



FACTSHEET

Clicker Training Your Cat

Yes, cats can be clicker trained! Clicker training is a great way to teach your cat good manners in a positive way as well as helping you bond with your cat. Sometimes training a cat can be harder than training other animals but it is well worth the time and energy for you and your cat.

What is clicker training?

Clicker training is positive reinforcement training that uses the 'click' sound of a clicker paired with a treat to let your cat know they are doing something you want them to do and that will increase the chance of them doing it again.

Clicker training can be used to teach your cat to use a carry cage, sit, eat slowly, curb play aggressive behaviours, harness train, give high fives, or just show your friends what a smart cat they are!

What you need:

- a clicker
- your cat
- your cat's favourite treat (if your cat is not food motivated this may be a teaser toy, or lots of pats)
- patience

The steps to clicker training

1. Your cat won't automatically associate the clicker sound with what you want them to do, so you need to start by getting your cat to learn the click means they will get a reward. An easy way to do this is pick a behaviour your cat does that you want them to continue to do, for example, sitting quietly near you. When you notice your cat is sitting quietly, click the clicker and give your cat a treat. It's important that you do this every time you see your cat do the behaviour, so they start to associate the behaviour with the click and the treat. Keep in mind you are reinforcing the behaviour by rewarding it so choose a behaviour that is one you want your cat to continue to do!
2. Once your cat associates the click with the treat you can move on to another behaviour. An important note is that you must **NEVER use negative behaviour or punishment** if your cat is not showing the behaviour you want. Just ignore an unwanted behaviour and reward the wanted behaviour.
3. It's important to note natural-type behaviours are usually the ones that cats will learn to do more quickly and enjoy. For example, high five is a good trick to teach your cat as most cats will reach their paw up when they want something, making it easy for you to touch their paw when it is in the air and reward the 'high five'.
4. Next associate the treat with a cue word. For example, if you are teaching high five, you just say "high five" as your cat touches your hand and then click and treat. This way you can start to train your cat to associate the word with the behaviour. Once your cat knows the word and does the behaviour consistently, you can stop using the clicker.

These are the basic steps; there are some great books on clicker training but remember to only use positive reinforcement when training your cat.

Putting it in to practice: cat jumping on kitchen bench

If your cat is jumping on kitchen benchtops and you don't want them to, start by gently lifting your cat off the benchtop and placing them on the floor. Do not yell at them or reprimand them. Calmly and gently say a word or phrase you want them to associate with the behaviour, for example, "on the floor", as you are placing them on the floor. A little while later, while they are still sitting on the floor, click the clicker and give the cat a treat.

Each time your cat jumps on the bench repeat. You will need to be diligent and click and treat only when your cat has been sitting on the floor for more than 30 seconds. Ensure you do it every time you see your cat on the bench top. To avoid your cat associating jumping on the bench as the reason they are getting the treat, be sure to treat them any time you see them sitting on the floor and not trying to jump up as well. Be patient as some cats may take a while to learn the floor is a nicer place to be as they get treats. As cats like high areas make sure you give them a platform or scratch post ledge to get up high and then each time they jump onto the ledge area, click and treat. Your cat will soon stop jumping on the benches and jump on the ledge area instead as they get rewards by being on there. Now start saying "on the floor" each time the cat jumps up on to the bench and if they don't jump off do the steps above again. If they do jump off, give them a treat once they are on the floor and have been sitting for at least 30 seconds.

Cat scratching furniture

All cats need a place to scratch as it is a natural feline behaviour. If you don't want your cat scratching the furniture or carpet, you need to give them a correct place to scratch. Firstly, look at how your cat is scratching; are they scratching along the carpet or are they reaching up to scratch? This will determine what type of scratch post to get for them (horizontal, vertical, or both!).

Once you have the scratch post you want them to use, you need to train them to use it. Place the scratcher near the area the cat is currently scratching. Each time you see your cat scratching the unwanted area, pick them up (do not yell at them or reprimand them), gently say a word you want to associate with the correct behaviour, for example "on the post" and place them on the area you want them to scratch. Click and treat. You need to ensure you are placing them and the treat on the wanted area each time. If you see your cat go to the wanted area, click and treat. This way your cat will learn the wanted area.

If your cat is reluctant to use the scratch post, try some Feliway or Feli-scratch to attract them and place their favourite toy at the base of the scratcher. Be patient, it can take some cats a long time to get out of the habit of scratching furniture and you may need to try several scratch post options until you find one your cat likes. Always remember your cat is not doing this behaviour to be spiteful or naughty, they are just being a cat.

Once your cat is using the scratcher you want them to use you can slowly start moving it into the area you want it in but keep in mind your cat may be scratching in the area they are scratching in for a reason (like scent marking or a stray cat outside they want to tell to go away), so they may go back to your furniture if you move the scratch post. Once you have done the above procedure a few times, start saying the cue word when you notice the cat scratching in the unwanted area and if the cat goes directly to the post then give them a treat. If they don't go to the area repeat the above again. As mentioned, you do need to be patient as it can take some cats some time to stop scratching. If the cat continues the behaviour after eight weeks you may need to look at the behaviour further to see if there is a reason they are displaying this behaviour.

If you have any questions about training your cat, or cat care in general, please call us at Cat Protection Society of NSW on 9519 7201 or visit our website www.catprotection.org.au