



# **AVERSIVE SOLUTIONS FOR CAT PROBLEMS**

*Kit Jenkins, Understanding Animals*

## **WHAT ARE AVERSIVES?**

Using aversive solutions to cat problems means finding ways to discourage the cat from going into or onto certain areas. Aversives make the area unattractive from the cat's point of view using textures, smells, tastes, and startling noises or movements. Outdoors, aversives can be used to keep cats out of flower beds, away from window and door areas, or off of cars. Indoors, they can be used to keep cats off of furniture and counters, away from previously urine-marked areas, or away from a particular location. They can also be used to discourage chewing of inappropriate objects.

Determining an effective aversive reaction for your cat is definitely a case of trial-and-error, as individual preferences will vary with each cat. While often the best method to discourage a cat from a particular action or place, it will seldom work effectively without offering an alternative that is both convenient and rewarding. This means that you need to provide a place you DO want the cat to go INSTEAD of the place he is going.

## **PROVIDING ALTERNATIVES**

For example, if the cat is digging in the flower bed you should make the area **unattractive** by using an aversive method. At the same time, you should provide a very **attractive** alternative place to dig — soft dirt, but in a place you approve of. If the cat likes to nap on the warm hood of the car, then make the car unattractive or unavailable while you also make another area available that is also a good, warm spot to nap.

## **BLOCKING ACCESS**

One of the simplest ways to keep a cat out of a certain area is to make the area unavailable. You can block access to many “jumping up” spots by removing (or covering) the object used as the “in-between” jumping-off point — like the chair he jumps on in order to get onto the table. If an outdoor cat likes to jump onto a window sill (and drive your indoor animals crazy!), you can block the sill itself by filling it with a window box, uneven bricks, or some other object that leaves no room for the cat.

Indoors, the best way to keep a cat out of a specific room is to use a door. Baby gates aren't effective to block a doorway from cats since they will simply climb over. However, a screen door installed in a doorway is an excellent way to block access to a room and still allow the flow of vision, smells, and sound. This works very well to help pets adjust to the presence of a new baby in the house. Screen the door into the nursery, and your pets will still be able to know what is happening in that room and be included by what they can see, smell, and hear.

## **TEXTURES**

You may need to weight the “material” firmly or tape it in order for it to stay put. To protect furniture or floor finish from sticky substances, attach them to a piece of foil or heavy plastic and secure that with weights or light tape.

### ***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)

**SMELLS**

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.

**Indoors & Outdoors:**

- ◆ Insect repellent, especially those containing citronella and/or citrus odors (check for toxicity – if safe for young children, it’s generally safe for pets)
- ◆ Citric odors – colognes, concentrated juices or fresh peels
- ◆ Annoying colognes
- ◆ Some muscle rubs (NOTE: some cats react to menthol as they do to catnip – beware!)
- ◆ Aloe gel

**TASTES**

Some of these substances may damage furniture or floor finishes, so be sure to test them in a hidden location before wide-spread use. Except for hot sauce and cayenne pepper, these substances should be safe to apply to most people’s skin; however, some individuals may be sensitive to them.

- ◆ Bitter Apple or similar sprays and gels marketed specifically for taste aversion
- ◆ Insect repellents, especially those containing citronella or citrus odors (check for toxicity; if it’s safe for young children, it’s generally safe for pets)
- ◆ Some hot sauces
- ◆ Cayenne pepper
- ◆ Some muscle rubs
- ◆ Citric odors (colognes, concentrated juices or fresh peels)
- ◆ Aloe gel

**SURPRISES!****Remote Controlled Aversives:**

- ◆ Motion detector that reacts with a startling sound
- ◆ Snappy Trainer (upside-down mouse trap that’s securely taped under paper to avoid contact)
- ◆ Aluminum pie plate containing water, dried beans, dry macaroni, or pebbles -- preferably balanced precariously on a counter or another undesirable “jumping up” surface
- ◆ Scat Mat (very slight electrical shock)

**Human Controlled Aversives:**

Use these to get your cat’s attention, and thereby offer an appropriate alternative.

- ◆ Spray bottle or squirt gun filled with water or a combination of water and vinegar (NOTE: avoid the super-duper 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)

**WARNING: For fearful cats, try everything else before trying surprise techniques, especially those using noises!**