

FREQUENTLY ASKED:

Why is my cat suddenly aggressive?

REDIRECTED AGGRESSION & THE IMPACT OF SCENT

As guided by Amy

FOUNDER, NOOSA COUNTRY CAT HOTEL

What is Redirected Aggression?

Redirected aggression occurs when a cat becomes aroused or frustrated by something they see, hear or smell—usually something they can't reach—and then takes that arousal out on the nearest cat or person. It is not about dominance or spite; it is an involuntary response to high stress.

Pryor, K. (2017). Don't Shoot the Dog! 3rd Ed. Penguin Random House.

Common Triggers

- Seeing cats, animals or people outside
- Hearing noises (cats fighting, wildlife, dogs barking)
- Being unable to access a resource or space
- Sudden movement or startling events
- High arousal during play

Overall, K. L. (2013). Clinical Behavioral Medicine for Small Animals. Mosby Elsevier.

How Other Cat Scent Can Change Recognition

Cats primarily recognise each other by scent. When a cat comes home smelling of unfamiliar cats from outside, the resident cat may perceive them as a stranger, not a sibling. This can lead to hissing, growling or even fighting. This is especially common after vet visits, grooming, boarding or roaming.

Horowitz, A. (2002). Inside of a Cat: What Cats See, Smell and Know. Scribner.



Signs Your Cat May Not Recognise Their Sibling

- Hissing, growling or yowling at a familiar cat
- Staring or tense body posture
- Blocking paths or refusing to come near
- Chasing or swatting
- Sudden change after being outside or returning from the vet or groomer

Turner, D. C. & Bateson, P. (2013). The Domestic Cat: The Biology of Its Behaviour. 2nd Ed. Cambridge University Press.

What You Can Do

- Keep cats separated and safe
- Swap scents using bedding or a soft cloth
- Feed on either side of a door
- Use slow, controlled reintroductions
- Provide plenty of resources, space and vertical options
- Never force interaction

International Society of Feline Medicine (2022). ISFM Feline Friendly Handling Guidelines.



Redirected aggression is a stress response, not a choice. Changes in scent can make even close feline siblings seem like strangers. With patience, management and the right reintroduction process, most cats can rebuild their bond.

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