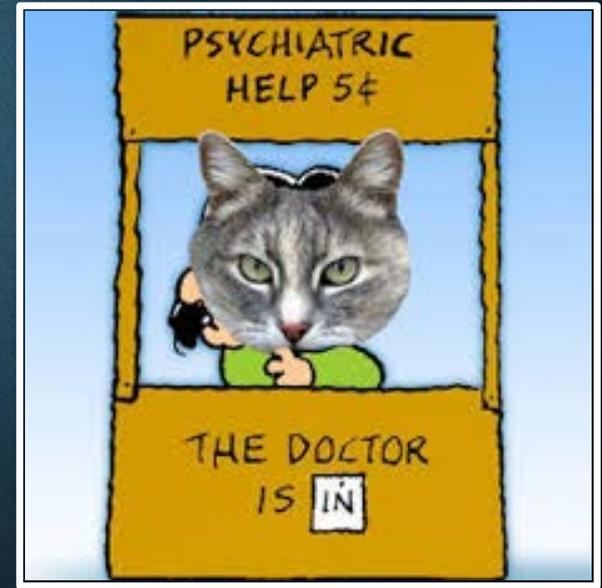
Developed and Presented by:  
Rachel Geller Ed.D.



# SURRENDER PREVENTION

# EMPATHY AND COMPASSIONATELY HELPING PEOPLE/CATS

- Definition of empathy and compassion
- Both are important in cat behavior counseling
- Empathy: emotional response to your client's situation – you try to understand how the client is feeling and imagine yourself in the same situation - feelings, but not action
- Compassion: take action to provide the client with a positive outcome



# BE NON JUDGMENTAL

## Clients' point of view

- Understand how the client feels to be effective in convincing them to work with us
- It is through understanding that we can get them to try different interventions

## Understand that:

- Client may be really stressed
- Under pressure from other family members, roommates, boy/girlfriend/spouse etc.
- Feel as if getting rid of the cat is the only option
- Living with the problem for a long time



# ACKNOWLEDGE FEELINGS/CONCERNS

## Acknowledge that:

- Cat pee is really smelly
- Having a lot of litter boxes isn't the greatest
- A poop on the bed is pretty terrible to come home to
- Don't make it sound like it's no big deal
- Don't think clients would think the same way you do



# RELATE TO CLIENTS' PROBLEMS – RELATE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

- Let your client know you have had personal experience with this problem
- Tell a story - provide an anecdote
- Talk about what happened and how it was resolved



# THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING

- Let the client talk
- Acknowledge feelings
- Spend a lot of time listening
- Relate to the client
- Continually show you are paying attention

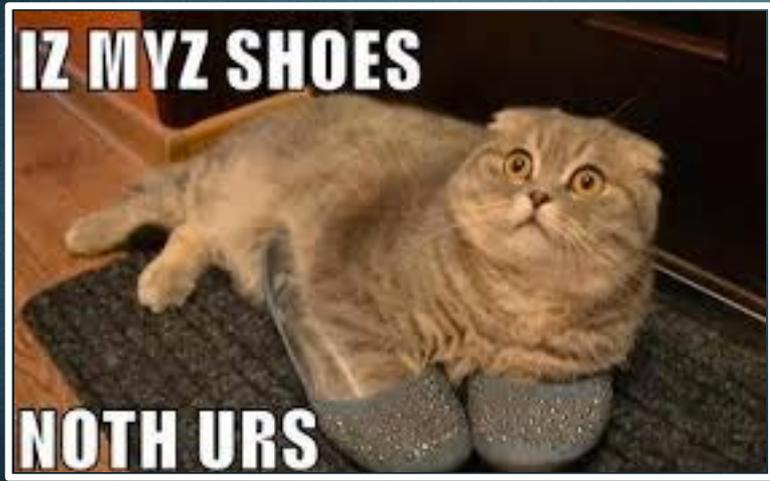


# MIND SET OF CLIENTS

- May be at the “end of their rope”
- Coming to you as a “last straw”
- Nothing has worked, ready to give up
- By the time they are calling you – frustrated, hopeless
- May feel alone
- Don’t understand why their cat is acting out
- Most likely have tried many things on their own
- Struggling with unwanted behaviors for a long time



# PUT YOURSELF IN THE CLIENTS' SHOES



- tired of coming home to messes outside of the litter box
- confused at the way their cat responds aggressively to them
- lost hope that the cat will be part of the family because her behavior is inappropriate

# START WITH SMALL STEPS ACKNOWLEDGE SUCCESS

- acknowledge every success
- suggest advice for a short period of time
- keep following up
- be supportive, positive, comforting
- proceed in small increments
- be realistic



# VALIDATE THE CLIENT'S EMOTIONS REALIZE THEY ARE NOT YOU

- recognition and acceptance of another person's thoughts and feelings
- supports the client
- strengthening the client relationship
- summarize with understanding and empathy
- understand the client

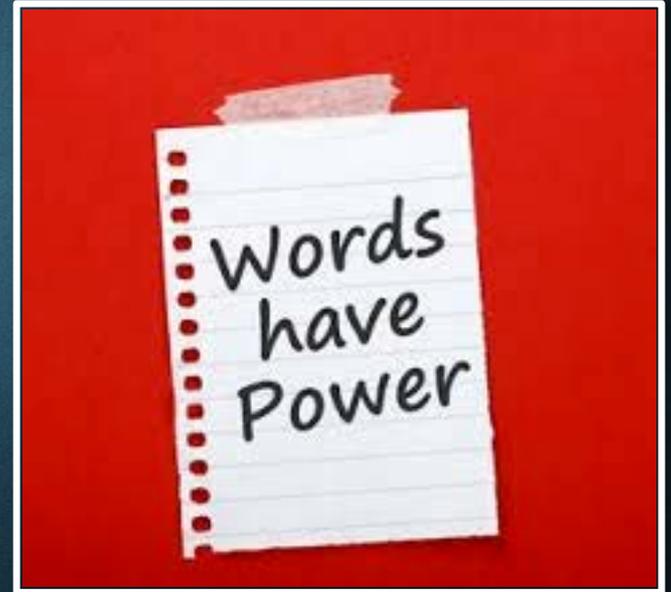


# UNDERSTANDING HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH CLIENTS



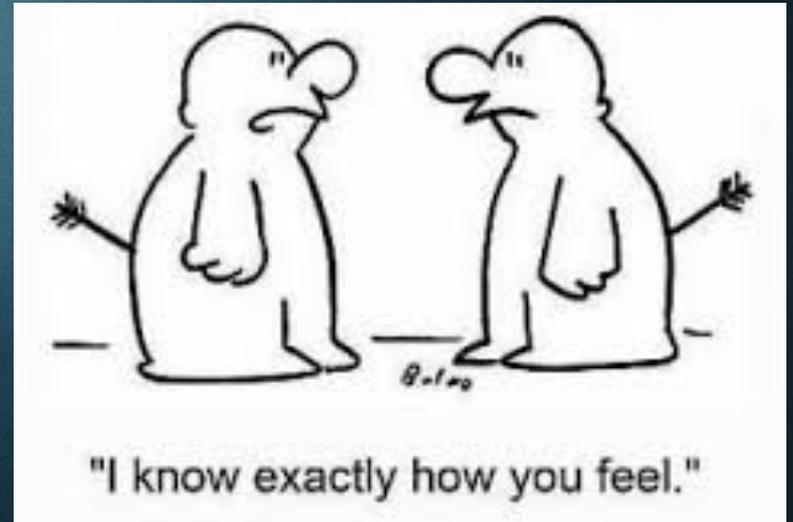
# ASKING QUESTIONS

- Ask a lot of questions - descriptions are not always accurate, especially when under stress
- Ask open ended questions to get more detail from the client
- The words the client may use (the cat is attacking me) can be misidentified as many different things



# EMPATHY IS IMPORTANT WHEN CLIENTS ARE STRESSED

- cat behavior -> stress for the client
- seek help when stressed -> problem is worse
- may speak negatively about their cats
- does not mean they don't love their cats



# PRACTICALITY IN CAT BEHAVIOR COUNSELING

- important to be practical
- not all clients have the money or time to follow every suggestion or intervention
- gather information about the client so you make suggestions s/he can follow



# FINANCIAL LIMITATIONS

- Be honest with clients re finances and budgets

**Your suggestion:** cat tree for vertical space if they can't afford a cat tree, come up with other ways to create "free" vertical space

**Your suggestion:** puzzle feeders if they don't want to spend more money, can be made out of tissue boxes



# TIME OR PATIENCE LIMITATIONS

**EXAMPLE:** client does not want to take 15 minutes twice a day to play with her cat

**SOLUTION:** suggest doing it while she is on the phone or checking email, suggest ways to multi-task

**EXAMPLE:** 3 cats and 1 litter box, client doesn't want 4 litter boxes

**SOLUTION:** start with adding one more box in a different location

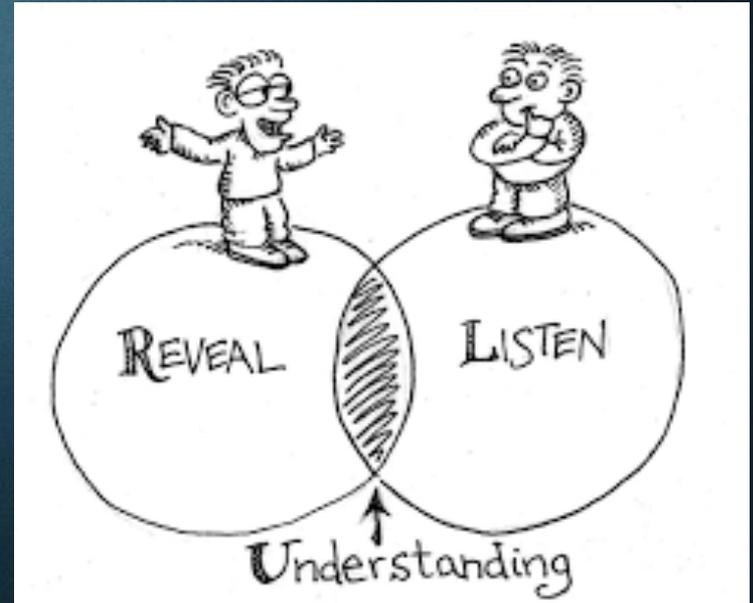


# UNWILLING/DIFFICULT CLIENTS



# HONESTY/NON JUDGMENTAL COMMUNICATION

- let the client know you understand
- give a solution
- give reasons why this will benefit the client



# PROBLEM SOLVING WITH THE CLIENT



- I use myself as an example, let them know I face the same issues
- “I play with my cats while I am returning phone calls, maybe try that?”
- “I cleared off parts of a book shelf for vertical space instead of buying another cat tree, maybe something like that might work

# BEING AVAILABLE, UPBEAT, OPEN TO FUTURE COMMUNICATION

- let the client know I am 100% there for him
- advice is not a one-time thing
- can call me again in one day or one year
- let client know a voice-mail will result in a call back
- communicate confidence
- very positive



# AVOIDING UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

- don't use yourself as a barometer
- inspire the client to do what s/he can
- compromise with:
  - cat trees
  - window perches
  - cat tunnels
  - lots of litter boxes



# FOR CLIENTS WITH LIMITED PATIENCE/TIME

- offer suggestions that result in immediate change
- choose the top 2 suggestions
- with progress may be willing to take on additional suggestions



# IMPORTANCE OF FOLLOW UP CALLS



# IMPORTANCE OF FOLLOW UP CALLS

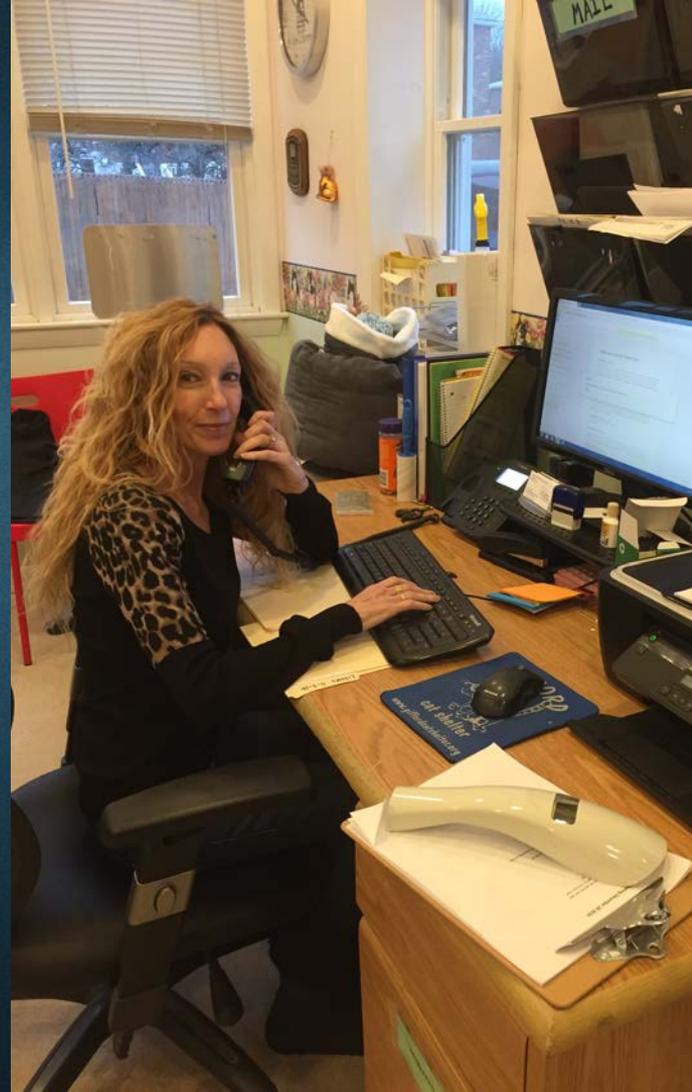


- Follow up calls are important 7-10 days after the original conversation

# CALLING THE CLIENT AFTER THE CONSULT

Lets you know if:

- hasn't followed through on the suggestions
- needs additional information
- needs encouragement
- needs refreshers/reminders
- has questions



Is someone or something preventing the client from implementing the suggestions

May need to problem solve or find a way to remove any barriers



May find out the client is unwilling to follow the program/suggestions

If this affects safety/health of cat, may need to look at other options



Follow up call may reveal that the client is doing exactly as I suggested but the problem is not fixed

little or no progress

want to know so I can:

- re-look at the situation
- gather more information
- site visit



# SPECIAL SITUATIONS

- ongoing “hand holding”
- need frequent check-ins, feedback, encouragement, reassurance
- 3 months is not an atypical amount of time
- emotional support is often critical



LET THE CLIENT KNOW THEY  
CAN CONTACT YOU AT ANY  
TIME.



Call me

# KEEPING CATS IN THEIR HOMES: RECENT ADOPTERS



# CONCERNS SPECIFIC TO NEW ADOPTERS

- calling soon after the adoption
- 3 to 4 days is important
- new adopters have not yet formed a bond



# STRESS RELATED LITTER BOX ISSUES

## With a follow-up call

- prevent problems and offer solutions
- confine the cat to a small room with the litter box on one side and the food on the other so the cat becomes conditioned/forced to use the box
- being in a small room allows the new adopters to spend time and get close to the cat



# ONGOING SUPPORT/ FOLLOW UP CALLS

## New adopters feel

- appreciative of my phone calls
- grateful for the support
- feel like I care very much
- my caring often makes them realize that their cat is worth the effort



# EMPATHY FOR A NEW ADOPTER

Let them know:

- you “feel their pain”
- you will be there 100% to support them
- confident that this is solvable
- validate feelings, concerns, fears, frustrations
- empathize with the cat
- stress/new environment vs. routine/stability



# STATISTICS

Statistics from Gifford Cat Shelter  
cat behavior and retention program  
– success in keeping cats in their  
homes

2016

341 cat behavior calls  
successfully solved 306 cases

90% success rate



# COMMON BEHAVIOR CONCERNS

## Litter Box issues

- Ruling out medical issues
- chronic renal failure
- diabetes
- hyperthyroidism
- UTI



# COMMON BEHAVIOR CONCERNS

## Litter Box issues

- problems with the litter box
- problems with the litter itself
- location



# LITTER BOX ISSUES

For the cat who is not using the litter box, try:

- placing another box in an area she can have to herself
- one more litter box than the amount of cats you have, even if you only have one
- particular part of the house that the cat likes
- cats feel vulnerable in their litter boxes
- need to see her opponent
- If box is not safe, won't be used
- clear sight lines



# LITTER BOX ISSUES

## Real estate reality check:

- does your cat feel vulnerable
- uncovered, not under something and not tucked into a corner
- bathrooms, mudrooms, annexes are popular locations for litter boxes - cats don't like these locations
- slide the box out from a corner



# LITTER BOX ISSUES

## Location strategies

- same wall as entrance → move it to the opposite side
- do the move gradually
- box under something → pull it out a couple of feet
- box against the wall → slide the box 12 inches away
- box is in a room w/one door → cats prefer more than one entrance
- multiple litter boxes throughout the house
- think escape and visual warning time when choosing location



# LITTER BOX ISSUES

## Location strategies (cont.)

- shape of your current litter box room is wrong → try a different room
- better to get a second box rather than moving the old one to a new spot
- leave the old box there for consistency and security
- allow your cat to ease through the transition



# LITTER BOX ISSUES

## Type of litter

- cats are tactile
- texture can be uncomfortable
- some cats don't like scented litters
- soft, sandy texture



# LITTER BOX ISSUES

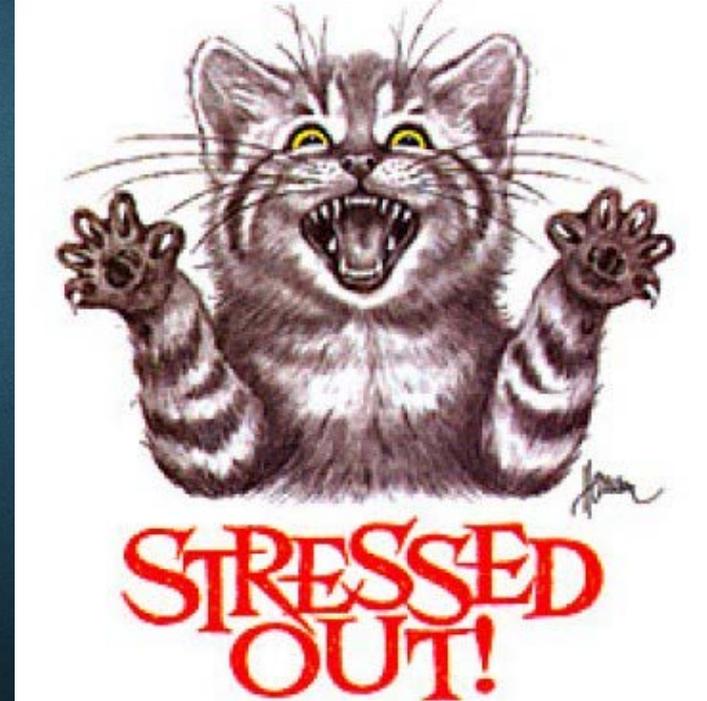
Sudden changes in a cat's life can cause litter box problems

## Environmental Stressors

new home  
new marriage  
new furniture  
deaths  
holiday commotion  
change in schedule

loud visitors  
divorce  
new carpet  
home renovations  
guests  
vacations

cats are reactive to change, even ones that seem minor



# LITTER BOX ISSUES

## Environmental Stressors

Multi cat households

Relationship between companion cats has a major influence on the litter box being used

- intimidation
- posturing
- chasing
- guarding



# SCRATCHING POSTS

## NOT USING THE SCRATCHING POST

### THE RIGHT POST

- not covered with carpet
- need to slough off dead sheaths
- claws can get stuck in carpet loops
- sisal or rope
- firm and sturdy
- post that is wobbly or falls won't be used
- at least 3 feet tall
- needs to reach up and get a full stretch



# SCRATCHING POSTS

## NOT USING THE SCRATCHING POST

### THE RIGHT POST

- location should be accessible
- don't hide the scratching post
- don't tuck the post in a remote corner
- note where your cat is currently scratching
- texture, sturdiness, location
- place a post there
- cat trees w/scratching posts
- place by window to further entice
- don't place your cat's paws on the post



# SCRATCHING POSTS

SCRATCHING IS A NATURAL BEHAVIOR  
THAT SERVES SEVERAL FUNCTIONS

- conditions the cat's claws
- marking behavior (visible)
- leaves olfactory marks
- gives back and shoulder muscles a stretch
- emotional component
- releases buildup of emotion and anxiety
- avenue of expression



# SCRATCHING POSTS

## REDIRECTING TO THE SCRATCHING POST

- let the cat think this is her idea
- scratching post next to the spot where she was scratching
- deterrent on the old spot
- sticky paws, double sided tape, plastic, a slick plastic placemat, shelf paper, plastic carpet runner – think slick/sticky
- deterrent makes the old object no longer appealing



# SCRATCHING POSTS

## REDIRECTING TO THE SCRATCHING POST

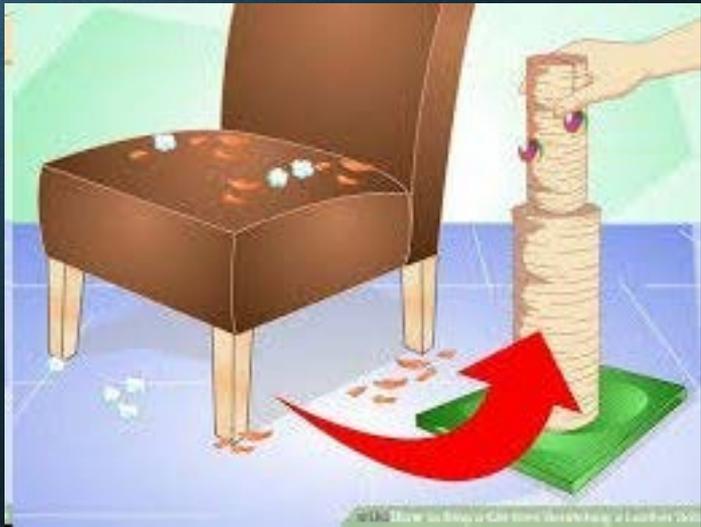
- catnip - entice the cat to scratch
- interactive play – retraining
- fishing pole type toy, long feather
- place the post on the side, move the toy around it
- horizontal scratcher
- remove the deterrents gradually



# SCRATCHING POSTS

## NOT USING THE SCRATCHING POST

- deterring from inappropriate scratching area
- don't use verbal and/or physical reprimands
- appealing scratching surface become unappealing
- deterrent with retraining
- empathize with the client



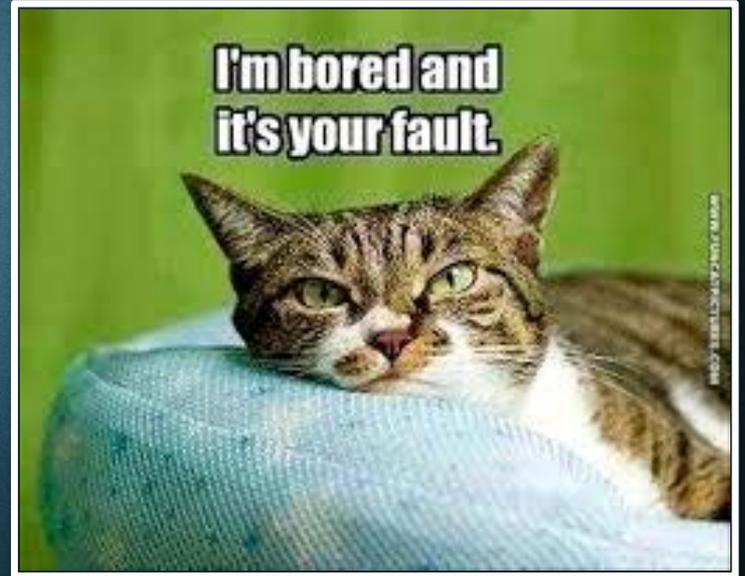
# AGGRESSION/ TERRITORIAL ISSUES



# UNDERSTANDING AGGRESSION

May not be aggression

- bored or under stimulated
- hands/feet may be only stimulation
- provide outlets for play behavior
- needs stimulation as a hunter
- no stimulation, cat will look for it in other ways



## UNDERSTANDING AGGRESSION

Aggression can be:

### FEAR

- avoid a fight
- engage in posturing
- defensive behavior

### MEDICAL

- cat feels vulnerable
- pain induced aggression



## UNDERSTANDING AGGRESSION

- environmental stressors/territory
- need adequate territory
- status-related aggression

Can result in:

stalking, staredowns, growling  
need enough territory:

multiple litter boxes  
vertical space  
multiple feeding stations





# QUESTIONS



For Additional Questions:  
[rachelsg@aol.com](mailto:rachelsg@aol.com)