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ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT FOR INDOOR CATS

We, being cat owners (or shall we say guardians of cats), ultimately decide what's best for them. We decide to bring them inside to keep them healthy and out of harm's way. Most of the time, indoor cats do not have the opportunity for social interaction, are not able to engage in normal feline behaviors (i.e. climb and hunt) and are placed in unnatural environments. They are expected to be content with these changes. It's essential to strive to recognize an animal's psychological need in order to obtain optimal health and well-being.

We must start to enrich the cat's environment and work to maintain behaviors comprising the animal's natural daily life. The environment should provide a cat with a feeling of...

- + Security
- + Complexity
- + The ability to control, or make decisions (achieve objectives)
- + Novelty
- + Opportunity for social interaction

As the saying goes, "Curiosity killed the cat", but boredom can as well. Cats engage in exploratory and investigative behaviors which function to obtain as much information about their own environment as possible. The stress of having a limited environment without stimulation may negatively impact both behavioral and psychological health. Some of these behaviors are...

- + Displacement activities
- + Elimination problems
- + Eating disorders
- + Anxiety-related disorders
- + Attention seeking behaviors (directed at human or self-directed)
- + Aggressive behaviors
- + Self injurious and compulsive behaviors
- + Psychotic behaviors

Modification Steps to Enhance the Indoor Environment:

1. Three Dimensional Spaces

Cats prefer to rest on elevated objects. Provide a variety of perches in more than one area and make them private enough for only one cat at a time. Resting places of different heights are also recommended.

- + Construct cat walks, walls
- + Cat condominiums
- + Cat trees
- + Window seats
- + Tents, igloos, tunnels
- + Book shelves and places especially for cats (remove breakable items)
- + Furniture
- + Remember to rearrange and move items to different spaces for novel exploration.

2. Feeding

Instead of one regular feeding location, divide their meals into 3 - 4 feedings and hide the food around in various sites. This is to stimulate “hunting” and “working for something”.

- + Hide in corners of rooms, under beds
- + Place the food behind furniture so they have to “paw it”
- + Hide high atop shelves, refrigerators
- + Place food and treats in intermittent feeding balls, puzzles, toilet paper rolls taped at one end, Kitty Kongs™
- + Offer very yummy treats like freeze dried liver, canned food, shrimp, chicken, turkey luncheon meat
- + Use a timer feeder, vary the times food becomes available each day

3. Touch and Olfactory Stimulation

Find acceptable scratching materials

- + Scratch mats (rug, cardboard, sisal)
- + Door hangers
- + Scratching posts in visible areas
- + Pieces of tree limbs with and without bark

Substrates for resting

- + Fleece-like materials
- + Taffeta
- + Burlap
- + Felt
- + Down
- + Sheepskin, fake furs

Other sensory stimulation

- + Catnip
- + Cat Grass
- + Felaway facial pheromones

4. Toys

Most cat toys are unlikely to maintain the interest of cats unless only a few toys are given at a time and on a rotating basis. Some examples of toys around the house are...

- + Ping pong balls
- + Twisty ties
- + Milk bottle caps
- + Q-tips™
- + Paper and foil balls
- + Balls with bells
- + Boxes piled with holes to investigate
- + Paper/shopping bags (no plastic)
- + 12 pack soda containers open at one end

Lots of interactive toys are found in multiple pet stores and over the internet. (See additional resources)

Other modalities:

Clicker training for treats

Massage therapy

Kitty Videos: Kitty Show 1-843-524-7928

PO Box 6345 Burton, SC 29903

Internet and Phone Numbers:

1. CatToys.com, PO Box 1401, West Chester, PA 19380
<http://www.cattoys.com> 877-364-8697
2. KatWALLks PO Box 470366, Tulsa, OK 74147
<http://www.katwallks.com> 866-528-9255
3. HDW Enterprises, Inc., PO Box 418104, Sacramento, CA 95841-8104
<http://www.hdw-inc.com> 916-481-2287
4. Me-ow-trageous Kitty Creations, 2545 West 10th St, Suite H, Antioch, CA 94509
<http://www.catfurniture.com> 877-778-6369
5. Interpets.com, 903 W. Waterloo Rd, Akron, OH 44314
<http://www.interpets.com> 877-414-7387
6. CoolPetStuff.com, PO Box 9091, Newport Beach, CA 92658
<http://www.coolpetstuff.com> 800-686-6599

Reading Materials

1. *Cat Massage: A Whisker-to-Tail Guide to Your Cat's Ultimate Petting Experience* by Maryjean Ballner
2. *How to Massage Your Cat* by Alice May Brock
3. *Showbiz Tricks for Cats* by Anne Gordon
4. *The Cat's House* by B. Walker
5. *Cat's Into Everything* by B. Walker
6. *Felinestein* by Suzanne Delzio and Cindy Ribarich, D.V.M.