

Not a knee-jerk emotional response

There is no excuse for onychectomy any longer. How proud Dr. Robert M. Miller sounds, both for the operation he defends and the fact he punished his own cat after having had his baby son's eye injured by a claw.

As a behaviorist of more than 30 years, I should not have to remind any veterinarians who continue to perform this hideous amputation that there are ways to constructively deter a cat from using her claws in what's understandably seen as a destructive manner. Did Dr. Miller not know any of this? Perhaps I should give him the questionable benefit of the doubt: If more veterinarians had proper feline behavior in their DVM curriculum, if more utilized the services of behaviorists in their practice, they would understand the methods and practices that can eliminate the operation. But they should know that cat was behaving normally.

I also have to wonder what the baby was doing crawling around a cat in this manner. Why were both the cat and the child not being watched? Why did Dr. Miller not understand a cat's behavior to know that quite possibly, his pet felt threatened by the baby's actions?

As a father, particularly as a veterinarian, is he not aware of how cats behave? What was the baby doing? What was the cat's body language? Why were the two in such close proximity? This tells me this veterinarian knows so little about cat behavior, to have them both in such a position. Just as children need to be supervised, just as cats around them need to be supervised, they have to be supervised together.

Instead of dealing with a cat's natural, normal response and learning how to handle such situations in the future, he overreacted and amputated part of his toes instead. That was punishment, and it was inappropriate, to say the least.

This is, I assure you, not a knee-jerk emotional response to the concept of declawing. As a behaviorist with more than three decades of experience, I've seen the aftermath and the damage this operation has done to cats. These range from creating behavioral problems because of the cat's inability to defend him or herself to litter box issues to chronic physiological difficulties. I have to wonder if this veterinarian has.

Judging from the number of countries that have and are considering banning this procedure, to the number of American cities that have already done so, to the increasing numbers of veterinarians who refuse to perform this barbarism, it's relieving to know Dr. Miller is in the minority of animal professionals who encourage this practice.

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