

# Balancing Act

Pet Owners Expecting Visitors Should Prepare Their Family, Friends, Felines

Having guests stay over can be difficult when they have allergies and you have a cat. Such a situation requires a balancing act to make both your guests and cat comfortable in your home.

In most cases, grooming your cat beforehand can be effective. Products such as LoShed and Allerpet can reduce shedding and dander. Also, thoroughly clean your home, and once you clean your guest room, limit pet access. If possible, place an air purifier in the room where your guests will sleep. Most importantly, encourage guests to discuss increasing doses of their allergy medications with their physician.

In many cases, it might be necessary to give guests a crash course in how to behave around cats, says Jacque Lynn Schultz of the ASPCA. "Guests will need to understand that they must allow a cat to come around on its own time and not force a relationship," she says. Schultz cautions that cat owners should fully describe their cat's personality and behavior and emphasize how important it is to maintain the cat's routine.



**Keep Off:** Cats, guests need space

If you feel that your cat will have any serious behavioral problems while you are entertaining guests, seek the advice of your veterinarian. Your vet can prescribe an anxiety medication that can help reduce your cat's stress. "Most medications take at least three weeks to work effectively, so once you know the date when the guests will arrive, schedule an appointment with your pet's veterinary immediately," says Rolan Tripp, founder of the Animal Behavior Network.

Even if your cat doesn't need medication, Tripp suggests purchasing a



Comfort Zone with Feliway, a wall plug-in used to reduce stress. The Feliway diffuses a natural comforting pheromone throughout the room. For best results, plug the diffuser in the electrical outlet a few days before guests arrive.

Tripp also proposes making sure that your pet has a place to retreat to avoid company. If the cat has relaxed in the spare room that guests will occupy, consider slowly relocating his bedding, food bowls and litter box to a room that is off-limits to guests.

Finally, once your visitors arrive, encourage them to treat your cat well. Ask them not to challenge your cat by staring at it, looming over it or speaking loudly. Remind them that if the cat approaches them, allow it to sniff their fingers. If the cat grants permission, pet it gently. Also, ask them politely to keep the door to the guest room closed at all times and to exercise extreme caution when opening windows and doors. If children are guests in your home, simply explain to them that they are to leave the cat alone, and ask their parents to help enforce your policy. If a toddler is in the house, put up a gate across the entry to the cat's safe haven so that your feline won't be bothered.

And even though you have guests, try to spend some time alone with your pet. Engage in interactive play with fishing-pole toys. Get your cat jumping, pouncing and batting so that it can burn off some energy and take its mind off the guests. End each play sessions with a few minutes of petting or massage to further relax the cat. With a lot of love, patience and determination, your cat can become an excellent host. ■

*Charlotte Reed is a contributing writer to New York Resident. She is an author, lecturer and spokeswoman for the pet industry and frequently appears on television and radio. She is the author of the 'Pet-Owning Made Easy' series of booklets. Her Web site is [www.charlottereed.com](http://www.charlottereed.com). Please send responses to this column to New York Resident editor in chief Elaine Paoloni at [elainep@resident.com](mailto:elainep@resident.com).*