

## Cats and Their Place on the Scale of Predation vs. Prey By Stephen Quandt

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Email: [Stephen@cat-behavior-help.com](mailto:Stephen@cat-behavior-help.com) Web: [cat-behavior-help.com](http://cat-behavior-help.com) Instagram @JennyTheBlindCat

Kittens at 4-6 weeks of age are all very similar, and at 4 weeks of age they are just learning to explore the world and show virtually nothing of their adult personality development. When you look at all the variations in adult cat personalities, confident, nervous, playful, lazy, affectionate, independent, lap cat, non-lap cat, and everything in between, people often think that cats are the way they are because of how they were raised, but nothing could be farther from the truth. Yes, cats can be raised to their potential, but you can't turn a non-lap cat into a lap cat. Almost all of what we see in adult cat personality is innate to them and their development. If you have 2 kids, and one is a grumpy pessimist and the other a cheerful optimist, and they were raised by the same people in the same home then we can't blame the environment.

So then the question becomes, how do I help my cat, who's adult personality is shaped by and falls at one end or the other of this scale of Predator or Prey, be the best and happiest cat she can be and allow me to enjoy her company as much as possible?

- ★ Step one, is recognizing that cats are literally carnivorous hunters and no matter how much we domesticate them, we cannot remove the hunter from them. Secondly, domestic cats are also one of the few of the 38 species of cats in the world that are simultaneously predators and PREY. Domestic cats exist on a scale of "self identity" that they see (feel) themselves either at the very top as predators (confident hunters) or at the bottom as prey (nervous cats) or somewhere in between (most cats).
- ★ When our cat is somewhere towards the top or bottom of this scale we tend to see behavioral problems. The solution is to help meet the needs of the cat without us becoming the object of the cat's fear or confidence. Example situation: In this case it sounds like you have become the object of her predatory needs, in other words you have become a big "mouse". We see this when someone describes what I call "Drive by ankle biting" or any sort of unprovoked aggression. We need to get her hunting things other than yourself.
- ★ For cats at the low end of this scale we see cats who are environmentally nervous or fearful. Noises, new people, changes in the environment, new environments all provoked a need in these cats to hide. What they're effectively hiding from instinctively are other animals that would hunt them. The way we help this cat is to try to raise their confidence. We do this in several ways, by securing their environment, making it "safer" for them, providing hiding spaces, but also ways to express status and confidence like giving them cat climbing furniture. Cats feel more confident and express more confidence and status through height. Engaging our cat in gentle play, with treats (!) is encouraging the hunter in them and helps to give them a confidence boost without risk. The treat reinforces the nature of getting to EAT after killing, reinforcing the cycle of predation.
- ★ For cats, the cycle of predation has several steps, Hunting, Killing, Eating and then Sleeping, in that order. PLAY for cats is predatory behavior. Hungry cats may bite because this is what they do in nature, it's hardwired into them, first they stalk (hunt) then bite (kill) then they eat so it makes complete sense that some cats are more aggressive when they are hungry. It's often true that the person who bears most of the aggression is the one who does most of the feeding. The cat is trying to provoke you into feeding them in the way they know best, even if it's counter productive.

In other cats the opposite can be true. The one who feeds them has a stronger relationship with them as they are fulfilling the role of "mother cat". See also [Are You My Mother? Cats and Their Relationship to Us.](#) and [Cats and the Cycle of Predation.](#) A complete and customized behavior modification plan can make significant progress to the point of real success with the cats described above.