



©Nils Jacob | Getty Images

Can Cats Hold a Grudge?

BY RITA REIMERS AND LINDA HALL

When clients reach out to us for help, they often have their own theory as to why their cat is doing things deemed inappropriate by human standards. Revenge, grudges and payback are often mentioned as a feline motivation for bad behavior. An example we hear quite often: “Every time I leave town for business, my cat poops on my bed to punish me.” But, is that really what happened here?

Humanizing our felines

Humanizing our cats’ behaviors and actions is a common thing among us cat parents. Admit it: You happily refer to yourselves as “cat moms and dads.” (Yeah, so do we!) We often talk to our cats and confide in them much the same way we would a trusted friend. Cats are such an integral part of our everyday

lives that we often refer to them as our BFF’s (best feline friends) or even as our fur kids. After all, there are many commonalities between our cats’ actions and those of our human children.

However, assigning human emotions to our cats is not a good idea. Cats are actually motivated by something more important than emotions.

Behind the behavior

Human beings are very expressive, and we often make decisions based on our emotions. But everything a cat does is based on survival, not emotions. When you look at what your cat is doing — good or bad — and compare it to how wild or stray cats live, it’s clear that they are using their survival instincts to act as they do.

While cats do have long memories, they don’t really hold grudges like people may do. Cats might avoid certain people, places, situations or things they have had bad experiences with. In nature, this is how cats, both big and small, use their survival instincts in everyday situations. Even if they have never lived outdoors, cats are born with that instinct to safeguard themselves. This is a constant motivation in every cat’s life.

Instinctive and/or memory motiva-



tion to act a certain way, however, isn't the same as holding a grudge. Your cat is not retaliating for something that makes him unhappy. He doesn't even know what a grudge means. He's simply acting to protect his resources and is actually feeling fear.

As a cat parent, it's crucial to learn as much as possible about cats, their history living with humans and their natural habits. Cats are in the middle of the food chain as both predator and prey, so they are more vigilant about their security than your dog might be about his. Learning what makes cats tick will make it much easier for you not only to understand what your cat is doing but also will enable you to redirect unwanted behaviors more easily.

Think like your cat

The next time you feel that your cat is acting out of spite or anger, put yourself in his place. What is he really trying to communicate? Assess the entire situation, find the what or who that is causing him to misbehave, then find ways to relieve his feelings of threat, fear and anxiety behind his actions. Make changes or redirect his actions to relieve his stress. You'll both be much happier, and your home will be peaceful with a kitty happily snoozing on your lap. 🐾



Rita Reimers and **Linda Hall** are co-founders of The Cat Behavior Alliance, offering a unique Duo-Approach to cat behavior correction. Visit them at CatBehaviorAlliance.com for more information. You can also find Rita and Linda on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok @CatBehaviorAlliance.

Why is kitty acting this way?

Here are a few examples of unwanted cat behaviors and what the behavior is actually communicating. Always check with your veterinarian to rule out any medical reasons for your cat's irksome actions.

Peeing or pooping on your bed:

We hear this one quite a bit, and most people think it either means the cat is retaliating for something he didn't like or that he doesn't like them. It's neither. Mixing his scent with yours is comforting to your cat when he is feeling anxious or stressed.

Spraying: Quite different from peeing, spraying behavior occurs when a cat feels his resources are being threatened, and he's putting up his sign that lets everyone else know "I live here, and you do not!" Changes in the household, like new pets, outside feral and/or stray cats being near your home are all examples of what may cause your cat to sense a lack of enough of his resources to go around. So he reclaims them as his by marking with his scent.

Scratching: This isn't retaliatory behavior either — it's part of your cat's DNA to scratch. Scratching keeps his claws and paws in tip-top shape as he scent marks where he's scratching with those paw pads. It's a natural and necessary part of your cat's physical needs.

Aggression: A cat acting aggressively is one who is in fear for his life and/or his well-being. That fight-or-flight mentality is triggered when a cat feels threatened, and he will do whichever one he feels is necessary to survive. Moving, new people in the household, new pets and any type of major change could create aggressive behavior in your cat. But again, this is not any type of hatred nor grudge your cat is harboring.

