**Feline Aggression Scale**

This scale assesses behavior observed in the moment; it does not assess stable traits, nor should it be used to make statements about a cat’s personality.

**Neutral**

**Body:**

* Body is relaxed
* Eyes are almond shaped with a soft gaze; pupil size is appropriate for the ambient lighting
* Ears are in a relaxed position: forward or turned slightly outward
* Whiskers may droop loosely
* Tail is likely not moving or, at most, moves slowly and intermittently back and forth; tail hangs naturally or is held upright in a curved position

**Behavior:**

* Appears relaxed and may slowly blink eyes
* May look at a stimulus with little to no interest
* If engaging with a stimulus, shows interest while staying calm
* Easy to handle

# **Aggression**

Body language is common across all levels of aggression but is likely to become more exaggerated with increasing aggression.

**If the cat is trying to make themselves appear smaller:**

* Body will be flattened or compressed
* May be rolled partially onto side (weight shifted away from the stimulus)
* Eyes may be round or narrowed
* Pupils are likely to be dilated
* Ears are back and/or down
* Whiskers are likely to be pulled back
* Tail may be down or wrapped around body

**If the cat is trying to make themselves appear larger:**

* Back may be arched with tail downward in an inverted U-shape and fur raised (piloerect)
* May stand straight legged and upright, directly facing the stimulus or turned sideways
* Eyes may be round or narrowed
* Pupils may be dilated or constricted
* Ears are back and/or down
* Whiskers may be fanned out and forward
* Fur may be raised (piloerect) along the spine and/or tail
* Tail may flick, swish, whip, or thump
* Tail may be held tall and stiff, straight down, or in an inverted U-shape

# **Mild Aggression**

**Behavior:**Cat displays one or more of the following behaviors:

* May hard stare at the stimulus
* May threaten to avoid or ward off the stimulus:
  + Emit a high-pitched, long meow, or hiss, growl, yowl, or huff
  + Orient to the stimulus with open or closed mouth
  + Lift paw
  + Air swat
  + Swat the ground
  + Swat or place mouth on the stimulus with no more than light pressure, while staying in place or leaning away
  + Come forward to threaten without making contact, then quickly retreat
* If startled, behavior may escalate beyond the threats listed above (e.g., spits or lunges), but behavior is brief, subsides immediately, and does not cause damage
* If handled or picked up, may vocalize and forcefully use legs and feet with claws extended to push away from handler

# **Moderate Aggression**

**Behavior:** Cat displays any of the behaviors in mild aggression plus at least one of the following:

* May briefly spit
* Stays in place or moves toward the stimulus but does not pursue if the stimulus moves away or disengages
* May move toward or lunge briefly toward the stimulus without making contact
* If cornered, lunges and swats or bites
* If swats or bites, uses no more than moderate pressure, potentially resulting in shallow broken skin
* If the cat swats or bites several times in a row, injuries are minor, and the cat quickly retreats
* If handled or picked up, rakes handler with back legs while trying to escape

# **Severe Aggression**

**Behavior:** Cat displays any of the behaviors in mild or moderate aggression plus at least one of the following:

* May repeatedly or often yowl, spit, or scream
* Escalates to lunging and biting or swatting with little warning
* Swats or bites with moderate to hard pressure, displaying one or more of the following:
  + Likely causes bruising, deep scratches, or punctures
  + Bites and holds for more than 2-3 seconds
  + Repeatedly bites or swats with claws extended
* May pursue or chase even if the person tries to de-escalate the situation
* Likely difficult to interrupt
* Even after the stimulus has been removed, cat still is severely aroused and may redirect aggression to another target
* If being handled or picked up, struggles forcefully to get away and inflicts quick, hard bites, likely puncturing the skin