

8 Ways to Help Your Cat Feel Loved

Cats are different from dogs, and even from each other, meaning the way to your cat's heart is a unique path. How do you find the way so your cat will feel truly loved and cared for? With a little time, attention and outside-the-box thinking, it can happen.

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Jan 31, 2023 • 6 min read

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Cats differ in significant ways from dogs, and from each other, which means making your kitty's life fabulous requires an individualized approach
- To provide your feline family member with all the basics and a few indulgences, it's important to learn how to handle him the right way, how to communicate with him, and most importantly — how to feed him the food he thrives on
- It's also extremely important to provide your kitty with a feline-friendly indoor environment and regular opportunities to be outside safely
- One of the very best ways to give your cat an excellent quality of life is to find creative ways to bring out his inner hunter

Cats and dogs are both companion animals, but that's pretty much where the similarities between them end. In other words, cats aren't dogs, but rather an exquisitely unique species quite different from other animals, and from each other. Every feline family member is an individual, and assuming all cats are alike, or heaven forbid, assuming they're much like their canine counterparts, will not endear you to your purry companion.

That said, it's really not difficult to give your cat all he needs to make his life with you feline fabulous. It just requires a bit of guidance (which I'm about to provide), some time, attention, and a little outside-the-box thinking.

8 Perfect Ways to Say 'I Love You' to Your Cat

1. **Learn his communication signals** — No matter whether your feline friend is a talker or the strong silent type, learning to understand his body language, behavior, and the sounds he makes can deepen the bond you share with him, and improve communication between you.

The good news is it's not really that difficult to learn to read your kitty's messaging, including what that look in his eyes means, or the tone of his meow, or the position of his ears, or the way he's holding or moving his tail.

2. **Make her indoor environment stress-free and feline friendly** — The term "environmental enrichment" means to improve or enhance the living situation of pets to optimize their health and quality of life. The more comfortable your cat feels in your home, the lower her stress level.

Enriching your cat's surroundings means creating minimally stressful living quarters and opportunities to have

fun and exhibit normal behaviors, and reducing or eliminating changes in her daily life that cause anxiety.

Enrichment may also mean adding or changing things in your cat's environment that encourage her to enjoy natural feline activities like climbing to a high spot or hunting prey in the form of a cat toy. It's also important to pay special attention to these 5 indoor environment zones.

Climbing and scratching are natural feline behaviors. Cats scratch to mark their territory with scent in their footpads as well as visually. They also scratch to relieve stress, to stretch and to shed the older layers of their nails. Scratching feels good, too, which is why it's important to give kitty access to a variety of scratching surfaces.

Offer burlap, cardboard, and carpeted scratching surfaces, placed vertically and horizontally. Scratching also stretches tendons, ligaments, and muscles, so think of it as a free massage when your cat exhibits this behavior.

3. **Learn his comfort level with being handled** — Some cats simply don't like to be touched and find being petted and stroked quite stressful. If your kitty initially allows some petting and then abruptly lashes out, it probably means he can tolerate it for a short time, but then it begins to stress him out.

Like the rest of the animal kingdom, depending on genetics and past experiences, he may be touch-averse, or it could be you're touching him in ways that are uncomfortable for him.

The right way to pet most cats is with an open hand and soft gentle strokes over the back, shoulders, neck, and the top of the head — never the paws, tail, or tummy until a cat communicates it's ok to go there. Spend some time learning exactly how and where your cat likes to be petted. Stop when you see him shift from relaxed to apprehensive.

The right way to pick up a willing cat is with one hand under the chest and the other hand supporting the back legs. Hold him gently against your upper body so that he feels secure. If he pushes away, looks toward the floor, flattens his ears, or twitches his tail, that's your cue to put him down quickly and gently.

Some cats love to be held and cuddled, but many do not, and some can only tolerate it for brief periods. If kitty's tail is in motion and his ears are flattened, he's had enough — let him go.

4. **Encourage her to come out of her shell** — It used to be that very timid kitties who spent most of their time under the bed or in another hiding spot, rarely if ever hanging out with the rest of the family, were left mostly to themselves. They had all their physical needs met by their humans, but it just didn't occur to anyone to try to help kitty come out of her shell.

Fortunately, things are changing. Feline experts and advocates are helping cat caretakers understand that shy kitties are often capable of learning to be more confident, approachable, and sociable. You can find some very helpful suggestions here: [10 Tips for Socializing a Shy Cat](#).

5. **Use playtime and mealtime to encourage his inner hunter** — Daily interactive playtime is just as important for cats as it is for dogs. To help your little lion get the most from play sessions, think like a cat and buy or create toys that stimulate his hunting instincts.

A piece of string wrapped around the end of a stick that you drag on the ground will bring out the stalker in almost any cat. So will ping-pong balls or small balls of paper that you can flick across the floor.

You can make your own inexpensive kitty toys, but also invest in a few interactive toys that will appeal to your cat's natural drive to stalk and bring down prey. I also highly recommend these **indoor hunting feeders** to enrich your cat's eating and indoor hunting behaviors.

6. **Give her lots of opportunities to get outdoors** — Even though your kitty lives indoors, it's important for her mental health to have opportunities to experience the outdoors safely. It also allows her to ground herself. One option is to train your cat to walk or sit outside in quiet areas using a harness and leash.

Most cats, especially kittens, can be trained to spend time outside on a leash, but not every cat learns to enjoy the experience, especially older cats that have never been outside, so don't force the issue if yours seems anxious or uncomfortable.

Another alternative for shy cats is to create a safe outdoor enclosure they can explore at their own pace (usually in the middle of the night). A catio allows her secure access to the outdoors and helps her gain confidence about being in a new space at a pace she's in control of. The enclosure should be open air but shielded enough to prevent kitty from getting out, or a predator from getting in.

7. **Feed him like a true carnivore** — Felines are obligate carnivores (their bodies require animal meat) with very specific dietary needs. I recommend feeding either a homemade or commercially available nutritionally optimal, species-specific fresh food diet, preferably minimally processed (raw or gently cooked).

If you go the homemade route, you must be absolutely sure the diet is nutritionally balanced. Keep carbs under 15% of your cat's daily caloric intake.

8. **Enjoy her affection in all its weird and wonderful forms** — Cats have many ways to show affection for their humans — some are quite subtle, while others are, shall we say, quirky. There's head butting (aka "head bunting"), kneading ("making biscuits"), grooming (often the top of your head), and the always-popular delivery of "gifts" from outdoors (e.g., dead, or nearly dead mice or birds).

To fully appreciate all the ways your cat says, "I love you," it's important to learn how the feline species shows affection, and to meet them where they are, doing all we can to make their lives the best they can be.

Sources and References

[PetMD June 15, 2018](#)
