



The Proper Way to Pick up and Hold a Cat

In general, if cats had their choice, many would probably prefer to never be picked up and held. For a cat, there's tremendous security in having all paws on the ground and the ability to move at will.

For many cats, being picked up and lifted off the ground creates stress. If the cat is fearful or not used to being picked up, it can potentially create a situation in which someone may get scratched or bitten. A cat struggling to scramble out of a person's grasp can also cause injury to herself if she falls to the ground.

Know Your Cat's Tolerance Level

Be sensitive to your cat's tolerance levels and always have a purpose for picking her up. If your cat loves being held, then enjoy that closeness, but if she doesn't, be respectful of the fact that lifting her up changes her level of security. Don't insist of holding a struggling cat with the intention of getting her to surrender or adjust. The longer you hold a squirmy, unhappy cat, the more she'll hate being held the next time. If your cat hates being picked up and held, slow down and just focus on being able to put one hand on her side and then releasing. Work up to placing a hand on each side and then letting go. When she's comfortable with that you can then use very gentle pressure when you place your hands on her sides and then let go and praise and reward your cat. Do this several times before you attempt to pick the cat up. Make sure she's comfortable with being touched.

Your Approach Shouldn't Startle or Appear Threatening

Don't grab your unsuspecting cat from behind in order to pick her up. No one likes being startled. Your cat should be aware of your presence but approach in a non-threatening way. Don't make a direct approach from the front as that might cause some cats to feel threatened. If the only way you're able to pick up your cat is to sneak up behind her and grab her quickly then maybe it's time to do some gentle training.

The Proper Technique for Holding a Cat

Some cats have very definite preferences when it comes to how they like to be held but your most important job is to provide security for both of you. The cat must feel secure in your arms and you must ensure you keep the kitty safe. No one must get injured in this process whether feline or human.

Specific handling techniques vary depending upon your cat's comfort level and the particular environment (carrying a cat in a shelter, veterinary clinic or outdoors involves more concern with preventing escape). In general, you must always use both hands when picking up a cat. Even though the cat may be small enough that you could scoop her up with one hand, it's not secure and it certainly won't be comfortable for the cat. Have you seen someone holding a cat by one hand where the poor kitty's legs are left dangling? Not comfortable or at all secure. Always hold a cat, no matter how small, with both hands. Use one hand to cradle and support her back end. To secure the front end, it will depend on your cat's preference and whether you're in a safe environment or one where escape could prove dangerous. Most cats want to be supported under the chest so they can rest their front paws on your arm. This is the typical way many cat parents carry their cats in safe environments. If the cat is in an environment where escape would be dangerous, hold the front end by securing the front legs with the fingers of one hand while the other hand cradles the back end and holds the hind legs. If in an environment, where escaping from your arms could be dangerous then the best method of transport is to have the cat securely in a carrier.

The first few training sessions shouldn't involve any walking around – just let her get comfortable with being held and then placed back down. Hold the cat close to your chest so she doesn't feel as if she's suspended in mid-air. Hold securely but don't grip so tightly your cat feels uncomfortable. What matters most when holding a cat is that you need to make sure you have her securely and safely held and that she feels comfortable.

Don't Cradle Your Cat on Her Back

You love your cat like a member of the family but may even call her your baby but that doesn't mean she wants to be held like one. There are some cats who don't mind being carried that way but most don't like being placed on their backs and held. It's also a somewhat dangerous position to carry her because all claws will be pointed toward your face. That's not a good position to be in if your cat gets scared or upset while being held.

Placing Your Cat Back Down

Don't let your cat leap for your arms and don't just drop her when you're done holding her. Gently place her back on the floor, cat tree or another surface and give her time to get her footing. If you want her to enjoy or even just accept being held, the training process also includes a gentle and safe release.

If you're training your cat to accept being picked up, keep the sessions short, positive and calm. Always place the cat back down before she shows any sign of struggling.

Don't Pick Up Your Adult Cat by Scruffing

Scruffing should be reserved for especially egregious behavior such as physical aggression toward humans or another cat. Scruffing is something the mother cat does when she needs to move her very young kittens. Scruffing and one-handed holding are both uncomfortable and cause the bulk of the cat's weight to just dangle in the air. NEVER scruff and pick up an ADULT cat due to the weight issue-ALWAYS support the cat's weight if scruffing an adult. Scruffing with one hand while gripping the cat by the hind legs with the other hand is basically putting her in a death grip. While this method will allow you to pick up your cat, it also isn't doing anything to encourage her to ever want to be picked up and held again.

Never Hold Your Cat to Force Social Interaction

Yes, your cat is incredibly cute and you'd love for guests to see her adorable face up close, but don't ever pick her up to force social interaction with people or other pets. It's very stressful for her to find herself restrained in your arms at the same time being face to face with a stranger or unfamiliar animal. Whenever you pick up your cat it should have a purpose that's beneficial, loving (meaning she should be the one who loves it) or necessary.

Picking Up Your Cat to Put Her in a Carrier

Picking up your cat to shove her in a carrier isn't a fun experience for anyone and can result in lots of hissing and growling on her part and injury on your part. Take the time to train your cat to be comfortable with going into the carrier so you can gently place her in there without a struggle or least with minimal amount of stress.

Don't Pick Up Your Cat When She's Upset

When a cat is unhappy or angry isn't the best time to try to pick her up. You may want to hold and cuddle your upset cat to comfort her but that typically ends with kitty struggling to get out of your grasp. In these situations, what the cat needs most is some personal space and to be left alone. If you absolutely must pick up an angry cat, use thick towels to cover her first.

Teach Your Children the Proper Technique

Most cats don't enjoy being held by children because they are either squeezed, dangled or suddenly dropped. They may also be chased down in order to be held. If your children are too young to be taught the proper technique then work on instructing them how to sit next to cat and enjoy petting or how to invite the cat onto their laps. It may even have to start with the cat being on your lap while a child sits nearby. Go slowly and keep things positive and calm. Reward your cat for even the smallest amount of progress. This time of trust-building and security will pay off as you watch your cat become more comfortable with physical touch. Remember, the cat must always have the choice to move away.