



BEHAVIOR
SERIES

Understanding Your Talkative Cat

WHILE WE 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.

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.

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- **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.

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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