

Aversives For Cats

An aversive is something that your cat finds unpleasant. It can be used to discourage her from a particular action or place. Aversives are most effective when you also offer a pleasant alternative to the place or action you need your pet to avoid. Please experiment cautiously and sparingly when choosing an aversive as individual responses will vary. An aversive that is mildly unpleasant for one cat may be terrifying for another and have no effect on yet another. The goal is to apply the aversive at a level that will cause your cat to avoid the action or place without becoming fearful.

Using Textures as Aversives

Apply these textures to places you need your cat to avoid, and add toys or treats to appropriate places to make them more attractive.

Indoors:

- Shelf paper (sticky side up)
- Double-sided carpet tape
- Heavy foil

Outdoors:

- Irregular or sharp rocks, firmly set into dirt
- Chicken wire, firmly set into dirt (sharp edges rolled under)

Both:

- Heavy plastic carpet runner (pointed side up)

You may need to weight the aversive material firmly or tape it to keep it in place. To protect furniture or floor finishes from sticky substances, attach the material to a piece of foil or heavy plastic and secure that with weights or light tape. Easy-to-attach, commercial varieties of texture aversives are available from most pet supply stores.

Using Smells as Aversives

Apply these substances to places you need your cat to avoid and add toys or treats to make appropriate places more attractive.

Indoors and Outdoors:

- Citric odors – colognes, concentrated juices or fresh peels
- Aloe gel

Soak cotton balls, rags or washcloths in the “stinky” substance. To help protect carpets, upholstery, floors or furniture, place the saturated object on a piece of weighted foil or heavy plastic. To prevent the substance from seeping into the ground, use the same precautions. Outdoor substances need to be reapplied daily, due to quicker dissipation into the air.



Using Tastes as Aversives

Apply these substances to places where your cat's mouth should not be, and offer an appropriate toy or treat instead.

- Bitter Apple or similar sprays and gels marketed specifically for taste aversion
- Some hot sauces
- Cayenne pepper
- Citric odors (colognes, concentrated juices or fresh peels)
- Aloe gel

Some of these substances may damage furniture or floor finishes, so be sure to test them in a hidden location first. Except for hot sauce and cayenne pepper, these substances should be safe to apply to human skin; however, some individuals may be sensitive to them.

Surprise Remote-controlled Aversives:

Available at pet supply stores or easy to make at home, these items are activated by the cat's behavior, so the owner need not be present to apply them.

- Motion detector that reacts with a startling sound
- Snappy Trainer[®] or an upside-down mouse trap that is securely taped under paper to avoid contact
- Scat Mat[®] (gives a slight static shock)

Human-controlled Aversives:

Use these to get your cat's attention; and then offer an appropriate alternative.

- Spray bottle or squirt gun filled with water (NOTE: Avoid the Super-Soaker[®] water guns that have a very forceful spray.)
- Loud air horn
- Whistle
- Shaker can (soda can containing nails, pennies, beans or pebbles - securely taped shut)
- Air blaster (such as a computer key board cleaner)

WARNING: For fearful cats, avoid using surprise techniques, especially noises. Also, remember to start out with the lowest level aversive first and experiment cautiously to see what works for your pet.

Adapted from material originally developed by applied animal behaviorists at the Dumb Friends League, Denver, Colorado. ©2000 Dumb Friends League and ©2003 The HSUS. All rights reserved.



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This material is brought to you by the Maddie's Fund,[®] the Maddie's Pet Rescue Project in Mobile County and its six partners: the Mobile SPCA, A Friend of the Mobile Animal Shelter, City of Mobile Animal Shelter, Mobile County Animal Shelter and Saraland Animal Shelter. Maddie's Fund,[®] The Pet Rescue Foundation, (www.maddiesfund.org) is a family foundation funded by PeopleSoft and Workday Founder Duffield, and his wife, Cheryl, to help create a no-kill nation. The first step is to help develop programs that guarantee loving homes for all healthy shelter dogs and cats throughout the country. The next step is to save the sick, injured and poorly behaved pets in animal shelters nationwide. Maddie's Fund is named after the family's beloved Miniature Schnauzer who passed away in 1997.

