



## The Mouth That Roared

### Managing Excessive Vocalization in Cats

While many cats barely draw attention to themselves, spending hours napping or watching birds through the picture window, others can't seem to keep quiet! They may not only meow but howl, wail, chatter and so on. Though Siamese and other Oriental breeds seem most prone to this trait, any breed of cat can be a "talker". Here are some considerations for frazzled owners.

1. Rule out illness first. Wendy Christianson, author of "Outwitting Cats", notes that a sudden change in vocalization can indicate a health problem. If your cat has always been tranquil and is suddenly yowling up a storm, it may be time for a checkup.
2. Don't reward the meowing. This may sound like a strange suggestion, but remember that any attention – even negative attention – can reinforce the behavior. If you can, avoid feeding, playing, petting or talking to the cat while she is making a racket. Even yelling "Shut up!" can teach the cat that meowing gets your attention, and therefore works.
3. Reward quiet behavior. Save whatever kitty likes (petting, playtime, dinner, etc.) for quiet moments to reinforce peaceful behavior. It may take time, but animals naturally repeat behavior that benefits them, so save their "good stuff" for quiet moments.
4. Redirect rather than punish. If your cat tends to become vocal in certain situations or during certain times of the day, try to intercept her before she starts and redirect her to a fun game or petting session. This will prevent the problem behavior from starting in the first place.
5. Consider your cat's activity level. Remember that young animals need more exercise and stimulation than their older counterparts, so make plenty of time for interactive play at least once a day. You might also purchase a food-dispensing toy for Fluffy to bang around while you are at work, burning both mental and physical energy. Cats that lack sufficient stimulation may vocalize out of boredom, so be sure to tend to those needs.
6. Consider your cat's age. Senior cats' vision and hearing typically deteriorate over time, so her meowing might be the result of confusion or disorientation. Some owners of senior cats note that these distress vocalizations become stronger in the evening. Provide seniors with plenty of loving attention to soothe and reassure them. If your senior cat prefers to keep to herself, however, let her do so.
7. Explore possible medication options. If your cat truly seems distressed and anxious, your vet might be able to prescribe some anti-anxiety medication to calm your cat while you work on modifying her behavior.



At the end of the day, it boils down to this: some cats just talk a lot. While we may find it annoying, there is no specific definition of “excessive vocalization” since it depends largely on the owner’s tolerance level. Recognize that your cat might simply be a motormouth and use these tips to minimize everyone’s stress. A little understanding can go a long way!

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