

# **Cat Communication:**

## ***How cats communicate through visual, tactile, olfactory, and auditory means***

**Visual signaling includes body posture; tail, ear, and head position; and willingness to make eye contact.**

**For example, if your cat walks around with her tail raised straight up, she is feeling very good about herself and her surroundings. If her tail is straight up, but the tip is relaxed downward, she is feeling quite confident and easy-going. If her the tail is curled toward her head she is trying to get you or another animal to interact with her. (This interaction can be in the form of play, feeding, or petting/grooming.) If her tail is arched up at the base, but then turns downward (like a "Halloween cat"), she is trying to say "I feel confident, but I want you to go away." (This cat is fearful, but confident enough to attack if necessary.) The tail held totally under the body indicates submission, fear, and sometimes illness.**

**Similarly, ears held forward indicate a relaxed mood; ears aimed sideways indicates a readiness to react to stimuli, usually involving a mood of annoyance, playfulness, or assertive aggression. Ears held flat against the head indicates fear.**

**Whiskers pointed straight forward and outward? Your cat is ready to attack (either in play or to defend her territory).**

**Contrary to popular opinion, a cat with her teeth showing, fur puffed up, and approaching you sideways (the "Halloween Cat") is scared and hoping that she will not have to attack. A cat with no teeth showing, staring at you, neck extended, rump raised above its shoulders, and body and head in a straight line aimed at its victim is feeling VERY brave and is preparing to attack! (Unless the opposing cat communicates submission by turning sideways, not staring back, crouching low to the ground,**

putting her tail under her body, and placing her ears flat against her head.)

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**Tactile communication includes rubbing against others, including people; grooming other animals (or you); and nose-touching and head butting, which are used as a friendly greeting.**

**All of these tactile events are communicating care-taking, friendliness, and intimacy. An interesting point is that the tactile touch of a cat's body is so tied into intimacy that when sleeping or sitting in a group of cats or adopted people, cats will sleep with their rump and/or body pushed up against the cat/person with whom they feel the most intimate and relaxed around. On the other hand, they will face the cat/person with whom they feel the least intimacy. So be honored the next time your cat climbs onto your lap or jumps into bed with you and you find her "butt" in your face!**

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**Auditory communication includes:**

***Purring*, which occurs primarily during contact with another individual. Cats purr when they are content and when they feel a need for reassurance.**

**The *trill* (or *chirrup*) and *meow* are used as friendly greeting calls.**

**The *growl* is a warning to others of danger and to the attacker that "I'm prepared to fight back!"**

**Intense fighting results in a *snarl*.**

**The "*hiss*" and it's more intense version the "*spit*" are involuntary reactions to surprise by an enemy. It's so**

**involuntary, in fact, that kittens can emit these sounds even before their eyes are open!**

**The "yowl" and the "scream" are used during the mating ritual by the male and female, respectively.**

**The low pitch, raspy, "under the breath" sound that cats emit when something is being forced upon them is called the "Refusal".**

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**Because cats have such a keen sense of smell, olfactory communication is very important.**

**Olfactory communication in the form of fecal or urine marking or spraying is territorial ("This is mine, so stay away!")**

**Cats also mark their "territory" by rubbing the side of their face, the base of their tail, or the pads of their feet against an object or another cat ...or you! They are doing this to both remind themselves and to communicate to other cats "This is mine, because this is where I am most happy. So I'm marking it with my scent so that everyone knows, 'This is mine!'"**