

# Understanding Your Talkative Cat

While humans may not yet be adept at holding conversations in cat-speak, cats nonetheless use their language to communicate with us and other animals. Some cats “talk” more than others, but most cats do make noise some of the time, and they expect us to know what they’re saying.

We’re all familiar with the meaning of hissing and growling, but there are many other sounds your cat is capable of making, and a variety of reasons for vocalizing.

As independent hunters, cats have limited need for an extensive vocal repertory. Cat-to-cat vocalizations are generally limited to communicating with one’s kittens, one’s sexual partners and one’s potential enemies. There is also an array of vocalizations used by our furry friends when they attempt to communicate with us.

By changing volume, intensity and number of repetitions of the vocalizations and backing them up with expressive body language and olfactory signaling, cats ensure their messages are received and that their needs are met.

## Medical Reasons

If your cat’s behavior changes suddenly, the first thing you should do is take her to your veterinarian for a thorough health examination. Cats often hide symptoms of illness until they’re seriously ill; any change in behavior may be an early indication of a medical problem. A new vocalizing behavior, in particular, may indicate physical discomfort stemming from an urgent need for medical attention. A normally vocal cat who stops talking is also in need of a medical checkup.

## Breed Tendency

Asian breeds, such as the Siamese, are known to be very vocal. If your cat has a pointed face and a long, lean body, chances are she has some Asian heritage, so “talking” may be a part of her character. If your cat’s chatter bothers you, then avoid giving her any attention when she is vocal because this will only encourage the vocal behavior. Instead, give her attention when she is quiet.

## Attention-Seeking Behavior

Some cats “talk” because they know they’ll get a reaction. People may talk back, put out some food, pick up and soothe the cat, or even pick the animal up and temporarily “lock” her in another room. All of these responses will encourage an attention-seeking cat. To discourage

this behavior, simply ignore your cat when she does this, and when she is quiet, pour on the love, feed her, or give her some treats. This will teach your cat which behaviors you would like her to continue.



## Your Cat Wants to Go Outside

If your cat was previously an outdoor cat and you plan to keep her safely inside, then good for you! The following are some suggestions to help make the transition easier on both of you:



- **Spay or Neuter Your Cat.** Spaying or neutering will rid your cat of those hormonal urges to go out and seek a mate. This will result in a calmer, friendlier cat. Create a play schedule. Schedule play times during the times your cat would normally be outside. This will distract her from her normal routine and establish another, safer routine.
- **Provide a Window Seat.** Be sure your cat has a view of the outdoors and a sunny place to lie. Cats like to watch birds, so putting a bird feeder outside a window is likely to make the window a favorite spot for your cat.
- **Run a Scavenger Hunt.** Give your cat a game to play by hiding bits of dry food around the house. Hide the food in paper bags, boxes, and behind open doors. This will give her exercise and keep her busy so she doesn’t think of going outside. This is especially good to do right before the family leaves the house for the day.
- **Pay Attention.** Try to give your cat extra love and attention during this difficult transition.
- **Try Aversives.** If your cat still won’t give up meowing by the door, try an “aversive.” For example, leave a strong citrus scent by the door to help make the area undesirable to your cat. Totally ignore her vocalizations. Whenever she is quiet, give her a food treat and encourage her to play or cuddle.

## Grief

After the death or departure of a person or animal in your cat’s life, she may vocalize to express her grief. This can be a normal part of the grieving process. The best thing you can do for her is keep her schedule the same (or as close to it as possible) and spend some extra time cuddling and playing with her. With time, this problem should take care of itself. If your cat does not return to her normal self, consult your veterinarian.

## Transition

If your cat is new to your home or has just gone through a change—such as a person or other animal moving into or out of the home—and she has just started her talkative behavior, be patient. This may be happening due to the transition and will stop on its own if the behavior is not encouraged. Remember, even scolding can be perceived by your cat as attention, and thus encourage the behavior.

## Purring 101

The purr is the most common sound issued by cats—and yet one of the least understood. Kittens just a few hours old begin purring as they knead their mother's chest and nurse. The purr sound is made both on the inhale and the exhale, with an instantaneous break between breaths. Built-up pressure created by the opening and closing of the glottis results in a sudden separation of the vocal folds, creating the purr. While purring is often heard when the cat seems content, those familiar with handling cats in pain or near death know that they also purr when under duress, the reason for which is yet unknown.

## The Meaning of MEOW

The second most common vocalization is the meow. Rarely heard between cats, this vocalization seems tailor-made for communication between cats and humans. Early on, cats notice that meowing brings attention, contact, food and play from their human companions. Some behaviorists suggest that certain cats seem to alter their meows to suit different purposes, and that some guardians can differentiate between, say, the "I'm Hungry!" meow" from the "Let Me Out!" meow.

The meow is the most often used of the vowel patterns—vocalizations produced with the mouth first open and then gradually closing.

- The sound cats make when highly aroused by the sight of prey is called chirping.
- When a cat is frustrated (such as when an indoor cat finds he is unable to get to the birds at the feeder), you may hear him chatter.
- When a neonate kitten is cold, isolated from his mother or trapped, he issues a distress call—also sometimes called an anger wail. As the kitten matures, the distress call is used when play is too rough or the cat finds something else to protest.

## A hiss is just a hiss?

All threat vocalizations are produced with the mouth held open. These sounds mirror the cat's intense emotional state. A hiss is uttered when a cat is surprised by an enemy. A high-pitched shriek or scream is expressed when the cat is in pain or fearful and aggressive. Snarling is often heard when two toms are in the midst of a fight over territory or female attention. And a long, low-pitched growl warns of danger.

If you need further assistance go to [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org),  
[www.mobilespca.org](http://www.mobilespca.org) or email the Mobile SPCA  
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