



## Interactive Play with Cats

Seems silly, right? A protocol on how to play with your cat? Playing with your cat is pretty simple, but there actually is an “incorrect” way to play that can cause frustration and lead to additional behavior issues rather than alleviating stress, which is our primary goal.

The following protocol will help give you some tips and tricks on the best toys to use, what to avoid, and sets some rules for the game that will benefit both you and your cat so you’ll both get the most out of each session. Additionally, if your cat likes to play, then it could be a great form of enrichment, and maybe even solve some behavior problems.

### **Notes:**

- Be sure to use appropriate toys such as lure toys, wands, or anything that keeps the toy away from your hand.
- Never encourage your cat to play with or use your hand as a toy.
- Set a timer for 10 minute to ensure that the cat is getting a good amount of play time.
- Have some treats ready to give at the end of the session.
- Stop the first time your cat moves away or shows any signs of anxiety or arousal.
- Never use laser pointers as toys. Many cats will chase the laser pointers, but without there being a tangible object for the cat to catch, it can actually create frustration and over-arousal. Imagine trying to hold on to smoke without understanding that just because you can see it doesn’t mean there’s something to touch.

### **Teaching the Behavior:**

1. Find a lure or wand toy that your cat likes. Some prefer feather toys while others like something that resembles small pre-like animals.
2. Set a timer for 10 minutes. This gives the cat a good amount of time to engage in the game and get a good session without building stamina which could have an adverse effect in the long run.
3. Move the toy along the ground, flick it up in the air, and move it erratically. You may notice some cats have preference to if the toy moves a particular way.
4. Do your best to keep the toy moving away from the cat. Think about how a prey animal such as a bird or a mouse would act if there was a cat around. They would never move directly towards the cat (unless the cat was hiding) or climb on top of the cat, or boop them on the nose, etc. We want to try and make the game as realistic as possible so the cat will engage.
5. Wait for your cat to come out and chase after the toy. Be patient; many cats will take a few moments to minutes to stay back and watch the toy first. This is okay; watching and observing is part of the game!
6. When the cat does come to catch the toy, keep it moving, and try to find a good balance between allowing them to catch it and continuing to move it away from them. It’s okay if the toy “gets away” as not every hunt is successful, but we want to still allow the cat to have success to keep them engaged.
7. Once the 10-minute timer is up, end the session by allowing the cat to catch the toy, and then drop treats next to the toy. Once the cat starts eating, remove the toy and end the session. This completes the hunt sequence, offers a conclusive end to the session and helps prevent the cat from being frustrated.