

Red Flags That You're Not Your Pet's Favorite Person

Does your pet do this when you enter the room? Hide from you regularly? Interact with others but not with you? Chances are you may be guilty of one of these behaviors that your pet can't stand.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Does your cat hiss at you? Try to bite you? Lower his tail to a horizontal position and walk the other way when you enter the room? Hide from you regularly? Interact with others but not with you? These are obvious signs that you may not be your cat's favorite person
- A low or tucked tail is a sign of fear or anxiety, while one that's moving back and forth rapidly, or has fluffed up fur, is a sign of anger or agitation
- If your cat arches his back with fur standing up, and he's growling or hissing, it's a sign of fear or anger — not a good time for petting
- Your cat may run from the room when you come in if you have a habit of carrying him incorrectly, dressing him in costumes or making direct eye contact, which may make him feel threatened
- If you feel like you and your cat could use some special bonding, make a point to spend time with him each day, but on his terms, not yours

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If your cat spends long afternoons curled up in your lap, hangs out next to your computer while you type and makes a beeline to say hello when you walk in the door, you probably have no doubts that your cat adores you. For some cat owners, though, it may feel nearly impossible to get their cat to show them some love.

This can be a matter of personality. Some cats are naturally more outgoing and friendly while others may be reserved or prone to hiding. By observing your cat's body language and other forms of communication, however, you can learn quite a bit about what your cat's thinking, and while it's unlikely that he actually hates anyone, he may certainly prefer the company of some people over others.

Cat Communication: What to Watch For

Cats have multiple methods of getting their point across, from vocalizations to purrs to changes in tail position. When trying to decipher your cat's mood, be sure to look at his ears, eyes, tail and body, as well as listen to his vocalizations. In general, short meows, chirps or trills are indications that your cat is greeting you, wants you to follow him, wants food or otherwise wants your attention.

A longer meow that sounds more like a howl, on the other hand, may be a sign of distress. Your cat may be calling you for help, he may be in pain or it could be a mating sound. Purring is usually a sign of contentment, although it can also occur when your cat is sick or anxious and trying to calm down.

If you hear your cat chattering or twittering at the window, it's likely because he's watching birds outside and is excited at the prospect of catching them; it's not a reflection on you at all. As for body language, here's how to decipher what your cat's really thinking:¹

- **Ears** — If they're forward, your cat is happy and interested in what's going on. Backward or flattened ears are a sign of anger or fear.
- **Eyes** — Constricted pupils can be a sign of either aggression or contentedness, so use context to decide which one your cat is feeling. Large, dilated pupils are similarly contradictory, meaning either a nervous or submissive cat or one who's feeling playful or aggressive.
- **Tail** — A tail held straight up is a sign of an alert, happy cat. If it's also quivering, your cat is really excited. A low or tucked tail is a sign of fear or anxiety, while one that's moving back and forth rapidly is a sign of anger or agitation. If the tail's fur is also fluffed up, your cat could be angry or frightened.
- **Body** — If your cat arches his back while circling your legs, he wants attention and affection. If, however, he arches his back with fur standing up, and he's growling or hissing, it's a sign of fear or anger — not a good time for petting. A cat lying on his back may also be either angry or relaxed depending on whether he's simultaneously growling or purring, respectively.

Signs Your Cat Dislikes You

Does your cat hiss at you? Try to bite you? Lower his tail to a horizontal position and walk the other way when you enter the room? Hide from you regularly? Interact with others but not with you? These are obvious signs that you may not be your cat's favorite person.²

More subtle signs could include not using their litter box, which may be less a sign of distaste toward you and more a sign that your cat is not happy with something, perhaps the location of the litter box or perhaps something seemingly unrelated, like an underlying medical problem.

It's important to rule out other causes for your cat's unfriendly behaviors before taking it personally. If you've just added a new pet or person to the household, for instance, your cat may be feeling overly anxious and stressed, causing him to act out in general. A good description of an anxious or nervous cat, as noted by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), is:³

“Ears sideways or back, pupils dilated and tail low or tucked between legs — your cat may slink through the house close to the floor, looking for somewhere to hide. They may turn their face to the wall to shut the world out.”

Even during playtime, it's possible for your cat to get overexcited and irritable, especially if the play session was particularly intense. As HSUS explains, this may appear as the following, “Pupils dilated, ears turned back and tail twitching or waving — your cat may growl or put their teeth on you as a warning to cease and desist.”⁴

Are You Making Your Cat Unhappy?

Most cats will gravitate to the person who regularly tends to their needs, including feeding and refreshing his water. If you've met all of your cat's essential needs but he's still not warming up to you, it could be because you're doing something he dislikes. Options to consider:⁵

- **Carrying him incorrectly** — Some cats enjoy being held and carried. Others tolerate it while some despise it. It could also be that you're carrying him incorrectly, in a way that makes him feel unsafe. I've previously discussed the best way to pick up, carry and put down a cat.
- **Taking too many photos** — Are you constantly trying to get the next social media-worthy shot of your cute kitty? It may be tempting, but your cat may not appreciate your cellphone being aimed in his direction, especially if you use the flash.
- **You stare at him in the eyes** — Direct eye contact is a sign of dominance and aggression in cats, so if you stare down your cat he may think you pose a threat. If you want to bond with your cat, try blinking slowly at him, which is an interspecies way of saying "I love you."
- **You put your cat in costumes** — Playing dress up is not the idea of fun to most cats, who may become frightened, angry or stressed by the unfamiliar or restricting costume you've subjected him too.
- **You're a creature of constant change** — If your lifestyle is one of chaos and lack of routine, your cat may have a hard time feeling safe and secure. Cats enjoy being stimulated in their environments, but they like for their homes to be a constant, safe place.

So avoid changing your cat's feeding times, litterbox locations, sleeping areas and housemates, and when you do, do so gradually so your cat has time to adjust.

If you feel like you and your cat could use some special bonding, make a point to spend time with him each day, but on his terms, not yours. Don't force a petting session or playtime, but let your cat know that you're there and ready to interact. Offer a new toy, a brushing or simply to spend time at his side, and it's likely that eventually your cat will reciprocate some affection.

Keep in mind, however, that if your cat has been abused or wasn't socialized properly as a kitten, he may not ever be the kind of cat that wants to sit on your lap and be pet for hours on end. A well-adjusted cat starts off as a well-adjusted kitten, so if you adopt one, be sure to take advantage of the early developmental periods to ensure your kitten will grow into a friendly, social cat.

Sources and References

^{1,3,4} [HSUS, Cat Chat: Understanding Feline Language \(Archived\)](#).

² [Insider October 29, 2019](#)

⁵ [Indy 100 August 14, 2018](#)
