

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.

Behavior may manifest differently based on the arousal-inducing stimulus; therefore, examples are provided in relation to situations that commonly induce arousal:

- Playtime or movement
- Petting
- When physically prevented from engaging with a stimulus (e.g., a caged cat sees a person and wants to interact but cannot)

Arousal may overlap with other categories, such as fear and aggression. If a cat exhibits fear when aroused, please refer to the fear scale. If a cat escalates to a point where there is concern for human safety, please refer to the Feline Risk Assessment.

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

Mild Arousal

Body

- Body may be tense
- Compared to the cat's normal state, movements may be quicker, more frequent, or more intense
- Eyes may be somewhat round; pupils may be dilated
- Ears may swivel back and forth

- Whiskers may be forward
- Fur along the spine, base of tail, or entire tail may be raised (piloerect), and skin may ripple or twitch
- Tail may intermittently flick, swish, whip, or thump, or if tail is constantly moving, movement is likely slow

Behavior

- May momentarily focus gaze on the stimulus
- May vocalize, including brief hissing or growling
- If the cat pursues the stimulus, does so with minimal intensity
- Can easily disengage from the stimulus
- Arousal quickly decreases when the stimulus (e.g., being petted) is removed

If aroused by playtime or movement

- May intently watch the stimulus with tail moving intermittently
- May stalk the stimulus with body and head low to the ground
- May freeze before briefly pouncing
- May mouth the stimulus with light or no pressure or bat/paw the stimulus lightly

If aroused by petting

- May rub on nearby objects or the person with increased speed
- May lie down on one side or roll on the floor
- May orient to the petting hand with a closed or partially open mouth
- May place mouth on the person without applying pressure
- May raise paw or bat at the hand with light pressure, typically with claws retracted
- May choose to disengage by getting up and moving away

If prevented from engaging with the stimulus

- May meow and/or chatter
- May pace back and forth
- May rub against, gently paw at, or place front paws up on the barrier
- May reach through the barrier to paw at or grab the stimulus with light pressure, typically with nails retracted

Moderate Arousal

Body

- Body is tense
- Eyes are likely round with dilated pupils
- Ears are swiveled back
- Whiskers may be forward
- Fur along the spine, base of tail, or entire tail may be raised (piloerect), and skin may ripple or twitch
- Tail may flick, swish, whip, thump, or quiver; as arousal increases, tail may move with more force and/or more quickly

Behavior

- May hard stare at the stimulus
- May meow, chatter, hiss, growl, or yowl with increasing intensity
- May leave superficial scratches or shallow bites that graze the skin or leave indents, but does not cause severe damage to people
- May be difficult to interrupt or distract

If aroused by playtime or movement

- May stare at or pursue the stimulus with moderate intensity
- May pant, especially with prolonged exposure to the stimulus
- May pounce on, mouth with moderate pressure, swat, grab, or bunny kick; behavior may occur toward the stimulus or be redirected onto a person or another animal in the vicinity
- May need several minutes to return to a normal state once the stimulus has been removed

If aroused by petting

- May rub on objects with greater force and/or frequency, potentially pacing back and forth quickly
- Will likely orient quickly to the person's hand and may do so with an open mouth
- May place and/or hold mouth on the person's hand with no more than moderate pressure
- May bat or swat at the person's hand briefly, with or without claws extended, and with light to moderate force

If prevented from engaging with the stimulus

- Is alert and focused on the arousing stimulus
- May pace more intensely
- May rub against the barrier or scratch at the barrier with front paws

- May reach through the bars to forcefully or frantically grab or swat at the stimulus, typically with claws extended
- May be intent on pursuing the stimulus and need constant redirection or significant environmental change to reduce arousal
- May be too focused on the stimulus to engage in other activities, such as taking treats or playing, especially if near the stimulus

Severe Arousal

Body

- Body is tense
- Eyes are round with dilated pupils
- Ears are swiveled back or down and back
- Whiskers may be forward
- Fur may be raised (piloerect) along the spine and/or tail
- Tail is constantly moving with increased speed and force or may be held high and stiff with the tip quivering

Behavior

- May stare directly at the stimulus and be unwilling to break eye contact
- May meow, hiss, growl, or yowl intensely
- May be unaware of anything else going on around them
- May deliberately follow the stimulus in close proximity, stalk, or chase the stimulus, or may make quick, forward, and sudden movements towards the stimulus with little to no warning
- When the stimulus is removed, may remain in a heightened aroused state and/or continue to pursue or search for the stimulus
- Requires adept defensive handling or may require the use of a physical barrier to protect people entering the cat's space
- May continue to pursue or search for the stimulus after it has been removed
- May remain in an aroused state long after the stimulus is removed
- Impossible to interrupt or distract

If aroused by playtime or movement

- May stare directly at the stimulus before pursuing it with high intensity
- Makes repeated contact with the stimulus by pouncing, chasing, or grabbing
- May mouth, bite, or use claws persistently with moderate to hard pressure
- May bite and hold the stimulus for several seconds or longer

- May redirect onto people or other animals in the vicinity and may be difficult to physically remove
- When actively pursuing the stimulus, cannot be interrupted
- If the cat needs to be touched, requires the use of defensive handling/equipment

If aroused by petting

- May pace back and forth quickly
- May rub on objects with greater force and/or frequency
- May directly stare at the stimulus, then escalate to swatting, mouthing, or biting with extreme force and/or hard pressure, possibly with little to no warning, and may be difficult to physically remove
- May remain aroused after petting has ceased and follow as the person moves away or tries to leave, and potentially swat or bite the person

If prevented from engaging with the stimulus

- May pace consistently
- May forcefully and repetitively paw at or jump on the barrier
- May swat, grab, or mouth at people or other objects with extreme force and/or pressure
- May try to escape confinement
- May redirect onto a person or other animal that is near