



# Stanhope Park Veterinary Hospital

## FELINE BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS

### 5 PILLARS OF A HEALTHY FELINE ENVIRONMENT

Whilst pet cats are considered a “domestic” species, having lived with humans for thousands of years, they still retain many of their natural wild instincts. Frequently, behavioural problems are encountered with pet cats, when these natural instincts are challenged or not accounted for in the home environment, with many issues being resolved once these areas are considered from the viewpoint of the cat.

#### **PILLAR 1: PROVIDE A SAFE PLACE**

##### **Rationale:**

While cats can comfortably live alone or in social groups, they hunt alone. The risk of injury represents a serious survival risk. As a result, cats tend to “*avoid and evade*” rather than confront perceived threats. A safe place enables the cat to withdraw from conditions it considers threatening or unfamiliar. All of the cats’ senses are mobilised to detect threatening conditions, which are signalled by strange smells, loud or strange noises, unfamiliar objects, and the presence of unknown or disliked animals. The degree of sensitivity to perceived threats varies according to individual cats. By having the option to withdraw, a cat is able to exert some control over its environment, which it finds satisfying in itself.

#### **PILLAR 2: PROVIDE MULTIPLE AND SEPARATED KEY ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: FOOD; WATER; TOILETING AREAS; SCRATCHING AREAS; PLAY AREAS; RESTING + SLEEPING AREAS**

##### **Rationale:**

Since cats are solitary survivors, they need to have free access to key environmental resources without being challenged by other cats or other potential threats. In addition to avoiding competition for access, separation of resources reduces the risk of stress and associated diseases, and satisfies the cat’s natural need for exploration and exercise.

Use the formula “*1 per cat plus one extra*” to ensure an adequate supply of key environmental resources.



# Stanhope Park Veterinary Hospital

## **PILLAR 3: PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY FOR PLAY AND PREDATORY BEHAVIOUR**

### **Rationale:**

The cat has a strong instinct to display a predatory behavioural sequence consisting of locating, capturing (*stalking; chasing; pouncing*), killing, preparing, and eating its prey. Predatory behaviour occurs even in well-fed cats. For cats that are able to hunt, predation consumes a significant proportion of their daily activities, requiring considerable physical activity and mental engagement. Inhibiting or failing to provide cats with opportunities for predatory-type behaviour can result in obesity or boredom and frustration that can express itself as over-grooming, stress-associated disease or misdirected aggressive behaviour.

## **PILLAR 4: PROVIDE POSITIVE, CONSISTENT AND PREDICTABLE HUMAN – CAT SOCIAL INTERACTION**

### **Rationale:**

Affiliative behaviours are integral to maintaining positive relationships. Similar behaviours are often directed towards preferred humans; for example, rubbing the head and body on the person; sitting on a person's knees; and in some cases, licking their skin in an attempt to groom them. However, there is a broad spectrum of social preferences among cats, which can be influenced by genetics and early rearing experiences. Problems such as aggression directed at other cats or humans, stress-related disease and inappropriate elimination may occur when the cat's social preferences are disregarded.

## **PILLAR 5: PROVIDE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT RESPECTS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CAT'S SENSE OF SMELL**

### **Rationale:**

Compared with humans, cats depend much more upon chemical and olfactory (*sense of smell*) information to explore their environment. If cats sense threatening olfactory or pheromonal information, or if they cannot express their sensory signals as described above, problematic behaviours such as inappropriate elimination or scratching and stress-related illness (*e.g. urinary tract disease*) can occur.