



~ In this edition of Keeping it Real with Ralfie ~ "Cat Claws"  
(When we know better we do better, right?)

From an article in Catster: "Cats are digitigrade walkers, which means that instead of walking on their heels & the balls of their feet like we humans do, they walk on tiptoe. The cat's claw grows right out of his distal phalanx. Unlike our fingernails, which are only connected to flesh, a cat's claws are connected directly to the bone. What that means is that when a cat is declawed, it's not just a super-mega nail trim. The entire distal phalanx needs to be amputated in order to keep the claws from growing back again. As you can imagine, this makes declawing very painful, particularly since your cat has to walk on what's left of his "fingers" afterwards." ~ (<https://www.catster.com/lifestyle/facts-cat-anatomy-claws>)

\*NOTE: By declawing you are also opening up the door for other undesirable behaviors such as biting & aversion to using the litter box\*

It's normal for cats to scratch objects in their environment for many reasons:

- ~ To remove the dead outer layer of their claws.
- ~ To mark their territory by leaving both a visual mark & a scent (they have scent glands on their paws).
- ~ To stretch their bodies & flex their feet & claws.
- ~ To work off energy.

Because scratching is a normal behavior, & one that cats are highly motivated to display, it's unrealistic to try to prevent them from scratching. Instead, the goal in resolving scratching problems is to redirect the scratching onto acceptable objects.

1) You must provide objects for scratching that are appealing, attractive & convenient from your cat's point of view. Start by observing the physical features of the objects your cat is scratching. The answers to the following questions will help you understand your cat's scratching preferences:

~ Where are they located? Prominent objects, objects close to sleeping areas & areas near the entrance to a room are often chosen.

~ What texture do they have - are they soft or coarse?

~ What shape do they have - are they horizontal or vertical?

~ How tall are they? At what height does your cat scratch?

2) Now, considering your cat's demonstrated preferences, substitute similar objects for her to scratch (rope-wrapped posts, corrugated cardboard or even a log). Place the acceptable object(s) near the inappropriate object(s) that she's already using. **MAKE SURE THE OBJECTS ARE STABLE & WON'T FALL OVER OR MOVE AROUND WHEN SHE USES THEM.**

3) Cover the inappropriate objects with something your cat will find unappealing, such as double sided sticky tape, aluminum foil, sheets of sandpaper or a plastic carpet runner with the pointy side up. Or you may give the objects an aversive odor by attaching cotton balls containing perfume, a muscle rub or other unpleasant odor. Be careful with odors, though, because you don't want the nearby acceptable objects to also smell unpleasant.

4) When your cat is consistently using the appropriate object, it can be moved very gradually (no more than three inches each day) to a location more suitable to you. It's best, however, to keep the appropriate scratching objects as close to your cat's preferred scratching locations as possible.

5) Don't remove the unappealing coverings or odors from the inappropriate objects until your cat is consistently using the appropriate objects in their permanent locations for several weeks, or even a month. They should then be removed gradually, not all at once.

Thanks for reading this edition & for "Keeping It Real"