



*A non-profit that educates
and supports dog owners*

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PREDATORY BEHAVIOR

The dogs and cats we live with are carnivores and predators. Although a discussion of predation is often lumped into the topic of aggression, technically the two are different. Aggression is really a social behavior that occurs when animals engage in some sort of conflict over territory, space, or other resources. Predatory behavior is not motivated by social conflict but rather by the need to obtain food.

When it comes to dogs, people become concerned when their dogs try to kill other family pets such as cats, birds or small mammals. Dogs that have the opportunity to run loose and chase and hurt livestock, horses, or wild animals such as deer, rabbits or even snakes also present problems.

Cats that roam outside unsupervised have more opportunities to display predatory behaviors. They may hunt and kill small mammals such as mice or voles. Some research shows that cat predation on song birds is significant, at least in some areas.

It is easier to prevent predatory behavior that dogs and cats direct toward animals other than humans (which will be discussed later) through socialization and environmental management than it is to change the behavior once it's become a pattern.

Animals don't normally prey on members of their own species or on species they recognize as peers or friends. Infanticide (the killing of infants of your own species) does exist in nature, but won't be discussed in this article. The best way to have dogs or cats that don't display predatory behavior toward other family pets is to socialize them to one another when they are young.

Back in the 1920's, a behavioral scientist demonstrated that kittens raised with rats treated them as friends rather than prey. If you want your cats to like dogs and vice versa it's best they become familiar with the other species when they are young, and the younger the better. For more information about the benefits of early socialization, and how to socialize young cats and dogs, read the Pamphlets For Pet Parents on that topic.

When adult pets are displaying predatory behavior to one another it can be quite a difficult and dangerous problem to work with. You can begin to introduce or re-introduce them using the techniques ex-

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Ask your pet professional for more information about dog and cat behavior.

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The first step in stopping predation is to prevent the opportunity to prey on others.

plained in the articles on introducing new cats to resident dogs and vice versa. But you must take steps to ensure the safety of all the animals, by using muzzles, confinement and containment, or other means. If you are concerned about the safety of any of your pets, you should consult a certified applied or veterinary behaviorist or other behavior consultant to assist you.

If your dog or cat is displaying predatory behavior toward wildlife or free roaming domestic animals, the first option is environmental management. You won't be able to successfully change the behavior unless you can prevent it from happening. This means improving or erecting some kind of containment system, not allowing your dog off leash in locations where they are likely to encounter other animals, and not allowing your cats to roam free.

When pets, primarily dogs, display predatory behavior to people this is an even more serious situation. In rare cases, dogs will display predatory behavior toward infants and young children. Dogs that chase joggers, or people on skateboards and bicycles may, or may not be showing true predatory behavior. The first step in addressing the problem is to change your dog's environment so he doesn't have the opportunity to be loose chasing people. For more information, read the Pamphlets on dog aggression to people and other animals.

It can be very difficult to stop dogs and cats from engaging in predatory behavior once they have had experience with it. If you want to try to modify your pet's predatory behavior you will need the help of a professional behavior consultant. Read the Pamphlet on how to find a behavior consultant to help you.

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