



Play Therapy for Shy Cats

Play therapy is a wonderful way to help shy cats come out of their shells and build confidence. This should **not** be used instead of socialization therapy in cats (please see our Socialization guide for instructions), but can be used in addition as an added benefit for them. Shy cats may be apprehensive or fearful, and play therapy can be a fun and effective method to gradually socialize and help them adjust to their environment. Here are some tips for using play therapy with shy cats:

Start Slowly: Shy cats may be easily overwhelmed, so start with short and gentle play sessions. Allow the cat to approach you at their own pace, and don't force interactions (this is separate from handling and socialization therapy- for more information on getting a kitten socialized and handled, please see our Socializing Kittens guide or for adults, Fearful Adult Cat Recommendations).

Interactive Toys: Use interactive toys like feather wands, laser pointers, or small toys on strings to engage the cat from a distance. These toys can pique their curiosity and help them come closer to investigate.

Positive Reinforcement: Reward the cat with treats after they engage in a play session. This positive reinforcement can help build a positive association with playtime and interactions.

Respect Their Boundaries: Respect the cat's boundaries and body language. If they show signs of stress or discomfort (such as hissing, growling, or hiding), give them space and time to relax. Start at a distance to get them comfortable enough to begin playing.

Consistency: Be consistent with play sessions, ensuring they occur regularly. Consistency can help the cat become more comfortable with the routine and with you.

Safe Hiding Places: Provide safe hiding spots where the cat can retreat when they feel overwhelmed. This gives them a sense of security and control.

Gradual Decrease in Distance: Over time, as the cat gets more and more comfortable playing during sessions, decrease the distance between yourself and the cat at the start of play sessions. Over time and with consistency, if they are enjoying play, they should get more and more comfortable with small increments of decreased distance, until you are able to sit closer to them to interact.