

Questioning Our Actions Towards Animals:
Animal-Related Ethical Dilemmas for Young People



Get Your Paws Off of My Claws: Humane Alternatives to Declawing Cats

As soon as Ian walked through the door, he could tell that something was wrong. He heard his mom talking on the phone in the kitchen to his father.

“I don’t know what to do at this point!” she said angrily. “Last week, it was the scarf. I’ve been working on for the past month. Now, my drapes! What am I to do?”

It was then that Ian realized who had caused his mom’s distress. Heathcliff, the family cat, must have been at it again, tearing through the house and clawing whatever he came upon to shreds. Sure enough, Ian spotted Heathcliff curled up in the corner of the room, his tail between his legs. Ian climbed upstairs to his room and didn’t come down again until he was sure he had heard the telephone slam onto the receiver and that he had given his mom enough time to settle down.

“So, Mom, who were you talking to?” he inquired.

“Your father and I were just having a discussion about Heathcliff. He got at my drapes today! I’ve decided to take him to the vet later this week to get him declawed. I’ve simply had it with that cat!”

Ian stared at his mother. He had read about declawing before, so he knew how it was cruel and painful to cats. What can he do to convince his mom to let Heathcliff keep his claws?



Ian is right to be worried about declawing his cat, Heathcliff. Declawing is a major surgical procedure; it isn’t like getting a manicure or pedicure. It is actually like having part of each finger removed or amputated, and the only one it inconveniences is the guardian. For the cat, it is painful, stressful, and requires a good amount of time to recover. And, once the healing is finished, the cat’s foot anatomy and balance are changed forever. Without their claws, cats can’t defend themselves as they instinctively do, leading some to become biters, and it can be painful to walk and scratch.

The MSPCA believes cats need their claws!

So, what should Ian do? First off, he might want to give his mom a little more time to cool off. After all, some things important to her were destroyed, and that doesn’t feel good for anybody. After letting the dust settle a bit, Ian might want to sit down with both of his parents and calmly explain to them his knowledge of declawing and the pain it inflicts.

Then, Ian can tell them that he wants to take some responsibility for training their cat. He might offer to build Heathcliff a scratching post out of carpet and wood or save up for one he saw in his local animal adoption center or pet supply shop. He can then show Heathcliff how to use the post by holding the cat’s paws in his hands and moving them up and down the carpet, even rubbing some indoor-grown catnip on it. This would give Heathcliff the opportunity to scratch away at something

appropriate. He can also keep up with his cat's ever-growing nails by talking to the vet about how to properly trim them. Once he practices the right techniques, it will be easy for him to keep the claws under control. If this still doesn't help, Ian can talk to Heathcliff's vet about rubber nail caps that glue on to the cat's nails. And, the MSPCA or his local adoption center is always there to provide additional help and tips when needed.