



Paws, Claws & Wings

Physical and Behavioral Rehabilitation for Animals



Vanny and Mandy

Vanny is a young adult Domestic Short Hair and we are not sure if she has been spayed or not. Mandy is a three year old spayed Domestic Short Hair. Vanny is showing overt aggression towards Mandy (she growls, stares, hisses, spits at Mandy and if Mandy does not leave, Vanny will attack her.) Mandy has begun to show fearful behaviour.

History:

Vanny moved in to the area, and began to be seen often in the garden last year around the end of December. She appears to have been 'left behind' or 'kicked out' by her family as she is very obviously not a feral cat as she seeks affection from humans. She knows about a litter box and is perfectly house trained. The owners felt sorry for her and began to feed her in the garden after she had been there for about a month. She became very comfortable there and even moved into the garage into a bed placed there for her by the owners with her own food and water. There have been a few fights between Vanny and Mishka in the garden. Since winter began, Vanny has begun to come into the house and fight with Mandy inside. Mandy is now spending more and more time in the house. The owners have now decided to adopt Vanny as they feel very sorry for her being homeless and have been charmed by her affectionate personality. Vanny and Mandy began growling at each other and it has now elevated into full blown fights. Mandy was the original cat in the house and she has a very sweet and soft personality. She has now become very timid and nervous since Vanny moved in. The two cats are continuously fighting and Vanny keeps chasing Mandy out of the room. The frequency and intensity of the problem behaviours is increasing

Inter cat aggression:

The source of the problem is that Vanny is a cat who has been forced to become streetwise. She decided that your house is a very good place to stay and started moving in. Unfortunately, her bold way of taking charge of the property has made Mandy feel unsafe in her own home. Mandy's pronounced negative reaction to Vanny has two causes. Firstly, Mandy is naturally a more timid cat and secondly, Vanny took her on and beat her when she initially started coming into the garden last year. By the time Vanny started coming into the house on a regular basis, Mandy had already lost at least one fight with her in the garden. A cat will only enter another cat's home after they have established in a more neutral area, like the garden, that they can win a fight.



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Inter cat aggression may have a fear / defensive and territorial components. I believe this is true in this case. Inter cat aggression is also most commonly seen in cats between 2 and 4 years old, and both Vanny and Mandy fit into this age bracket. One of the main causes of this problem I believe is caused by Mandy's fear of Vanny and it is exacerbated by both of their frustration the other factor that I see as a large contributing factor is the circumstances in which the two cats met, it was an inappropriate introduction, as Vanny was bullying and attacking Mandy.

If the aggression occurs only outside then it is probably only territorial aggression with no component of fear involved. As the aggression and fighting occurs inside and in the garden, I feel it is more likely to be inter-cat aggression with a territorial component.

In order to get the cats living together in relative harmony, we have to convince Mandy to see Vanny as less of a threat. This will take time and whether or not it works will ultimately depend on Mandy, but through showing her consistently that all the humans in the household are on her side, you will contribute greatly to the success.

Solutions:

Install a Feliway® diffuser in the room where Mandy spends most time or where you would like her to spend the most time. I think the spare room where she has chosen to spend most of the day is ideal, but you can also choose to install it in the master bedroom. Don't place it in a room where you plan to reintroduce the cats to each other, since Vanny's scent in this room may cancel out the positive effect of the Feliway. Keep the diffuser switched on at all times. Make the house Mandy's space again. You may allocate one room to Vanny (the guest bathroom is ideal for this) but she must not be given access to the rest of the house except when you are there to supervise. Even when you are supervising, certain rooms must be completely off limits to her for the next two months. These are the master bedroom, the room where Mandy sleeps, the room where Mandy toilets and the room where Mandy eats. We are doing this so that Mandy can regain confidence that the house is hers, and that she can feel secure inside the house. The areas where she sleeps, eats and toilets are the most important to her so there must be no threat in these areas. I am banning Vanny from the master bedroom since this is the room that a cat sees as the human stronghold. By eliminating Vanny's scent from this room we will help convince Mandy that we are on her side and not Vanny's in all this. The aggressor in this case, Vanny, must be separated from Mandy, the ideal is to place her in the least desirable space (the spare bedroom) and in this way allow Mandy to have free roam of the house and unlimited access to the more valuable spaces (bedroom, lounge ect - where people are most often). You must always

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be very vigilant when letting the two cats together and they must not be left unsupervised in any situation. At the first sign of aggression (as described below) the cat that is displaying the aggression must be startled and distracted from her behaviour. This is where you can use a shake can. When the two cats are in the same room and behaving calmly you can reward them with small food treats. It may even be necessary in the long term to separate the two cats for a time during the day, so that they can both have some alone time to completely relax as this will help to keep the peace.

When you are in a room that is not off-limits to Vodka, when you are in a position to supervise and when Mandy is in the room with you, open a door or window so that Vanny can come into the room. While both cats are in the room, make use of the "crime-and-punishment" list below to keep Vanny from bullying Mandy. If they are well behaved and are tolerating each other, reward them both, this may be food treats or attention.

Just remember to supervise them and never leave them alone together in this early stage of the process. As soon as Mandy leaves the room, pick Vanny up and place her back outside. While they are both in the room, ignore Vanny and give as much attention to Mandy as she wants. If she wants to be left alone, do it, but feel free to cuddle her and talk to her if she is amenable. A word of warning: for the first while, Mandy will leave the room the minute Vanny puts her paw into the room. This is normal. The fact that you kick Vanny out when Mandy leaves is a crucial step to helping Mandy regain her confidence.

You can allow Mandy to come into the garden with you for a while each day. During the first two months of the programme, these supervised constitutionals will be Mandy's only access to the garden. This is not a permanent measure - we just need to build her confidence in her house first and confining her to the house is the fastest, easiest and kindest way to do this. During this introduction time, only give Vanny attention in the garden and always wash any body part that she has touched with soap and water before going near Mandy. It seems excessive, but bear in mind that we are not just introducing two cats to each other. We are breaking down an existing fear-torment relationship. It can be done! But this is why it is so important to act slowly. During the time that Mandy is inside and Vanny is confined to the garden, make a mental note of where Vanny spends most of her time. One of the most subtle forms of bullying is for one cat to sit outside a room and stare intently at the cat inside through the window. While Mandy is still terrified, something as small as this can sabotage everything else you are doing right, so if you notice Vanny spending a lot of time outside one room, try closing the curtains to that room for a few days to thwart her.

Suggested deterrents: Small foam rubber or plastic cat balls (with or without a bell inside). These are ideal to throw at Vanny when you catch her doing very subtle things like looking intently at Mandy from across the room. They will just distract her attention without scaring her. A water pistol: This is my personal favourite because you



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have a high level of accuracy and can use it for all levels of aggression. If Vanny is sending very mild signs you may spray just next to her. If she is doing something moderately aggressive you can squirt the water at her. If she is being severely aggressive you can blast her as close to her head as possible and then chase her out of the room. A rattle can: This is also referred to as a conditioned deterrent. This is an empty coke can with a few cents or pebbles in it and some masking tape covering the top. You can throw the rattle can at Vanny when she is being severely aggressive. The bright colour and loud noise are a strong aversive stimulus, so must not be used unless she is being really bad.

Signs of mild aggression: Staring at Mandy, either while sitting still or while flicking her tail slightly. Moving into a position where she is closer to the inside of the house than Mandy is. If this happens you can either throw the little ball in her direction, squirt the water pistol near her or pick her up and place her closer to the outside again, preferably in a position where she cannot easily make eye contact with Mandy. Don't make a big fuss of moving her, just nonchalantly pick her up and put her down as if you are moving a handbag. Don't allow her to turn your contact into a cuddling session - remember that you are Mandy's protectors when inside the house. You can cuddle her later on in the garden if you would like to. Signs of moderate aggression: Moving herself into a position where she can stare directly at Mandy. Positioning herself on the floor in such a way that Mandy has to come closer to her before being able to leave the room. She is thus now directly between Mandy and the doorway, for example. Going straight back to showing one of the subtle signs listed above, directly after you have stopped her from doing it. Looking at Mandy with her ears rotated slightly backwards instead of straight up. If you notice these signs, squirt water directly at her and make sure she doesn't just go straight back to the behaviour. If she does, pick her up, carry her out and shut the door or window. Signs of severe aggression: Staring straight at Mandy and growling. Staring straight at Mandy and hissing. Walking slowly towards Mandy while looking straight at her. Running towards her. Swiping at her. If this happens, act immediately. Blast her full on the head with water or throw the rattle can straight at her. Immediately afterwards, pick her up and banish her outside. Both cats need to be absolutely clear on the fact that you will not tolerate this behaviour in your house. As discussed, there is always a risk showing aggression towards Vanny as she is the aggressor and this may make the situation worse.

If Mandy shows any of the aggression that you are punishing Vodka for, do nothing apart from allowing Vanny to leave the room. If this happens, it is a major victory since it shows that Mandy has regained her confidence. If Vanny responds to Mandy's aggression with her own aggression, pick her up and put her outside. Remember that



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you are acting as Mandy's body guards inside the house. Both cats need to be absolutely clear that Mandy is in charge in the house. Vanny has the garden to rule. Aggression is often followed by a period of withdrawal and both cats increasing the distance between them. Often the cause of this aggression is that the cats are fighting as they feel that there are not enough resources (food, water, litter boxes ect), for them both. In this situation you must ensure that when the cats are out in the house at the same time, there are enough litter trays (one for each cat and an extra one is a good rule to work by), food bowls, water bowls and hiding places. If the aggression occurs only outside then it is probably only territorial aggression with no component of fear involved. Aggression can be covert / subtle (staring, subtly moving the victim or not allowing the victim access to preferred areas., or overt / blatant (staring, hissing, spitting, growling, flat ears, raised twitching tail, hunched back, bushy tail.). During a display of aggression, do not pick up either cat (use a towel if you have to move a cat), or you may be the object of displaced aggression (when an animal cannot get to the target of its aggression, it may turn the aggression onto a target it can reach). The main goal for Vanny and Mandy is to get them to a stage where they can be in the same room together and relax in each other's presence. Desensitization is an important part of this as we will slowly get them used to each other until they can behave calmly towards each other.

Another way to familiarise them with each other and assist in the desensitization process is to get them used to the others scent in a safe environment where they do not feel threatened. To accomplish this, swap the food bowls so they each eat out of the others bowl, rub a blanket over the one cat and then give that blanket to the other cat to use. This will create an affiliation between the two. Remember to only begin this component when the cats are comfortable and totally relaxed in their areas of the house. Both cats must be spayed to eliminate any element of hormonal aggression. Another useful tool that you can try is to place a mesh divider across the room while you are there to supervise, place each cat on either side of the barrier and allow them to go about their business - just ensure that Vanny does not begin to act aggressively, if so, she must be put back into her room. Just also keep in mind that both cats will need daily exercise, be this wandering around the garden or playing, and ensure that this need is fulfilled, but remember to exercise them separately. An added benefit of them being exercised and therefore tired is that they will rest and sleep as opposed to being hyper-vigilant and alert to each other every move.

Prognosis:

The prognosis is good if all of these guidelines are followed and the owners are very consistent. The prognosis is excellent for the cats not to fight, if they are always kept apart, but is more guarded if you intend to get both cats to live together. If the owners are able to get the two cats to live together and there are no changes to the



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household or environment after this is accomplished, the prognosis is good. The prognosis is also dependant on the innate sociability of the cats and the owner continuing to consistently maintain the environment that allows the cats to co-habit. Even though you may follow this plan perfectly, there is always a chance that Vanny and Mandy will never be able to live in the same house. If this does occur, you may have to look at other options such as re-homing one of them or creating two separate living areas so each cat lives with you, but they stay apart continually.

Sr. Emmylou Rivers

