

The Cat Sweater

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Two years ago I adopted Cici and purchased an adorable cat sweater for her. Many times I attempted to force Cici to wear the sweater, however she would pin back her ears, hiss, kick, and claw until she escaped and hid under the couch. Soon she began to run away and hide if I only had removed the sweater from the box. So I would box the sweater immediately following her escape, which was incidentally reinforcing Cici's running away. Recently my roommate asked to take a picture of Cici in her sweater for a photography project. To achieve this, I used behavior modification. To reduce her avoidance behavior, I used treats to shape Cici to wear the sweater without fussing.

First I removed the sweater from the box, as before Cici escaped. This time I left the sweater out and eventually Cici came out and behaved normally while sneaking glances at the sweater. As Cici sat on command, I placed the sweater on the floor and had her sit about 10 feet from the sweater. If Cici sat without running away, pinning her ears back, or hissing I gave her a treat. After one day at 10 feet I had Cici sit 9 feet away from the sweater, then 8 feet away, and so on. After 10 days Cici sat right beside the sweater without fussing.

Next I began prompting Cici to lift one front leg at a time. I said "right" and I physically prompted her to lift her right paw and gave her a treat. I continued until I could say "right" and she would lift her right leg without prompting. I repeated this procedure with her left leg when saying "left." Now I could place her legs in the corresponding sweater arms!

Next I worked on Cici's not removing the sweater. I began by having her wear the sweater for one minute and if she did not attempt to tear off the sweater, I gave her a treat and also removed the sweater for a minute. I continued this procedure until Cici wore the sweater for 20 minutes. Then I gradually stopped removing the sweater and only used treats. Then I removed the treats and eventually Cici wore the sweater all day!

