**Feline Arousal Scale**

This scale assesses behavior observed in the moment; it does not assess stable traits, nor should it be used to make statements about a cat’s personality.

Behavior may manifest differently based on the arousal-inducing stimulus; therefore, examples are provided in relation to situations that commonly induce arousal:

* Playtime or movement
* Petting
* When physically prevented from engaging with a stimulus (e.g., a caged cat sees a person and wants to interact but cannot)

# **Neutral**

**Body:**

* Body is relaxed
* Eyes are almond shaped with a soft gaze; pupil size is appropriate for the ambient lighting
* Ears are in a relaxed position: forward or turned slightly outward
* Whiskers may droop loosely
* Tail is likely not moving or, at most, moves slowly and intermittently back and forth; tail hangs naturally or is held upright in a curved position

**Behavior:**

* Appears relaxed and may slowly blink eyes
* May look at a stimulus with little to no interest
* If engaging with a stimulus, shows interest while staying calm
* Easy to handle

# **Mild Arousal**

**Body:**

* Body may be tense
* Compared to the cat's normal state, movements may be quicker, more frequent, or more intense
* Eyes may be somewhat round; pupils may be dilated
* Ears may swivel back and forth
* Whiskers may be forward
* Fur along the spine, base of tail, or entire tail may be raised (piloerect), and skin may ripple or twitch
* Tail may intermittently flick, swish, whip, or thump, or if tail is constantly moving, movement is likely slow

**Behavior:**

* May momentarily focus gaze on the stimulus
* May vocalize, including brief hissing or growling
* If the cat pursues the stimulus, does so with minimal intensity
* Can easily disengage from the stimulus
* Arousal quickly decreases when the stimulus (e.g., being petted) is removed

***If aroused by playtime or movement:***

* May intently watch the stimulus with tail moving intermittently
* May stalk the stimulus with body and head low to the ground
* May freeze before briefly pouncing
* May mouth the stimulus with light or no pressure or bat/paw the stimulus lightly

***If aroused by petting*:**

* May rub on nearby objects or the person with increased speed
* May lie down on one side or roll on the floor
* May orient to the petting hand with a closed or partially open mouth
* May place mouth on the person without applying pressure
* May raise paw or bat at the hand with light pressure, typically with claws retracted
* May choose to disengage by getting up and moving away

***If prevented from engaging with the stimulus:***

* May meow and/or chatter
* May pace back and forth
* May rub against, gently paw at, or place front paws up on the barrier
* May reach through the barrier to paw at or grab the stimulus with light pressure, typically with nails retracted

# **Moderate Arousal**

**Body:**

* Body is tense
* Eyes are likely round with dilated pupils
* Ears are swiveled back
* Whiskers may be forward
* Fur along the spine, base of tail, or entire tail may be raised (piloerect), and skin may ripple or twitch
* Tail may flick, swish, whip, thump, or quiver; as arousal increases, tail may move with more force and/or more quickly

**Behavior:**

* May hard stare at the stimulus
* May meow, chatter, hiss, growl, or yowl with increasing intensity
* May leave superficial scratches or shallow bites that graze the skin or leave indents, but does not cause severe damage to people
* May be difficult to interrupt or distract

***If aroused by playtime or movement*:**

* May stare at or pursue the stimulus with moderate intensity
* May pant, especially with prolonged exposure to the stimulus
* May pounce on, mouth with moderate pressure, swat, grab, or bunny kick; behavior may occur toward the stimulus or be redirected onto a person or another animal in the vicinity
* May need several minutes to return to a normal state once the stimulus has been removed

***If aroused by petting:***

* May rub on objects with greater force and/or frequency, potentially pacing back and forth quickly
* Will likely orient quickly to the person’s hand and may do so with an open mouth
* May place and/or hold mouth on the person’s hand with no more than moderate pressure
* May bat or swat at the person’s hand briefly, with or without claws extended, and with light to moderate force

***If prevented from engaging with the stimulus:***

* Is alert and focused on the arousing stimulus
* May pace more intensely
* May rub against the barrier or scratch at the barrier with front paws
* May reach through the bars to forcefully or frantically grab or swat at the stimulus, typically with claws extended
* May be intent on pursuing the stimulus and need constant redirection or significant environmental change to reduce arousal
* May be too focused on the stimulus to engage in other activities, such as taking treats or playing, especially if near the stimulus

# **Severe Arousal**

**Body:**

* Body is tense
* Eyes are round with dilated pupils
* Ears are swiveled back or down and back
* Whiskers may be forward
* Fur may be raised (piloerect) along the spine and/or tail
* Tail is constantly moving with increased speed and force or may be held high and stiff with the tip quivering

**Behavior:**

* May stare directly at the stimulus and be unwilling to break eye contact
* May meow, hiss, growl, or yowl intensely
* May be unaware of anything else going on around them
* May deliberately follow the stimulus in close proximity, stalk, or chase the stimulus, or may make quick, forward, and sudden movements towards the stimulus with little to no warning
* When the stimulus is removed, may remain in a heightened aroused state and/or continue to pursue or search for the stimulus
* Requires adept defensive handling or may require the use of a physical barrier to protect people entering the cat’s space
* May continue to pursue or search for the stimulus after it has been removed
* May remain in an aroused state long after the stimulus is removed
* Impossible to interrupt or distract

***If aroused by playtime or movement*:**

* May stare directly at the stimulus before pursuing it with high intensity
* Makes repeated contact with the stimulus by pouncing, chasing, or grabbing
* May mouth, bite, or use claws persistently with moderate to hard pressure
* May bite and hold the stimulus for several seconds or longer
* May redirect onto people or other animals in the vicinity and may be difficult to physically remove
* When actively pursuing the stimulus, cannot be interrupted
* If the cat needs to be touched, requires the use of defensive handling/equipment

***If aroused by petting*:**

* May pace back and forth quickly
* May rub on objects with greater force and/or frequency
* May directly stare at the stimulus, then escalate to swatting, mouthing, or biting with extreme force and/or hard pressure, possibly with little to no warning, and may be difficult to physically remove
* May remain aroused after petting has ceased and follow as the person moves away or tries to leave, and potentially swat or bite the person

***If prevented from engaging with the stimulus:***

* May pace consistently
* May forcefully and repetitively paw at or jump on the barrier
* May swat, grab, or mouth at people or other objects with extreme force and/or pressure
* May try to escape confinement
* May redirect onto a person or other animal that is near

# **Considerations**

Arousal may overlap with other categories, such as fear and aggression. If a cat exhibits fear when aroused, please refer to the fear scale. If a cat escalates to a point where there is concern for human safety, please refer to the Feline Risk Assessment.