

SAFE CAT HANDLING

Cat and dog bites are dangerous in different ways

DOG BITES

- 450 pounds of pressure per square inch
- Significant tissue and bone damage
- Sometimes death (~20/year in US)
- Rarely get infected (open, bleed freely)

CAT BITES

- Minimal tissue damage (most cases)
- 60-80% get infected
- Infection- even with proper cleaning/washing (puncture means little bleeding to rinse the wound)
- 6% result in hospitalization, usually due to infection
- A few people die of infection each year!!! Some need fingers or arms amputated!!

UNDERSTANDING CAT BODY LANGUAGE

EARS:

Pointing forward and slightly outward- relaxed and happy

Twitching nervously- agitated or nervous

Flat against the head- frightened and may attack (this is instinctual to protect the ears during a fight)

Back or in between alert and defensive position- aggressive and may attack

TAIL:

Lowered fully or between legs- showing fear or concern

Lowered and bristled- afraid

Still, with twitching tip- somewhat irritated

Held to the side, rump raised- may be in heat

Whipping from side to side- cat is angry and may attack. Sometimes purring, rubbing cats whip their tails when they are over stimulated- take a break from petting because even a friendly cat with a whipping tail may bite.

OFFENSIVE- will try to make himself look bigger/intimidating- postures include

- A stiff, straight-legged upright stance
- Stiffened rear legs, with the rear end raised and the back sloped downward toward the head
- Tail is stiff and lowered or held straight down to the ground, direct stare, constricted pupils
- Upright ears, with the backs rotated slightly forward, piloerection (hackles up), including fur on the tail
- Directly facing opponent, possibly moving toward him, might be growling, howling or yowling

DEFENSIVE- self protective by making himself look smaller- postures include:

- Crouching, head tucked in, tail curved around the body and tucked in
- Eyes wide open with pupils partially or fully dilated, ears flattened sideways or backward on the head
- Piloerection (hackles up), open-mouthed hissing or spitting
- In an anxious cat, whiskers might be retracted. In a fearful cat, whiskers might pan out and forward to assess distance between himself and the danger
- Turning sideways to opponent, not straight on, might deliver quick strikes with front paws, claws out

OVERT AGGRESSION, whether defensive or offensive, includes:

- Swatting, striking with paws, biting, fighting, growling, shrieking, scratching
- Preparing for an all-out attack by rolling onto side or back and exposing all weapons: teeth and claws
- In this position, your cat might attempt to grab your hand and bring it to his mouth to bite it