

Figure 10-4. Facial expressions. Note changes in the ear position and pupil dilation. a) Alert. b) Offensive threat with c) increasing fear. d) Ambivalent offensive-defensive expression. Becomes increasingly defensive in e) and f).

out from the face and the mouth is closed. The eyes are wide open with an even gaze. The cat may greet his friend by lifting the two front paws off the ground quickly in a hop, then rub the person's legs or the other cat's body. Alternately the cat may bow his head up and down quickly. He may invite play or petting by rolling over and stretching out to expose his tummy. Occasionally while approaching, the cat may stop quickly, lift one front leg with the paw remaining limp and stare for a moment, or he may stop and lick his lips quickly, exactly twice. Both these behaviors suggest attention, mild concern, and a time to decide whether to be afraid or happy.

Avoidance behaviors are shown in an effort to establish dominance or to keep an outsider from intruding. The posture varies on a continuum of eye, head, whisker, and tail signals and may alternate between attack and defense very rapidly especially if a confrontation occurs near the boundaries of a cat's home territory.

The basic postures of aggression are body postures that make the cat look taller and bigger. Offensive threats may be pure aggression, as seen between two toms, or territorial aggression. In pure aggression between tom cats, the cats walk with their backs straight, pelvis higher than their heads. The hair along their spine and over the tip of their tail is bristled, and the tail hangs down vertically and the tip may twitch. The cat stares with normal or slightly narrow pupils. He holds his ears up and turned to show the haired surface to the other tom and he walks slowly while howling,

growling, or hissing. When the two toms get close to each other, they tilt their head 45 degrees and one grabs the nape of the other's neck and a fight with the hind feet claws and teeth ensues. Lots of noise usually accompanies these battles, often more noise than real fighting.

In episodes of territorial aggression, the resident is trying to run off the intruder, whether another cat or an animal control officer. The resident cat shows dominance and annoyance with his tail by carrying it curled over the back along the spine or quickly slapping it back and forth horizontally. His ears are turned sideways but erect; his eyes are slightly slanted; his pupils are constricted; his mouth is closed; and his whiskers slightly flattened along the side of the face.

A defensive threat posture is shown when an intruder reaches the resident cat's flight distance and the resident cannot flee. The Halloween cat posture is the classic defensive threat. The tail is fluffed and curled down in an arc. Eyes and pupils are wide; ears are flat with the tips flat out; whiskers are slightly back also; and the mouth is open.

As the cat becomes more afraid and seems cornered by his foe, the cat crouches to protect the nape of the neck. Ears are flat with the tips slightly up; pupils are dilated; whiskers are very flat against the face; and hair is erect.

Abject fear in the cat is demonstrated by the pariah position where the cat crouches sideways with mouth open, hair down, ears flat, and eyes wide open -- all seen in the posture the bottom cat shows the top cat, or

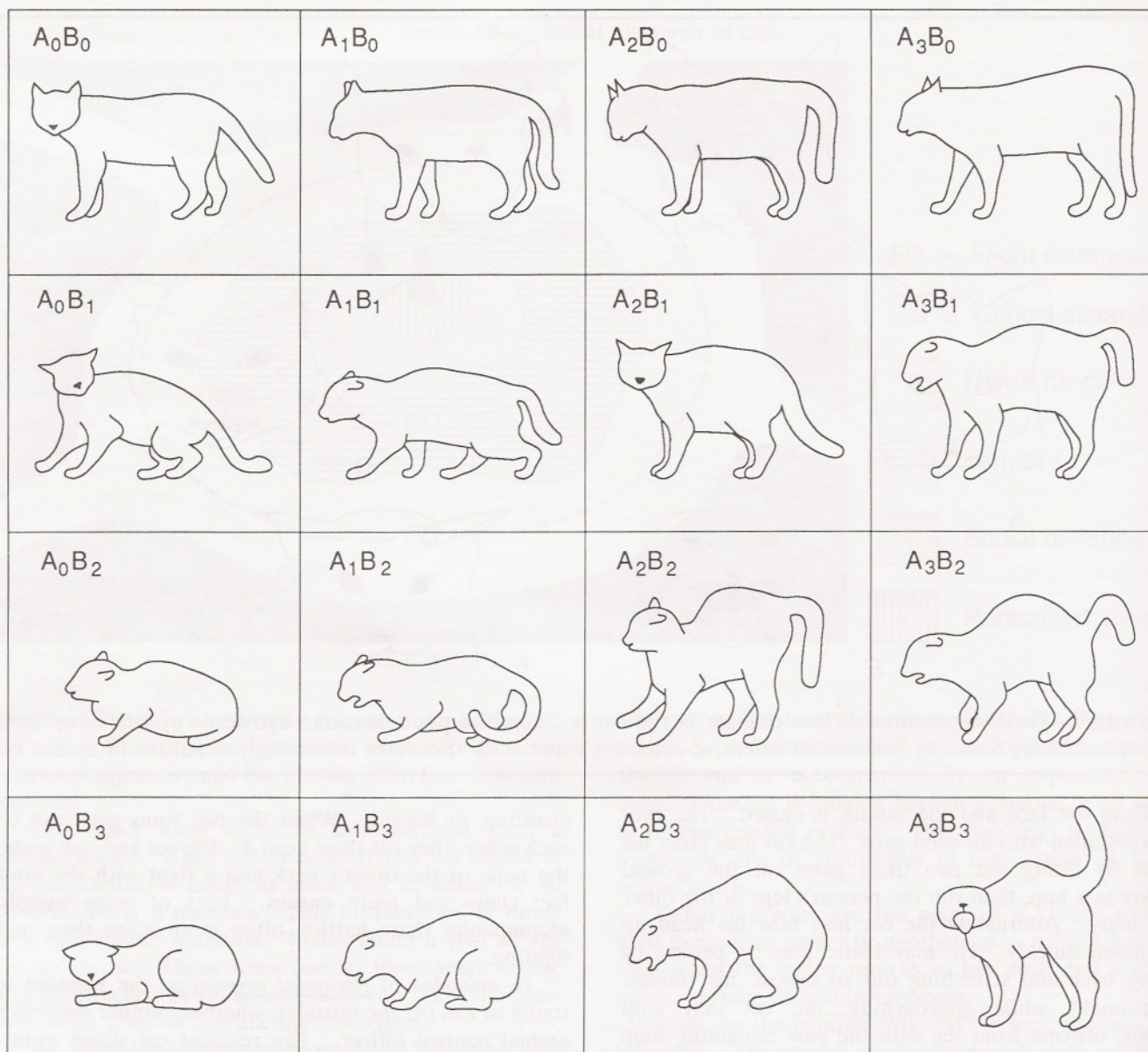


Figure 10-5. Body posture changes according to fear, aggression and defense. Moving left to right each posture shows more aggression. Moving from the neutral state down the left column, the posture becomes more fearful and more defensive. Moving from the neutral state down and to the right, the posture is increasingly a combination of aggression and defense. A_3B_3 is a classic defensive threat posture known as the Halloween posture.

the terrified cat trapped in a cage may show to an officer.

An extreme defense posture puts the cat on his back, ears flat, teeth exposed, and all claws out.

Ambivalent behavior or a fluctuation between offensive and defensive posture usually occurs when a cat meets an unfamiliar intruder near the boundaries of the cat's own territory.

How to Approach an Unknown Cat

Determine first what the cat's body language is telling you. Always approach quietly, slowly, and without staring at the cat. If at all possible, squat down

to make yourself smaller and thus less threatening. Talk (murmur) softly and extend your hand under the level of the cat's head. If the cat swats, move toward the cat rather than away, as the cat's prey might move. Wearing heavy, clean, cotton fireplace gloves that are thick but flexible may help. Washable cotton gloves are preferable to leather because the cloth ones may be washed between uses to decrease disease spread and remove another cat's odor. If the cat is in a pariah position, cover him with a terry towel, then pick up the cat from underneath.

The use of a blanket to cover a defensive cat or a pariah is best. Also if you can cover them, and then pick them up under the front arms and let their hind