

Reducing Shelter Admissions and Saving Lives with a Cat Help Desk



About Alley Cat Allies

Alley Cat Allies is the only national nonprofit dedicated exclusively to the protection and humane treatment of all cats.

For 25 years, Alley Cat Allies has led the movement to save cats' lives. With advocacy, education, and grassroots organizing, we champion innovative programs and policies that serve communities and save cats. Since our founding in 1990, we have popularized Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) as the only humane and effective approach to community cats. Before Alley Cat Allies, TNR was virtually unknown in America, and no local governments supported it. Today, a growing list of more than 500 municipalities has officially embraced TNR.

Alley Cat Allies has changed how all cats are treated—pet, stray, feral, and each cat in between. We advocate for a variety of progressive policies to protect cats, including the transformation of the American animal shelter system, which still routinely kills 70 percent of all cats who enter.

Thanks to our more than half a million supporters and countless advocates, Alley Cat Allies works in hundreds of communities each year. To learn more about how we save cats' lives, visit www.alleycat.org.

Shelter Series

This resource is one in a series for shelters and animal control, and was developed by Bonney Brown and Diane Blankenburg of Humane Network.

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Ideally, animal shelters should be places of last resort for dogs and cats, just as a homeless shelter would be for people. While certainly there are situations where a shelter is a needed safe haven, we want to avoid creating the perception that animals are disposable by unintentionally facilitating their abandonment at shelters. Rather, we should be encouraging and enabling people to do right by animals. The individual will feel better knowing they have done the best they can for the animal and, of course, the cat (or dog) benefits, too. With this premise in mind, we founded a free Animal Help Desk at Nevada Humane Society (NHS) in 2007. It was modeled on an earlier program started in 1993 by Bonney Brown and June Mirlocca at Neponset Valley Humane Society in Massachusetts. Of course, the program evolved over the years and was designed to meet the needs of the community—Washoe County, Nevada.

Washoe County, Nevada, Results

In effect, the NHS Animal Help Desk was a hotline or resource center for people needing help with an animal situation. People could call or email and hear back from a real person, free of charge.

The need for this service was great. The NHS Animal Help Desk received 300 requests the first week it opened and has handled as many as 23,000 calls and emails a year. Countywide shelter admission in Washoe County dropped, including in 2008 and 2009, at a time when many communities saw a double-digit increase in shelter admissions due to extreme economic hard-times. (This was due to a robust TNR program and spay/neuter efforts in the community as well the Help Desk, but the Help Desk plays a critical role in communication with the public about these lifesaving programs.)

Countywide cat intake has decreased dramatically in Washoe County

- 4,938 in 2014
- 5,874 in 2013
- 6,029 in 2012
- 6,823 in 2011
- 7,364 in 2010
- 7,013 in 2009
- 7,506 in 2008
- 7,819 in 2007
- 8,103 in 2006

To gauge the effectiveness of the program, we tracked and followed up on all calls coming into our Animal Help Desk for a two-week period. What we learned was that 60% of the callers who wanted to surrender one or more animals were convinced to try alternatives. For more than five years now, the community has sustained a save rate of over 92% for cats and dogs.

Why a Cat Help Desk is Important to Your Success

This type of program is important for several reasons. First, it helps people do the right thing—to live the values we all preach that pets are valued family members—and everyone feels best when they are doing the right thing! The second and most obvious benefit is that it keeps cats out of shelters that do not absolutely have to be there, reducing the burden on shelters so they can focus on saving the cats who really need admission to the shelter. Additionally, it is ideal for the cats because even the nicest, best-run shelters are very stressful places for cats—just as we would be stressed if we suddenly found our home gone and we were living in an institutional shelter. Stress is the enemy of the immune system for both people and animals, which is why many cats are prone to becoming ill in a shelter setting.

Growing Trends: Surrender Intervention/Mitigation and Managed Admissions

For many years, animal sheltering experts promoted the idea that it was best for shelters to accept any animal that was brought to them. So, it is not surprising that often people, when facing some challenge or problem with their pet or a cat in their neighborhood, assume that the best thing is to bring them to the shelter.

Recently, several animal sheltering experts have taken a fresh look at this long-standing policy of open acceptance of animals at shelters and come to new conclusions. In part, this is the result of public expectation that shelters save the animals coming into their care rather than relying on lethal solutions to manage populations.

To truly succeed for the animals, we need to increase the number of pets that leave shelters alive and reduce the number of pets coming into shelters in the first place. Surrender intervention or mitigation programs (such as a hotline, help desk or resource center) help achieve the goal of making animal shelters what they should be—safety nets for those animals who truly need to be in the shelter because there is no other option for them.

Generally, the earlier the support or intervention takes place, the more successful it is. The best time for surrender intervention is before the person arrives at the shelter with their pet. Ideally, it starts with a discussion with a trained staff member or volunteer that takes place via phone or email. To encourage this dialogue, many shelters are moving toward admission by appointment for animals which, when you think about it, really makes sense. We need an appointment to get our hair cut or to see the doctor (in all but serious emergencies). Of course, there are occasional emergency situations where a shelter is needed to provide an immediate safety net for an animal, such as a safe hold for a pet when an individual suddenly has to go to the hospital and has no family to care for the pet, but in most cases, it is possible, beneficial even, to schedule an appointment.



In addition to allowing time for the individual to consider and pursue alternatives, appointments allow for better customer service. Many people find it upsetting and sad to surrender their pet and the appointment system allows for more personalized attention, creating less stress for the animal and their person.

As you consider a name for your program, consider the impact it will have on people hearing about it for the first time. At NHS, we wanted to encourage people to reach out to us at the first sign of any problem, ideally before they reached the point of thinking about bringing the cat or dog to the shelter—so we did not want to include surrender in the name of the program. However, if someone called about giving up their pet, they were connected directly to our Animal Help Desk. A side bonus to the move to admission by appointment at NHS was that more than 20% of the people found a better solution between the time they called and the time of their appointment, just a few days later.

New Mexico Humane in Albuquerque has a video on their website to introduce their new surrender policy: http://animalhumanenm.org/pets/about/managed_admissions.php. So far, they have reported very positive community reaction and results.

Planning for the Future

One problem we often encountered at NHS was the inability of some pet owners to afford veterinary care for a pet in need. In many cases, these people loved their pet dearly and saw surrendering their pet as the only way to provide the care needed. This was especially common situation for senior citizens with older cats. What a heartbreaking situation!

Historically, some people have felt that people who cannot afford their pet's care should not have a pet. However, with many people losing their jobs or being underemployed and the growth of the senior population over the past several years, it does not make sense to assume that a lack of money indicates a lack of love. Instead, we, as a movement, need to seek to develop programs to provide affordable veterinary care to those in genuine need so that they can keep their pets and their pets can retain their home with the person they love.

Some people are able to receive the help they need through loan programs, such as Care Credit. But for those who do not qualify, ideally we will offer programs that provide low-cost and free veterinary care for those in genuine financial need. Providing critically needed veterinary care when a person is unable to afford it, thereby preserving that bond between individuals and their beloved pets, is a wonderful way to demonstrate how deeply we, as people and organizations dedicated to the welfare of animals, value that bond.

Why is a Cat Help Desk Effective?

You are probably only too familiar with the most common reasons why people bring animals to shelters, but what you may not realize is that many of these situations can be resolved in a manner that will help keep the animals out of shelters.

Most people have a limited understanding of animal behavior and not everyone is a good problem-solver. Sometimes people feel frustrated with their pet's behavior and are not sure what to do; in other cases, people may be facing a lifestyle change, such as moving, the loss of a job, or a new baby. The caller may feel out of options or simply believe that they will be doing the right thing by surrendering their pet. Ideally, surrender intervention helps to keep pets in their homes by suggesting, and in some cases providing, alternatives to leaving the pet at the shelter.

What we have found is that many people are willing to listen and at least explore other options to help keep their pet. Suggestions may include behavior modification, training, changes to the environment, basic health care information, help identifying alternatives, and—if they really cannot keep the pet—making the effort to find a new home for the pet themselves. Sometimes, at NHS, we provided practical assistance like veterinary services, free spay/neuter, or pet food, but in many cases, all the caller needed was information and moral support.

The Goal: Create Involvement

The goal of the NHS Animal Help Desk staff is to involve the caller in solving the problem. There are several good reasons for this goal. First, most humane organizations simply cannot manage all of the problems that occur in their local communities every day. But even if you could do it all, it would be wise to enlist the help and support of the community. After all, our mission, as humane organizations, is to create a more compassionate society. The only way to do that is by touching the hearts and minds of the individuals who make up our communities. And we can start with the folks that reach out to us for help.

Many people experience guilt about surrendering a pet and while they may not welcome the information initially, some people warm up to the idea of keeping their pet once they see that there may be a better solution to their problem. Staff was trained to work to bring out the best in the caller. Is this a big challenge? You bet! But that's our mission—to get people involved, to empower them, and to create a truly humane society in the largest sense.

Naturally, we will not be successful all the time, but when we are, we often find that we have created a powerful change in the lives of the people and animals involved. Some of NHS's best volunteers and most loyal donors are the same folks who first called for help. The experience of putting compassion for animals into action in your own life has no doubt had a positive impact on you, and no less can be true for many other people out there. Callers will feel more involved with the animal and your organization, because they participated in the process of solving the problem.



In-Person: Never Give Up

While it is easier to turn things around over the phone or via email than it is in person, the NHS staff members who work in their surrender room are trained to try to find a solution other than taking the pet into the shelter. We have a script that is used to guide their discussion and help them explore alternatives. The staff is trained to be polite, sympathetic, and helpful while, at the same time, asking non-judgmental questions about why the people are surrendering the animal. Sometimes you can turn a situation around even in the eleventh hour. There was also trained staff or volunteers who were able to talk people through more complex situations, such as choosing and implementing TNR for a group of outdoor cats.

Staffing the Hotline

Volunteers or Staff: At NHS, we were able to hire a staff member to manage this program, but we have helped establish other similar cat help desks or more general animal help programs that were run entirely by volunteers. Volunteers can be scheduled to pick up messages and return calls or emails. The volunteer who picks up the messages should function like a triage nurse—determining which are critical and who should return them.

Over time, some of your volunteers will cultivate areas of expertise. For example, one volunteer might be especially effective at handling calls from people who are moving and another volunteer may be most skilled at handling challenging feral cat situations. Your most diplomatic volunteer might be willing to handle the few, truly difficult people you may encounter.

Finding the Right People: Steven Covey once wrote, “Effective people are not problem-minded; they’re opportunity-minded. They feed opportunities and starve problems.” We looked to hire people and train volunteers for this job who had strong communication and people skills. Another important quality is finding individuals who are possibility thinkers, those who naturally see alternatives rather than just one way to do something.

Training: Your cat help desk volunteers and staff should be trained to empower the person seeking assistance by providing information, encouragement, and support and to appeal to the best within the caller. People are often stressed or upset when they are dealing with a problem involving an animal. This can make it challenging; however, one advantage of this type of program is that we are redirecting the emotion into finding a better solution for the animals.

The customizable Cat Help Handbook that is part of this toolkit provides an outline of all the common types of issues and provides potential solutions as well as a wide array of resources. It can serve as both a training tool and a reference for staff and volunteers. At NHS, we also relied on mentoring as part of the training process for the people who would handle calls from the public—partnering new people up with an experienced person.

Asking the right questions and listening is a critical part of this job. It's important not to jump to conclusions and to take the time to gain a full understanding of the situation. Sometimes the way someone initially presents the situation may not give you all the information you need—perhaps they are talking about a cat that may sound like their pet, but is actually an outdoor cat the person has been feeding, or maybe they are upset because their cat just peed on an expensive pair of shoes that belonged to their roommate. We usually need to ask multiple questions and listen carefully to get the complete picture before formulating solutions. For example, the cat with the litter box issue may be the result of a medical problem that can be easily resolved by a trip to the veterinarian. It may be surprising, but many people have limited knowledge of animal health and behavior issues and may not have thought that a health problem could be causing the behavior. The shy outdoor cat they have been feeding will be best off if they trap her and get her spayed for free through the local TNR program—rather than bringing her to the shelter.

We can always lend an empathetic ear and in most cases, we can, after asking clarifying questions, offer some help which may be in the form of advice, information, or real, practical assistance. When someone has fallen on hard times, pet food and basic veterinary care can become a huge burden. Low-cost spay/neuter services, a few simple tips to help resolve a behavioral challenge, or a fresh perspective on the problem can be all it takes. Understanding the problem is key and the only way to do that is to ask questions and listen carefully.

Often people ask how to handle callers who are not providing the real story. It's usually best to assume that people are being open and honest and respond to the reasons they are giving you. When you start a dialogue about the animal, people usually feel encouraged to open up about the additional challenges and concerns they have. For example, if they say they are moving and you begin addressing that barrier with questions and possible solutions, the person will usually offer up other barriers, such as the behavior problem they have not been able to address, and then you can address those issues too.

Affording this New Program

Surrender reduction, one of the goals of this program, results in cost savings; fewer admissions staff—both those that deal with the public and those processing the animals into the shelter will be needed. The same may be true of the clinic staff. Other cost reductions include euthanasia staff, supplies, and the disposal of bodies. Another consideration for creating cost efficiencies for the program is utilizing volunteers for some or all of the roles, rather than staff.

Beyond cost savings, a surrender mitigation program is an investment in doing the right thing—it directly supports the mission of saving animals, fostering the human-animal bond and creating humane communities. In addition to seeking donations for this program by sharing success stories, you can seek grant funding and sponsorships from local businesses. A Cat Help Desk can have a huge community outreach and educational component, as well as providing a needed service to the community.



Information Clearinghouse

Running an Cat Help Desk does not mean that you need to provide all the services. You can function as a clearinghouse, gathering information on all the cat-related resources in your community—low-cost spay/neuter, TNR, vaccination clinics, rescue groups, behaviorists that work with cats, and pet-friendly housing options—and then provide this information to the callers.

In addition to providing cat behavior information and guidance through life's changes (like moving or having a new baby), you will want to aggressively promote Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR). TNR—as well as SNR (Shelter-Neuter-Return), RTF (Return-to-Field) or Feral Freedom—programs have been proven to dramatically reduce the number of cats coming into area shelters, while also improving the lives of outdoor cats. These programs can be very cost-effective and immensely popular with the public.

People who want to surrender feral cats to animal shelters often mistakenly believe that he/she is doing the cat a service and that the kitty has a chance of being adopted as a pet. Once you present a more accurate picture for the caller and he/she learns that the cat will be okay if they are neutered and allowed to continue living outside, while impoundment may lead to death, most opt for TNR. A 2007 survey conducted by Harris Interactive for Alley Cat Allies demonstrated that 81% of the public would rather see a cat live out their life outdoors than be destroyed in an animal control facility.

If your organization does not lend traps for TNR nor provide free nor very low-cost spay/neuter services for feral cats, you will want to make referrals to a local organization that does, or develop a program to meet this need within your community. You can find everything you need to know about how to start a TNR program on the Alley Cat Allies website at www.alleycat.org. There are grant monies available for providing spay/neuter surgeries for feral cats, but even without them, TNR is more cost effective for the community than taking feral cats into shelters to be killed.

For support in influencing board and public officials to adopt SNR programs for outdoor cats surrendered to shelters, we recommend the online webinar by Kate Hurley DVM, MPVM: *Making the Case for a Paradigm Shift in Community Cat Management, Part One*, www.maddiesfund.org/Maddies_Institute/Webcasts/Making_the_Case_for_Community_Cats_Part_One.html.

Getting the Word Out

You will want to promote your Cat Help Desk (or cat resource center or hotline) so that people know that it's available, free, and the best way to get help for any cat-related issue or question. You will want to use all the standard ways to get the word out: news releases, flyers, posters, ads, business cards, and public service announcements. Promoting success stories on Facebook also helps get the word out (see samples). At NHS we also worked with our county animal services so that their field officers and staff could refer people to the Help Desk.

Top Tips for Success

At NHS, we were fortunate to have had Beata Liebetruth as our Animal Help Desk Manager for more than five years. Before this, she had a similar role for Best Friends Animal Society and she brought years of experience to the position. Here's Beata's advice on how to make your help desk as effective as possible.

Beata's Top Tips for Success in Counseling People about Pet Problems

- 1) Listen. Give the caller the chance to tell their whole story before you respond. If you listen to them, chances are they will be willing to listen to YOU.
- 2) Be non-judgmental. Often callers tell us they have been scolded by other rescue resources where they asked for assistance. Just because a person may not be able to provide the same amount of time and care that you provide to your own pets, it does not mean that the pet is unhappy in its home.
- 3) Be empathetic. Show compassion to the caller and try to comfort them. Instead of saying; "How can you just get rid of your cat!?!". Try this approach: "I am so sorry to hear about your dilemma. That sounds like a tough situation. Let's see what we can do to help you out."
- 4) Don't hesitate to use your powers of persuasion to get a good outcome for the animal. The goal is to buy some time and get the individual involved in finding a solution. Try getting them to take small steps at first.
- 5) Focus on the positive outcome. The happiness of a person who has hit upon a solution is as rewarding as knowing that we have kept a pet in their home. But even if the result is that the animal is surrendered, the caller will remember your kindness and the compassion you showed them.
- 6) Focus on the three E's. Educate – Encourage – Enable throughout your interactions with the public. Beata's favorite quote: "Nobody made a bigger mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little." –Edmund Burke



Using the Customizable Handbook

The next section of this toolkit is an editable, fully customizable Cat Help Desk Handbook. You can review it and adapt it to work for your organization and community. If there is something you read in the Handbook that you feel will not work for you, change it to meet your needs. Incorporate your own policies and programs into it so that it can serve as a reference guide for your program and a tool for training staff and volunteers on how to manage incoming calls for help. Establishing clear guidelines for how you want issues handled is important to ensure that consistent and accurate information is being provided by all.

Closing

One of the most surprising things we have noticed is that while most people need some advice or help with problem-solving and while some people need real practical assistance, there is great benefit in providing a little moral support. Someone empathetic to talk to who can provide information, encouragement, and lifesaving options can make a dramatic difference in the outcomes for the cats. One of the most rewarding parts of this work is when we can turn someone on to helping animals. It is not unusual to see people who have been helped give back because they are so grateful for the help in finding a solution they felt good about. The Cat Help Desk is one of the ways we can create these transformative connections between people and animals. It also builds a deeper connection for the organization and its community which supports you in fulfilling your lifesaving mission.

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Chapter 1:

Understanding the Problem and How You Can Help

Some 96 million cats are estimated to live in over 36 million households in the U.S., making them the most popular companion animal. No one knows exactly how many cats are living outdoors in our communities, but some experts suggest that you could get an estimate for your community based on 0.5 outdoor/feral cats per household (not per person) within the geographic area. Other estimates place the total number of feral or community cats at more than 50 million.

Nationally, between 6 and 8 million dogs and cats enter animal shelters each year. In many communities, cats entering shelters outnumber the dogs. While statistics vary greatly by community, on average half of the animals entering shelters do not leave alive, with cats often constituting more than half these numbers. While an average of 30% of dogs are reclaimed by their people, less than 5% of cats are reclaimed. Making matters even worse for felines in many communities, often fewer cats are adopted from shelters than dogs.

Given these numbers, it is clear that we need to take a dual approach to saving cats: increase the number of cats getting out of shelters alive—through adoption, return-to-field (RTF), shelter-neuter-return programs (SNR) or Feral Freedom type programs—and decrease the number of cats entering shelters through proactive efforts to keep cats in their homes (often called pet-retention or surrender mitigation programs) and to promote and support trap-neuter-return (TNR) for outdoor/community cats. Ideally, shelters will become places of last resort for animals, just as we view shelters for humans.

To achieve the goal of saving more cats, we need to encourage more people to get involved helping cats. By inspiring action, compassion, and involvement, sharing information, providing potential solutions, and inviting new people to get involved, we can help many, many more animals.

As a Cat Help Desk Caseworker (staff or volunteer), a significant part of your job will be to bring out the best in people. Inspiring people to help the animal themselves, to act, to become involved, and to accept responsibility, is the only way that many of the animals will be helped. As you can clearly see from the numbers, we cannot do it all ourselves.

Additionally, there is a side benefit to encouraging people to get involved and handle the problem themselves; they will discover that they can do it. They will have put compassion into practice in their own lives. Who knows, you may inspire someone to become a loyal crusader for the cats!

About the Cat Help Desk

The Cat Help Desk was created to provide a central source of cat resources and a network of volunteers serving the _____ (name of community). It provides advice, information and resources to create efficient and effective means of meeting the needs of cats and their owners/caregivers.

The Cat Help Desk is a free program offered to the public, dedicated to helping find lifesaving solutions for our community's cat population. Cat Help Desk staff and volunteers may help in a variety of ways, from working to increase public awareness to responding to phone and email queries to providing other skills and expertise.



What Do People Expect When They Contact Us?

What do people expect when they call or email the Cat Help Desk?

Many people who call us expect that they are calling an organization with the capacity to resolve all cat problems. Some people who contact us about their pets or outdoor/feral cats will be surprised and disappointed to learn that we cannot just take the cats in.

Though we may not be able to help out in the way that they had hoped, it's important that you point out the ways in which we can help.

As a Caseworker, it will be your task to guide people through the situation, explore options, get them involved in the solution, and share additional resources.

- You'll ask questions to find out about their situation and listen to their responses. Just listening and talking can help sort out some problems.
- You'll share information and talk them through how they may take action and ways we can help. Together you'll explore options and help find a solution for the animals. (Be a possibility thinker!)
- Depending upon the situation, you may want to explain how they can find a new home for the animal.
- If it's a feral cat, you'll talk them through the benefits and basics of Trap-Neuter-Return.
- In other cases, you'll provide referrals to other resources, including affordable spay/neuter services.
- Occasionally, you will receive a case that you need to refer to others in the organization for specialized assistance.

Chapter 2:

The Basics—Doing the Job

General Guidelines for Managing Cases

A case starts as a call or email from a member of the public or representative of a fellow animal welfare group. We will assign a case number to it and keep track of the interactions with the individual(s) involved.

Return all calls/emails within the designated time frame. Calls and emails should be prioritized on a need basis—the most critical situation should be addressed first. For example, contacts about injured or sick animals are often urgent. Situations with a time limitation for a positive outcome are a high priority. General calls for information are low priority.

Response Time

| | |
|--------|-------------------|
| Urgent | less than 2 hours |
| High | 24 hours |
| Medium | 2 -3 days |
| Low | 3 days |

Set a professional tone. Start each call with

“Hello, this is your first name from the organization name Cat Help Desk returning your call.”

Take notes while talking. If available, use a computerized Case Management System to create a Case record OR the phone reps call sheet (sample provided) for logging information from the caller or documenting email correspondence.

Start a new Case Record or Call Sheet for each caller/situation. If you are using the Call Sheets, after you have completed the necessary follow up, papers should be kept on file in alphabetical order by last name for easy reference.

Can't reach the caller? If you are unable to reach the person, leave a message, including your first name, and letting them know when you will call back. If they will not be available at that time, ask them to call the main number (leave the number for them) and leave a message about the best times to call. You can leave your email address or personal phone number, if you are comfortable doing that.

Our standard is to return the call and leave messages three times (either with someone who takes a message or on an answering machine). If there is no response after three attempts, then there is no need to follow up further, unless you have been specifically instructed otherwise by your supervisor.

Become a truly effective phone counselor for the animals. As a representative of the Cat Help Desk, the public will view you as an expert on all issues related to cats. You are, in effect, a counselor for cat issues. Read, study, and learn everything you can.

Please run any new or revolutionary ideas by the supervisor before presenting them to the public.



It's okay not to know. If you are not sure of the answer, it's always best to say, *"That's a good question. I'm not sure, but I'll check into it and get back to you soon."*

Please feel free to contact the supervisor for advice on how to best handle a situation that is unusual, new to you, or potentially complicated. There's no such thing as a silly question.

Keep the caller on track. If the person is rambling, taking up too much time, or not answering your questions, interrupt politely and say, *"What can I do for you?"* or *"Tell me why you called"* or *"How can I help?"* or *"Excuse me, [repeat your question]."* An upbeat, friendly tone of voice makes all the difference! You can also explain that you have very limited time and need specific information to help.

Deal appropriately with medical questions. If you are asked about medical conditions, explain that you are not a veterinarian. You may offer general advice. For example: *"Diarrhea can be caused by parasites, but it could also indicate more serious problems. I suggest that you contact a veterinarian."* Sometimes, the general advice needs to be customized to the situation. For example: *"Diarrhea can rapidly cause dehydration in very young animals and this can be fatal. You should consult a vet at once."*

Be aware of the disclaimer on lists of shelters or resources. The following statement needs to accompany any referral or resource listing that you send out: *"The inclusion of a service, organization, or program in this listing is NOT an endorsement or recommendation. We are not able to guarantee the quality of services of other groups. We strongly suggest that you check them out yourself before using a specific service."*

Customize your message. Your reply needs to be suitable for the experience level of the caller/writer. An experienced rescuer or a shelter employee needs a different response than an individual who is facing this challenge for the first time. This can be as simple as adding a sentence that recognizes the experience of the individual. For example: *"I realize you may have tried many of these things, but here is our standard advice. Let me know if you have already exhausted these options."* Or you could preface your response with this: *"Forgive me if you are already familiar with this, but we have found that. . ."* If you are working with someone coping with their situation for the first time, take care to avoid using jargon and explain any potentially confusing terminology you use.

Know when to make calls. As a general rule, we do not recommend calling before 8 a.m. or after 8:00 p.m., except in the event of an emergency or a specific request.

Geographic Considerations

- **Within area covered:** The Cat Help Desk covers the name of geographic area.
- **For callers who are inquiring about situations outside area covered:** See list of referral resources to see if you can point them in the right direction to find help in their local area.

Help the organization to cultivate members. Always be on the lookout for individuals to add to your mailing list. A kind person who rescues a stray may be a future donor or a valuable volunteer! But if we don't get their name on the mailing list we'll lose touch with them! Names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses for the mailing list should be sent to role or name of individual on the first of each month.

General Guidelines for Email Correspondence and Phone Conversations

Tone. The tone should generally be friendly and conversational.

Spelling. Spell-check EVERY email message before it goes out.

Proper terminology. Always use correct medical terminology; for example, the correct term is “FIV,” not “kitty AIDS.”

Jargon. Avoid using humane movement slang. For example, ask “*Is the cat friendly?*” rather than “Is the cat adoptable?” OR “*Can you pet him?*” rather than “Is the cat feral?”

Email subject line. Subject lines need to get the reader’s attention and give an idea of what the message is about.

Specific information on what to do. ALWAYS tell people EXACTLY what they can do to help.

Contact information. Be sure to include your contact information and the contact information (the email address and/or phone number) for the individual who is coordinating the project (if you are not doing it yourself). Including all the contact information for the caller/writer will be essential if someone else is going to handle the case/assist the individual, and it can also be helpful for your own follow up.

Avoid graphic descriptions. We avoid graphically disturbing descriptions or dire warnings. Alarming people is not likely to have the desired effect.

Avoid critical comments about other groups. We do not pass along information or forward messages that are critical of other organizations. Edit out inappropriate comments from others.

Animal situations only. The Cat Help Desk only provides assistance for animal situations, specifically for cats in the geographic area. We cannot use the Cat Help Desk to promote any business, for-profit venture, OR to request help for a personal problem that does not directly involve animals.

Follow up for success. If time allows, two weeks after a case has been closed, re-contact the caller/writer who originated the case to make sure everything worked out and also find out how we are doing.



Steps to take to successfully assist people seeking help or information:

- Be a sympathetic listener; provide personal attention and emotional support.
- Gather information. (Ask the right questions.)
- Take notes as they talk.
- Give them an overview of the current circumstances. This may include explaining that the best ways to help outdoor and feral cats is TNR (the individual may not be aware of Trap-Neuter-Return, or that the best hope for their cat or the friendly outdoor cat they are feeding is for them to find a new home for the cat – rather than bringing the cat to the shelter.)
- Facilitate exploring options and finding solutions (possibility thinking).
- Encourage callers and involve them in the solution. Provide moral support.
- Provide information, tools, resources, and referrals to help with their specific situation. (See below)

Ways to Provide Resources, Advice, and Referrals

Resources: Provide information, literature or Internet resources, including:

- Send How to Find Homes manual (PDF provided)
- Send Feral Cat Trap-Neuter-Return resources as appropriate: www.alleycat.org/TNR
- Suggest other literature and information from Standard Resources provided for you

Advice: Make specific suggestions or offer advice, including as appropriate:

- Find a new home for the cat(s)
- Advertising in newspaper or newsletters
- Posting on adoption websites
- Word of mouth
- Distributing flyers/posters
- Veterinarian check-up
- Behavior modification:
- Suggest behavior websites
- Suggest an animal behaviorist (CABC),
- Board-certified veterinary behaviorist
- Trap/neuter/return for feral cats
- Suggest relocation as a last resort for feral cats

Referrals: Make referrals as needed, including:

- Rescue organizations
- Pet-friendly Apartments
- Low-cost spay/neuter services
- Low-cost veterinary services/assistance

The Case Management Process

All requests for help will come into the Cat Help Desk either through the phone voicemail or email account. The Casework Coordinator will retrieve the messages on a regular basis and assign them to a caseworker as appropriate.

Many cases will require that you gather a significant amount of information before you can decide on the best course of action. This usually involves a phone call and one or more email messages being sent back and forth between the person seeking help and the caseworker handling the case. In order to document the case so that another caseworker could follow up if necessary or in the event that questions arise in the future about the case, it's important that you record the entire exchange in the Case Management System or on the Call Sheet.

At first glance, some of the steps below may seem unimportant and cumbersome, but following the instructions will actually save time by eliminating the need to search for previous messages relating to the case you are working on. Here are the steps to follow:

Responding to an Email request:

When a case originating from an email message is assigned to you, the message will be forwarded to you from the Casework Coordinator. The subject line will specify the case number that has been assigned in the Case Management program and will provide a name for the case including the caller's name and/or the type of situation/location and will indicate the level of urgency.

For example: #2733 TNR in Jonesboro, sick cat, R Smith, Urgent.

1. Read the message carefully to determine what type of help or information the person is seeking.
2. After you have decided how you are going to respond, click on "Forward" rather than starting a new message. Copy the person's email address from the text of the message and paste it into the "To" box. Your email program can be set up to leave the previous messages in the body of the email, creating a history that will hopefully be maintained throughout the case.
3. First, thank the person for contacting the Cat Help Desk concerning the situation.
4. You may need additional information in order to help them effectively. Ask any questions you have. You may also request a phone number if helpful.
5. Copy the appropriate standard reply, if there is one, into the message above your signature line. Read through the standard reply, and edit the information so it applies to the person's situation.
6. Be sure to ask them to include the email history when they reply.
7. Spell-check your message and then send the message to the writer.
8. Please send status of case back to Casework Coordinator so that the casework log can be updated. If, after two weeks, the person has not gotten back to you, consider the case closed and notify the Casework Coordinator.



Responding to a Phone Request:

Telephone communication needs to be similarly documented in the Case Management System or on a Call Sheet.

1. While you are on the phone, type notes directly into an email OR handwrite them into the Call Sheet.
2. Use a new Call Sheet for each case.
3. Please forward this information to the Casework Coordinator.

Be on the Lookout for Information that Will Help the Cat Help Desk

Newsletter-worthy success stories. If you come across situations that you feel may make a good newsletter story that might inspire other people to help animals, please run it by **__name of role or individual.**

Chapter 3:

How to Handle the Most Common Requests

We receive a wide variety of phone calls and e-mails each day. These are some of the most common categories of requests for assistance.

Common Types of Requests

New home needed for cat because of:

Behavior problems

- Litter box problems
- Aggression
- Damaging furniture
- Fearfulness

Health Problems

- FIV (feline immunodeficiency virus)
- FeLV (feline leukemia)
- FIP (feline infectious peritonitis)
- Neurological impairment, physical disability, deformity
- Other: URI (upper respiratory infection) incontinence, kidney disease/renal failure, chronic cystitis, diabetes, UTI (urinary tract infection) IBD (inflammatory bowel disease), blindness, deafness, special dietary needs.

Lifestyle changes

- Moving
- Allergies
- New baby

Special Circumstances

- Senior pet
- Multiple-pet placement
- Hoarding

Other situations:

- Report of abuse or neglect of an animal
- Orphaned kittens found
- Spay/neuter assistance needed
- Legal help needed
- Lifetime care or pet retirement home needed
- Injured or orphaned wildlife found
- Financial assistance needed
- Medical emergencies
- Lost pet
- Request for information on volunteering
- Request for information on adoptions

Feral cats, stray, homeless, or abandoned cats

- Pet Cats
- Feral/Community cats



Section 1: FINDING A NEW HOME

“I need to find a new home for my cat.”

“I need to get rid of this cat.”

When a caller makes one of the above statements, it’s usually advisable to start off by asking questions. Questions help to engage the caller, and the responses provide additional information for you to work with.

Beginning Questions to Ask

- How old is the cat?
- How long have you had the cat?
- Why do you need to place the cat?

Based upon their answers, see the various specific categories in this chapter for additional advice and information you can provide.

General Advice

Shelters should always be places of last resort for animals, so we should encourage people, whenever possible to seek other solutions.

The best outcome is usually achieved by discovering the underlying problem/reason for wanting to surrender the cat and help the person find a workable solution – thereby keeping the cat in the home. There are additional details under specific categories of situations within this manual that you can refer to so you can offer specific advice and help that will hopefully meet their needs. Refer to:

- Section 2: Behavior Problems
- Section 3: Medical Issues
- Section 4: Lifestyle Changes
- Section 5: Special Circumstances
- Section 6: Outdoor Cats (sometimes people are calling to find a home for an outdoor cat they are feeding).

The second best outcome would be to encourage them to try to place the cat directly into a new home themselves. If this later option is the most likely outcome, provide a copy of the guide: How to Find Homes for Homeless Pets.

Unfortunately, the animal’s age is a factor in finding a new home. It is especially hard on older animals when they go to a shelter, rather than another home. Adjusting to life in a shelter is so stressful for some older cats that some shelters routinely euthanize every cat over 6 or 8 years of age upon intake. It is not unusual for older cats to become ill in a shelter setting, and even those shelters that do not have age requirements for adoption may euthanize as soon as a cat shows signs of illness (even with a treatable ailment). Sometimes explaining the stress and the results of turning the cat into the shelter can help callers understand the need to find a solution to the problem to save their feline friend’s life.

Placement Tips

Some specific placement tips to share with callers who will try to find a new home for the cat themselves:

Prepare the cat for adoption. To increase the chances of finding a home and the success of the new placement, it is important that the pet is:

- Spayed or neutered
- In good health
- Clean
- Reasonably well behaved, especially litter box trained

Advertise widely. Get the word out, in as many places as possible, to increase the chances of success in finding a new home.

- Photos and descriptions really help people make a connection to an animal. In the ads, describe the pet's personality, habits, and some of the little things that make this animal special. Do not hold back when it comes to telling about any disabilities, health issues, or behavior quirks. Sometimes these are the things that particularly speak to an individual who may want to adopt this cat.
- Flyers are inexpensive and often highly effective, especially when they include a good photo and good description of the kitty. They work especially well for older animals or animals with special needs.
- Posting the flyers throughout the community, wherever a good prospective adoptive person may see it, is the key to success with flyers. Health food stores, supermarkets, libraries, churches, health clubs, sporting goods stores, and even the inside of a car window are just a few examples of good places to post flyers.
- Posting information about pets on adoption websites is another effective way to find a new home. There are specific sites for certain types of animals (FIV+ cats, disabled pets, senior dogs, etc.) as well as general adoption websites. (See Resources section)
- To find a home for a cat of a particular breed or breed mix, suggest they use the listings of breed rescues. (See Resources section)
- Word of mouth should not be underestimated! Advise the caller to tell anyone and everyone about the cat that needs a home and to ask others to help with spreading the word. It could be that a co-worker's father's neighbor's daughter is looking for a cat just like their cat, Morris!
- Use community and social media contacts such as Facebook. Ask people to share your post with their friends, mention the cat in their church's newsletter, send their flyer through their office memo system, or share some flyers with the members of their book club.
- Specialized advertising reaches out to a particular community that is most likely to offer an appropriate home for a pet. For instance, an older animal may prefer a quieter home with a mature owner, so an ad posted in the local senior newsletter might yield good results.
- Other shelters may be an option. Although any "no-kill" shelter is likely to be full and a traditional or large shelter may euthanize the animal, these organizations may be able to offer other assistance. Some have low-cost spay/neuter clinics. Some will list the pet on their bulletin board or website. Or they may let the individual bring the animal along for their off-site adoption days.
- Local rescues – see resources section.



- Suggest that they ask local veterinarians for any assistance they can offer in finding a new home for the cat and for rescue contacts they may be able to share. For a list of local veterinarians, see Resources section.

Be creative and persistent. Creativity and persistence are usually rewarded. Encourage the caller to think about the best kind of environment for the cat and to explore all options. There are often many cats needing homes at any one time, so finding a home can take some effort; the key thing this cat has going for them is the caller. It may help to remind callers that they can make a life or death difference for their pet.

Stay positive. If they express doubt that a good home can be found, it may be helpful to share these thoughts:

- There are good homes out there. People who don't believe that are generalizing the behavior of a minority of people who are irresponsible pet owners.
- The caller truly is the cat's best option for finding a new home. Some people think shelters or rescue groups would be best for placing the pet because we have experience, facilities, screening guidelines, etc. But an individual, particularly one who knows the cat, can focus all their efforts on that pet, provide the most information to prospective adopters and best determine the appropriateness of a new home. Also, any shelter or sanctuary is stressful for an animal.
- The shelter setting, no matter how nice, can bring on stress-related problems. Anxiety, aggression, and even illness are common and these natural reactions may make adoption difficult or impossible.

Closing the Call

End the call by wishing them success with finding a home for the cat and invite them to call back if they have any questions or would like to discuss the matter further.

Section 2: BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

General Advice

If callers say they have to give up a cat because of behavior problems, they might be willing to listen to advice about how to solve the behavior problem so they can keep their friend. (See advice in Section 1)

First, recommend a trip to the veterinarian to rule out a health problem. This is always the first step with any behavior problem, since many behaviors can have their roots in a medical condition. Last year's general checkup, when the person may not have mentioned the problem to the veterinarian, is not adequate to rule out a medical basis to the problem. So if they say the cat has been to the veterinarian, nicely inquire when and what the veterinarian said about this issue.

You could also suggest that the person consult a behavior specialist. Not all veterinarians receive training in animal behavior problems. There are many recent developments in veterinary medicine that involve the use of drugs to control behavioral problems. These pharmacological solutions can be highly effective, minimally risky, and reasonably priced. Many veterinarians, however, are not yet comfortable enough with the newer drugs to prescribe them readily, so it's worth finding a board-certified veterinary behaviorist, after medical causes have been ruled out, to prescribe drugs for behavior problems. (Most certified animal behaviorists who are not veterinarians can make referrals to veterinarians in the community who will help by prescribing drugs or will call your veterinarian to make a recommendation for drug treatment.)

While we are not behavior experts and should be referring people to experts for further advice, it's helpful if you can offer some preliminary information over the phone. It's important that the caller get a sense that there are things to try which can, in some cases, be quite simple yet effective. Your advice and patience can save a life!

Most Common Cat Behavior Problems

Inappropriate Urination/Defecation: Litter Box Problems

Inappropriate elimination is a common problem that results in the deaths of countless cats when people abandon or give up their pets because they can't cope with it.

Some people are still unaware of the scope of the numbers of cats entering shelters and think that it will be easy to find a new home for their pet. They may not realize that in many communities healthy, friendly cats without any behavioral issues are euthanized for space and time. So, you may need to clear up this misconception before they are open to hearing any alternatives.

Sometimes you can explain to people that unless they address the behavior issue, the chance of finding a permanent new home is very small. After all, if they cannot tolerate the behavior of the animal that they have had for years, why would they assume that someone else will tolerate this behavior? Pointing this out can help them to realize the need for action, on their part, to solve the problem. Sometimes friends or family are willing to help. There is some evidence that changing the cat's environment will sometimes correct the problem. Spraying may be associated with some unhappiness or stress the cat is experiencing in the home. However, they will want to follow up with whoever accepts the cat to be sure that it is working out and offer to take the cat back if the problem persists.

Generally, it is necessary to deal with the problem within the household. If callers insist on finding a new home for the cat, encourage them to work on the problem so that the animal will be more adoptable. (They may even decide to keep their cat!)



Questions You Can Ask

Here are some questions you can ask and things you can suggest to begin solving the problem:

When did the problem start?

It's easier to break a new habit, so encourage them to get on it right away!

Have you taken the cat to the veterinarian to have this problem checked out recently?

More on this in the "Specific Steps for Solving the Problem." (Often, a urinary tract infection, which can cause cats to go outside the box, can easily be treated with antibiotics.)

Has anything changed in the animal's environment or living situation?

This may include new people in the house, new pets, frequent visitors, the departure of a favorite person, construction, other animals coming into the yard, a change in diet, or a change in medications. Eliminating or minimizing the causes of stress can sometimes solve the problem.

How many cats are in the house? How many litter boxes do you have?

Try having at least one litter box per cat. Only one cat? Try two boxes.

Is he an indoor-outdoor cat? Is there a litter box in the house?

This may be hard to believe, but occasionally a person will expect the cat to hold it indefinitely until the cat can be let out. If this is the case, explain in a nonjudgmental tone that cats need to eliminate several times a day.

How old is the cat?

Some elimination problems can be age-related so reiterate the importance of a veterinarian checkup to discuss the problem.

Are the litter boxes kept scrupulously clean?

Some cats avoid an unclean litter box. Try sifting the boxes twice or more daily. Try completely cleaning it daily, not just sifting out the solids. Change the whole pan, using less litter; and changing it more often.

Where is the litter box?

It should be in a quiet, easy-to-access area. It must always be available, not behind a closed door (in the bathroom, for instance) or in the same room with the Great Dane that the cat is nervous about, or near the washing machine that makes scary noises sometimes, or in any busy location. Are stairs creating a barrier for a senior cat? Both older animals and young ones may not be able to climb into a high, walled box and may need more litter boxes around the house so that they can "make it in time."

Is the litter box covered?

Try uncovering it – some cats do not like covered boxes.

Is the box too small?

Try a larger one. Large storage totes with low sides can work well for some cats (under the bed type plastic storage boxes).

What type of litter do you use?

Try different types of filler; experiment with different brands and types of litter in different boxes. Try unscented litter, since some cats hate the scented type. After all, they have more sensitive noses than we do. Many cats like the fine texture of the clumping litter. Try clean potting soil, regular clay litter, sand, sawdust, or wood shavings in different litter boxes to see what the cat prefers. Use a good quality, low-dust litter.

Do you use plastic liners?

Some cats hate them, because their claws catch in the plastic.

What cleaner do you use in the litter box?

Do not use strong-smelling cleaners on the litter box and, whatever you use, rinse it very well. Cats have sensitive noses and can smell things you cannot. The scent of the cleaner may be putting your cat off! Some cleaners, such as Lysol, can be toxic to cats. Do not use air fresheners near the litter box, since they too may repel the cat.

Specific Steps for Solving the Problem

Here are some steps you can suggest to solve the problem:

1. Rule out medical causes

First, suggest that they take the animal to the veterinarian to rule out any health problems. Advise them to tell the him/her about the specific problem. Several physical problems may cause even the best-behaved cat to not use the litter box consistently (these include urinary tract infections, parasites, and hormonal problems). Physical problems should be ruled out before working on the behavioral aspect of the problem. The good news is that the physical problems that cause lapses in litter box training can often be easily and inexpensively treated and will often resolve the behavior problem completely. Even young animals can suffer from some of these medical conditions.

2. Try a few simple behavior modification techniques

(This step is not a replacement for a veterinary check-up, which is always the first order of business. But they may be necessary in addition to medical treatment for a health issue to get the cat back on track using the litter box.) Here are some suggestions from behavior experts that you can share:

- Eliminate the smell of the accidents. If the cat can smell that he has gone there before, it may seem like a good idea to go there again. A mild bleach solution can be very effective in removing urine odors; however, it must be rinsed and dried after use since bleach is toxic. Several products available for sale can help on surfaces that cannot tolerate bleach. Anti-Icky-Poo and Zero Pet Odor Eliminator are two that perform well. Never use ammonia-based products to clean up accidents, because it smells like urine to the animals. Once the smell is gone, try placing an extra food or water bowl on the preferred spot. Most animals have an aversion to eliminating near their food or water.
- Make the litter box as accessible and appealing to the cat as possible.
- Add a litter box or two. It may be necessary to have one box for every cat in the house.
- Make sure the litter box is easy to get in and out of. An older cat or young kitten may need a box with a lower entry area.
- Keep the boxes scrupulously clean.



- Avoid strong-smelling cleaners.
- Try different brands of litter. Some cats do not like scented litter, and many prefer scoopable litter.
- Try uncovering the litter box. Some cats do not like to enter into a hooded/covered box.
- Get larger litter boxes. A large cat may have trouble fitting into a small box.
- Make sure the location is quiet and private. The litter box needs to be in a location that is not too busy and where the cat can enter the box without fear of people or other animals that may be in the area.
- Discontinue the use of plastic liners, since some cats do not like digging in a plastic-lined box.
- Putting the cat in a large dog crate or appropriate cat cage for a period of time in the home, with a litter box, food and water available in the cage, can help to retrain most cats to use the box. It may take a week or more.

3. Consult an expert

If a health problem has been ruled out and the techniques described above don't work, there are still several options available to get the cat back to using the litter box. Callers will need to determine which is appropriate for their cat and particular situation:

- Discuss the problem with a veterinarian. Some have experience with behavioral issues and may be able to offer some assistance.
- Consult with a behaviorist. There are board-certified veterinary behaviorists or certified animal behavior consultants (CABC) in many communities. There are several medications that can be very effective, along with behavior modification. Behaviorists are more familiar with these medications and their effective use than most general practice veterinarians.
- **To find a consultant in your area, visit:**
 - www.iaabc.org
 - www.avsonline.org/resources/find-consult
 - www.dacvb.org/about/member-directory
 - Veterinary College Animal Behavior Clinics: Tufts University, Purdue University, University of Pennsylvania and a few other veterinary colleges offer animal behavior clinics. If you live in the area, these are worthwhile options.
- **Read a book or watch a video on cat behavior such as:**
 - The Cat Who Cried for Help by Nicholas Dodman
 - Think Like a Cat by Pam Johnson-Bennett
 - Jackson Galaxy's Youtube channel: Why does my cat pee outside the litter box video www.youtube.com/user/TheCatDaddy66/videos

4. Change the cat's living situation

If none of these options is successful, or if trying them is not feasible for the people, they might consider trying to change the cat's current living situation so that the inconsistent litter box use is not a problem.

An outdoor cat enclosure or cattery might be an option. A cattery is an outdoor protected area placed near a door or window (so the cat has some inside access) or it can stand independently (similar to the idea of a dog run, but built for a cat). Provide information on cat fencing and catteries, if callers are interested.

Aggression

Biting and aggression is a challenging problem in cats. Finding a new home is rarely an option, so encouraging the caller to address the problem within the household is generally the best option.

Here are some suggestions to share:

Get a medical checkup

Advise taking the animal to the vet to rule out any health problems. A painful injury or physical ailment can cause the sweetest animal to become ill-tempered. Since animals cannot tell us directly that they are hurting, their misbehaving may be their only way to communicate their pain to us.

Watch for signs of over-stimulation

Cats can become over-stimulated when being petted and may bite or scratch. Watch for subtle signs: Tail twitching or a shift in the tone of the cat's purr or facial expression can be clues. Learn to stop touching the cat before the cat has had enough. After an incident, withdraw all attention from the cat for several minutes. Briefly expressing your hurt verbally is okay, but reassuring and petting the cat are positive reinforcements and should not be done immediately following unacceptable behavior.

Get the cat neutered/spayed

Is the cat neutered? Neutering helps to calm animals down. While it's best performed early in life to prevent the development of bad habits, neutering at any age may help reduce aggressive behavior.

Be aware of your cat's sensitivities

Some cats simply do not like to have their feet, stomach, tail or other parts of the body touched, and avoiding these areas can be the best solution. However, such sensitivity can be a sign that the cat is in pain, especially if the behavior is new. This is where the veterinarian visit becomes so important!

Consult with a behaviorist

There are board-certified veterinary behaviorists or certified animal behavior consultants (CABC) in many communities. There are several medications that can be very effective, along with behavior modification. Behaviorists are more familiar with these medications and their effective use than most general practice veterinarians.

- **To find a consultant in your area, visit:**

- www.iaabc.org/
- www.avsabonline.org/resources/find-consult
- www.dacvb.org/about/member-directory
- Veterinary College Animal Behavior Clinics: Tufts University, Purdue University, University of Pennsylvania and a few other veterinary colleges offer animal behavior clinics. If you live in the area, these are worthwhile options.

- **Read a book or watch a video on cat behavior such as:**

- *The Cat Who Cried for Help* by Nicholas Dodman
- *Think Like a Cat* by Pam Johnson-Bennett
- Jackson Galaxy's Youtube channel: Why does my cat pee outside the litter box video www.youtube.com/user/TheCatDaddy66/videos



Damaging the Furniture

Scratching is natural for a cat, and rather than trying to stop it, it's best to redirect the scratching to an acceptable place. Declawing is not a humane solution. Many declawed cats develop behavior problems ranging from fearfulness, to litter box issues, to severe biting.

Suggest to callers that they use a two-fold approach to solve the problem:

1. Deter the cat from the currently selected spot(s)

Things to try:

- Put double-sided sticky tape on the spot where the cat is scratching.
- Cover the surface with a loose-fitting drape or fabric cover that will move when scratched.
- Tape aluminum foil in place over the surface.
- Spraying perfume or citrus scents can be a deterrent. There are also some indoor cat repellents sold at most pet stores.
- Spray the cat with water from a squirt gun or a plant mister when you catch him in the act.

2. Provide a desirable scratching post for the cat to use

It should be sturdy and not prone to tipping over. Most cats prefer rope, sisal-covered, or natural wood scratching posts. Some cats prefer carpeted posts. The post needs to be tall enough for the cat to stretch out (taller than the full length of the cat when stretched out). Fluffy carpeting material is not good for cats to scratch on and so is rejected by some cats in favor of the tighter-weave fabric that may be on the sofa. You can cover an existing scratching post with carpeting material putting the reverse side out or you can wrap the post tightly with sisal rope. Even a large natural wood log, secured so that it will not roll or tip, can be an inexpensive and effective scratching post. Some cats also like cardboard cat scratchers that can be purchased inexpensively.

- The scratching post should be located in a prominent place, not hidden away. One reason a cat scratches is to mark his territory.
- Encourage use of the post by rubbing catnip onto it. You can dangle a toy enticingly on the post. You can scratch your fingers on the rough surface in front of the cat so that he'll get the idea, but do not hold him and force his paws against the post, since this will only cause him to avoid the post.
- Give positive reinforcement when he uses the post, i.e., petting and verbal praise.
- Trimming the cat's nails regularly can minimize damage to furnishings.
- In some cases, people report success with Soft Paws, a product that can be used to prevent damage to furniture while retaining the cat's claws. Soft Paws are plastic claw-shaped caps that are glued onto the cat's claws.
- Declawing is NOT recommended because of the detrimental effect it has on the cat, both physically and psychologically.

Fearfulness and Hiding

Fight, Flee, or Freeze are the three “F’s” that dictate a cat’s actions when it is scared. When cats perceive a threat from an object, person, or situation, a cat will try one of these at first and, if that doesn’t work, the cat may be forced to try a different tactic. For instance, a cat fearful of dogs, may puff out her fur to make herself look big, then hiss and spit when a dog is present. If the dog doesn’t retreat, she may flee the situation, find a hiding spot, and freeze until she deems the situation safe. Although some fearful behaviors are acceptable, overly anxious or fearful cats may need a little help in the form of training, patience, and love.

Behaviors cats may exhibit when frightened or nervous:

- Fleeing
- Hiding
- Aggression (which includes spitting, hissing, growling, swatting, biting, scratching, puffing fur and tail, arching back, swishing tail, and flattening ears)
- Loss of control of bladder and/or bowels
- Freezing in place

It’s normal for the caller to want to help and comfort her when she’s frightened. However, that isn’t necessarily the best thing to do from a cat’s point of view. It’s normal for a cat to feel insecure or frightened in a new environment and often they will hide a few days. More traumatic events like going to the vet, or taking a ride in the car may send some cats into hiding for a while.

List of possible causes for fear or anxiety:

- A particular person
- A stranger
- Another animal
- A child
- Loud noises

Here is some advice you can give:

Get a medical checkup

If the hiding behavior is new, be sure to take the cat to the veterinarian to rule out any medical issues. Any sudden change in her behavior could mean that your cat is ill.

Behavior Modification

If nothing is found during a health checkup, you may suggest to the caller to leave the cat alone for a while. Forcing a cat to come out of their hiding spot will only aggravate the problem. Right now, the cat just needs a safe, quiet, warm place to hide. Suggest to the caller to make sure the cat has easy access to food, water, and a litter box. You want to be sure that the cat is eating and drinking. Monitoring the litter box and food and water bowls is the best way to tell whether the cat is eating and drinking.



Keep any contact with the fear stimulus to minimum.

Keep the cat's routine as consistent as possible. Cats feel more confident if they know when to expect daily: feeding, playing, cuddling, and grooming.

Talk to the cat in a calm and reassuring voice.

Steps to desensitizing:

1. Determine what distance the cat can be from the fear stimulus without responding fearfully.
2. Produce the fear stimulus at this distance while feeding the cat tasty treats and praising her.
3. Slowly move the fear stimulus closer as you continue to praise your cat and offer her treats.
4. Go slowly and stop before the cat becomes frightened.

If at any time during this process the cat shows fearful behavior, they've proceeded too quickly and will need to start over from the beginning. This is the most common mistake people make when desensitizing an animal, and it can be avoided by working in short sessions, paying careful attention to the animal so that things don't progress too rapidly for the cat.

The caller may need help with the desensitization process from a professional animal behavior specialist. More information on finding expert help can be found under the previous topic.

What not to do

- Do not punish the cat for her fearful behavior. The cat is likely to associate any punishment with the individual punishing them. The cat will not understand why she's being punished.
- Do not force your cat to experience the object or situation that is causing her fear. For example, if she is afraid of a certain person, don't let that person try to pick her up and hold her; this will only make her more fearful of that person.
- Be cautious in handling your cat when she is frightened. She may accidentally re-direct her aggression to you.

Section 3: MEDICAL ISSUES

Responding to Questions about Feline Medical Conditions

If you are asked about medical conditions, you will want to be sure the caller understands that you are not a veterinarian and cannot diagnose illnesses over the phone (or via email). But sometimes you can also offer advice that will save a life by advising people when it is critical to get an animal to a veterinarian right away.

Kittens and elderly animals often require prompt attention and care from a veterinarian for health problems. Diarrhea or upper respiratory infections (like a cold) can have fatal consequences for kittens and frail older cats if left untreated. The sooner the pet receives treatment, the better the prognosis.

When a Cat Needs to See a Veterinarian

A cat needs to see a veterinarian as soon as possible if they are:

- Not eating – not eating food for three days is already a serious problem for a healthy adult cat and sooner for kittens and seniors. (You can try tempting them with fish-flavored food.)
- Drinking excessive amounts of water or not drinking the usual amount of water
- Dehydrated – Pull skin up on back of neck and let go; if it does not go back down instantly, the cat is dehydrated and needs subcutaneous fluids. (Diarrhea or vomiting can cause dehydration in kittens and seniors more quickly than in a healthy adult cat.)
- Urinating frequently or higher than normal volume
- Not urinating or straining to urinate
- Repeated vomiting
- Showing any blood in their urine
- Failing to use litter pan
- Having prolonged or severe diarrhea
- Chewing at skin, coat or extremities
- Having a yellow or green discharge from one or both eyes, or if their eyes have a crusty appearance. (Note that clear tears that dry brown are normal for many cats)
- Sneezing or have a discharge from the nose
- Showing their inner eyelid or having a dull look to the eyes
- Listless, unresponsive, crying listlessly
- Panting, mouth breathing, when it is not excessively hot
- Showing signs of a physical injury (bleeding, limping, etc.)



Feline Medical Conditions

URI – Upper-Respiratory Infection

Cats can get colds, just as we do. It's never fun to have a cold, but just like with us, a cold will usually pass for a kitty within a few days. Colds are caused by a virus, and they do not respond to antibiotics.

Symptoms and What to Do

Clear discharge:

If a cat has clear discharge when they sneeze, it is probably a cold and while the owner should keep an eye on them, they do not usually require treatment at this stage.

Yellow or green discharge:

If the discharge becomes yellow or green, the kitty may have developed a secondary bacterial infection that will respond to antibiotics. If the person notices a yellow or green discharge from the nose or eyes, they should take the cat to a veterinary clinic.

If a cat or kitten's eyes are sealed shut, this requires veterinary attention as soon as possible. Some more experienced individuals can use warm water on cotton balls to gently wipe, clean, and slowly open the eyes.

Not eating:

Sometimes if a cat is congested and cannot smell the food, he may not eat. Try tempting the cat with fish food. Placing the cat in a bathroom with a hot steamy shower running nearby can sometimes help them breathe easier. A humidifier may also help. If a kitten or elderly cat has not eaten in a 24-hour period, seek the advice of a veterinarian. Adult cats should not go longer than three days without food.

FIV – Feline Immunodeficiency Virus

People are often very upset when they hear the news that a cat they may have rescued has tested positive for FIV. By sharing some of the facts about this feline virus and discussing options, you can sometimes save a cat's life. There is a great deal of information available on FIV. Encourage people to review what we send them and do their own research. Some vets still are inexperienced with FIV and may give inaccurate information. FIV-positive cats that are presently non-symptomatic (and some with mild problems that can be successfully treated) can often lead happy, healthy lives for many years, often living a normal lifespan. Homes can often be found for these cats, though it generally is harder than for a cat that does not have the virus.

Here's some information you can share:

FIV is not easily spread.

It is transmitted between cats almost exclusively through serious (penetrating) bite wounds. High-risk cats are intact males who have been living outside, since these are the cats that are most likely to fight. This means that, when introduced properly into a household with cat-friendly cats, FIV+ kitties may live safely with FIV-negative kitties.

The majority of FIV+ cats never become ill from the virus.

From what we have seen, FIV+ cats are more likely to lose their lives because they have tested positive (and no one is willing or able to take them) than because they actually become ill.

We can send out additional information on FIV.

(Read these materials over yourself so you can discuss additional points with callers. Sending printed articles in the mail can be helpful as people bond with the cat while waiting for the materials to arrive.) Other info on FIV is on Cornell University's web site at http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/health_resources/topics.cfm

Confirm the test result.

Make sure the positive test result has been confirmed with a Western Blot blood test. The Western Blot test usually requires sending a blood sample to a lab and is much more dependable than the test which is used most often in veterinary clinics. The American Association of Feline Practitioners' Academy of Feline Medicine and IDEXX (a test-kit manufacturer) both recommend that the second, more conclusive Western Blot test be done to confirm any diagnosis for FIV that will result in euthanasia of an apparently healthy cat. Test results in kittens under 16 weeks of age are not dependable, since the kitten may be carrying the antibodies from the mother. These kittens should be held and retested after 16 weeks of age.

Finding another home for the cat.

If callers want to find another home for the cat, refer the caller to the guide, How to Find Homes for Homeless Pets, and provide other suggestions from the "Finding a New Home" section of this handbook (page 13). You can also recommend posting information about the cat on special-needs adoption websites.

Closing the call:

End the call by wishing them success and invite them to call back if they have any questions or would like to discuss the matter further.



FeLV—Feline Leukemia Virus

People are often very upset when they hear the news that their cat has tested positive for FeLV. By sharing some of the facts about this feline virus and discussing options, you can sometimes save a cat's life. These cats are rarely adopted. Life expectancy is around three years.

Here's some information you can share:

FeLV is most often spread through bite wounds.

However, it can also be contracted through shared food and water dishes or litter boxes, especially if a cat is exposed over a long period of time. Mother cats can also pass the virus along to kittens. Kittens with FeLV may not live more than a year.

We can send out additional information on FeLV.

Read these materials over yourself so you can discuss additional points with callers. Other info on FeLV is on Cornell University's web site: http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/health_resources/topics.cfm

Here's some advice you can share:

Confirm the test result.

Make sure the positive test result has been confirmed with an IFA blood test. Confirming the initial test result with an IFA test is extremely important. The IFA test is much more dependable than the ELISA test, which is used most often in-house in veterinary clinics. Blood must be sent off to a lab for the IFA test. A cat can test positive for FeLV on the ELISA test (because he/she is carrying antibodies to the virus), but not actually be carrying the virus. The only way to know for sure is to have the IFA test performed. The American Association of Feline Practitioners' Academy of Feline Medicine and IDEXX (a test-kit manufacturer) recommend that the second, more conclusive IFA test be done to confirm any diagnosis for FeLV that will result in euthanasia of an apparently healthy cat. Test results in kittens under 16 weeks of age are not dependable, since the kitten may be carrying the antibodies from the mother. These cats should be held and retested if at all possible.

Finding another home for the cat.

Finding homes for these cats is tough, but they are out there. The most likely option for placement is to try to find a home with another FeLV positive kitty. Call local veterinarians and ask if they have any clients with FeLV+ cats who might be interested in a companion. The other option is to try to find a home with no other cats. Refer callers to the guide, How to Find Homes for Homeless Pets, and provide other suggestions from the "Finding a New Home" section of this handbook (page 13). You can also recommend posting information about the cat on special-needs adoption web sites. (See Resources section).

Closing the call:

End the call by wishing them success and invite them to call back if they have any questions or would like to discuss the matter further.

FIP—Feline Infectious Peritonitis

FIP is a fatal illness caused by the mutation of a corona virus within the body of the cat. Corona virus is very common and most cats have been exposed to a corona virus at some point. Tests for FIP screen for this exposure and hence the test results do not dependably diagnose FIP. In fact, the only sure way to diagnose FIP is through a necropsy (autopsy). Cats that have begun showing symptoms of FIP generally do not live longer than a few weeks. We are occasionally contacted about rescued cats who have been diagnosed with FIP through the test, or who may have FIP because of exposure to a FIP-infected cat. These methods of diagnosis are not dependable. Recommend that the caretaker do some more research before making the decision to euthanize the cat, or to classify the cat as FIP+, which makes adoption extremely unlikely. A vaccine exists for FIP, but it is highly controversial and actually banned in most European countries. Cats who have been vaccinated for FIP will definitely have a positive corona virus test. Other info on FIP is on Cornell University's web site: http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/health_resources/topics.cfm. We have additional information on FIP that we can send along if the caller is interested.

Incontinence

Incontinence should not be confused with spray-marking or other litter box problems.

Cats are generally incontinent for one of three reasons:

Manx syndrome

Manx cats have the “spina bifida” gene, which prevents their spine from developing normally and causes them to have a very short tail or no tail. This condition sometimes results in the cat having a loss of sensation or control past their lower back. While Manx syndrome rarely affects mobility, it often causes bowel and/or bladder incontinence. Generally, these cats do not improve.

Accident or injury

Cats with incontinence may have been struck by a car or attacked by another animal. Sometimes the cause of the injury is unknown. In some cases, loss of sensation after an accident is temporary, caused by the swelling of tissues against the spinal cord. Various therapies may bring about improvement. In other cases, incontinence is permanent. These cats may also be partially or completely paralyzed in their hind legs and tail.

Advanced age

Though this is rare, incontinence can come with advanced age. Older cats should always be checked medically because they may have a treatable illness or benefit from hormone or other therapies.



Kidney Disease, Renal Failure

Chronic renal failure is a relatively common problem in mature cats. Depending on the severity of the condition, these cats can live happily for many years. Treatment may include a special diet, subcutaneous hydration, or steroid shots.

At some point during the course of the illness, cats may urinate excessively and/or inappropriately. If inappropriate elimination begins, a vet visit is necessary, even if a cat has been diagnosed years prior. Because these cats are usually older, staying in a home is the best option. There is a helpful website—www.felinecrf.com— that provides information on caring for cats with chronic renal failure.

UTI or Cystitis

Cats with a UTI (urinary tract infection) or cystitis need to see a veterinarian for treatment. If the cat is unable to urinate, this can become an emergency situation, so seeking treatment early is advisable. Some cats develop chronic cystitis (crystals in the urine) and may require a special diet and some require frequent treatment with antibiotics. When we are contacted about these cats, it is often because of accompanying inappropriate elimination. It is essential to find out whether the owner has made every effort to manage the health problem within the home. Once it is under control, litter box habits usually return to normal. Because cystitis is often stress-related, finding a new home for the cat is not at all ideal. It is important to note that the stress of shelter life is likely to worsen the condition.

IBD—Inflammatory Bowel Disease

Cats with IBD generally experience bouts of severe diarrhea and weight loss. IBD is a chronic condition that can be managed with diet change, stress reduction, and medication. Since IBD is nearly always stress-related, it is not advisable for cats with IBD to be placed in shelters. They need to be in a comfortable home environment. In a suitable environment, they can live happily for many years.

Blindness

A blind cat can live happily for as long as a sighted cat. Fortunately, a home for a blind cat can often be found with a special person or family. A home environment is truly best for a blind cat.

Deafness

Deaf cats should not live outside, but other than that, they do perfectly well in a suitable home. Most cats that are genetically deaf are white. However, illness, injury, or old age can also cause deafness.

Diabetes

Diabetes is most common in older cats. Diabetes is a tricky illness and requires regular monitoring. Diabetic cats may require a special diet, and either oral or injectable insulin. It can take several weeks to stabilize a diabetic cat and get the medication right. Once the condition has been successfully controlled, however, a diabetic cat can be relatively easy to maintain. Diabetic cats can, and should be, managed in the home. If inappropriate elimination is a problem, it will likely vanish once the cat has been stabilized. Emphasize the importance of monitoring and managing the illness. Diabetic cats will require more frequent vet visits and may need changes in treatment as time goes on. However, they can live happy, healthy lives for many years if the disease is managed properly. Kittens with diabetes, unfortunately, have a short life expectancy (usually under a year). Stress is a factor in properly stabilizing a diabetic animal. Close monitoring of food and water intake, stool and urine, and energy levels is very difficult in a shelter cat colony setting.

When someone calls about a diabetic cat, you may want to offer the following advice:

Recommend that the caller visit this website for other helpful links to information about caring for and placing diabetic cats: <http://www.petdiabetes.com/>

If they really cannot keep the cat, suggest listing the kitty on websites dedicated to placing animals with special needs or disabilities.

Neurological Impairment

Neurological impairment generally occurs in one of two cases:

Cerebellar hypoplasia.

This condition is usually caused by exposure to distemper in utero. It may cause a cat to wobble, weave, twitch, or have a head tilt. These cats can live happily in a suitable home. In severe cases, the cat may have difficulty eating, drinking, or using a litter box. The cat may require help to eat and drink, and a litter box with lower sides in an easy-access area. Some will not be able to use a box, in which case adoption becomes very difficult.

Injury, hydrocephalis, encephalitis, etc.

These cats may show the same symptoms as cats with cerebellar hypoplasia, but they also often suffer from seizures. These cats vary widely as far as how they do in any given setting. It's best to get as much information as possible from the veterinarian and caretaker regarding the cat's mobility, improvement over time (or lack thereof), and suspected source of the problem.



Physical Disability or Deformity

A missing limb, eye, ear, etc., generally does not significantly affect an animal's quality of life. Homes can usually be found for these cats.

Unable to Afford Veterinary Care

It is important to realize that this could happen to anyone with a pet: You've always managed to provide veterinary care for your pet, but because of unexpected circumstances, you're faced with veterinary expenses that you are unable to afford. Keep this in mind and remain nonjudgmental in your communication.

If the illness or injury is severe, it can sometimes help to remind people that they could lose their pet even after great expense, so they should ask the veterinarian about their pet's treatment options and their prognosis (likely results).

Pet health insurance

Unless already enrolled, this will not help in the current crisis, but you can recommend it for future consideration.

Groups nationwide that are offering veterinary care assistance

- www.humanesociety.org/animals/resources/tips/trouble_affording_pet.html?credit=web_id91754962 — Check your own state first.

National Groups (note that each has special requirements):

- www.browndogfoundation.org — help with prescription medications
- www.bigheartsfund.org — heart disease
- www.catsincrisis.org/
- www.dccfund.org — cancer
- www.riedelcody.org — cancer
- www.joshualouis.org — cancer
- www.all-creatures.org/gcm/help-cf.html
- www.imom.org
- www.onyxandbreezy.org
- www.paws4acure.org
- www.thepetfund.com
- www.petsofthehomeless.org — helps homeless people's pets
- www.redrover.org
- www.rosesfund.org
- www.shakespeareanimalfund.org

Free or low-cost spay or neuter services

- www.humanesociety.org/issues/pet_overpopulation/tips/afford_spay_neuter.html?credit=web_id91754962

Work with local veterinarians

- Negotiate a payment plan with your veterinarian. If you're a client in good standing, she may be happy to work out a weekly or monthly payment plan so that you don't have to pay the entire cost of veterinary care up front. However, don't expect a veterinarian you've never been to before to agree to such a plan; she doesn't know you and understandably doesn't want to get stuck with an unpaid bill.
- Offer to perform a service for your veterinarian like cleaning kennels, answering phones, or other work in lieu of actual cash.
- Get a second opinion. You'll pay a consultation fee, but another veterinarian may have other, less expensive ways to treat your pet.
- Use a veterinarian in a less expensive area. Veterinarians in smaller towns tend to charge lower fees.
- Check out local veterinary schools. Many run low-cost clinics for limited income clients. The American Veterinary Medical Association's website and VeterinarySchools.com have lists of veterinary schools by state.

Raise Money

Explore ways to bring in some extra cash.

- Have a yard sale.
- If your birthday or a holiday is near, ask for cash in lieu of a present.
- Sell things on an online auction site such as eBay.
- Consider getting a second or part-time job or working for a temp agency.
- Ask your employer for a salary advance.
- Ask friends and family members for a loan.
- Online fundraising platforms like GiveForward enable you to create a personal fundraising page to raise funds for pet medical care. They charge a small percentage of funds raised.

Borrow Funds

- If you have a credit card, ask for a limit increase or talk with your bank about loan options.
- Many veterinarians accept Care Credit, which is a credit card specifically for health care expenses, including your pets. Care Credit offers multiple payment options that may help you through your pet's crisis. You can find out more information about Care Credit and fill out an application on their website <http://www.carecredit.com/>. Consumers should take care to understand the terms of any credit they accept.
- Groups like IMOM and RedRover also allow you to apply for financial aid if you can't afford veterinary care for your pet.

Other Options

Contact your local animal shelter. Some shelters have onsite low-cost veterinary clinics or work with local vets who are willing to reduce their charges. Some also have veterinary loan or grant programs.



Medical Emergencies

Refer callers to local emergency clinics listed in the yellow pages or on online.
(For feral cats, see separate section)

Injured Strays or Un-owned Cats

In the event of an injured homeless cat, try to encourage callers to provide some assistance on their own – for example, removing the cat (carefully!) from immediate danger. Take care to advise the individual to exercise caution in moving an injured animal. A suffering, frightened animal may lash out at the person who is trying to help. If the animal is on their side, and not moving, it's usually best to slide a board, cardboard, or other sturdy flat surface beneath the cat to minimize movement as the animal is transported.

- In some communities animal services will assist by picking up injured animals, but be sure that prompt treatment will be provided to the animal (advise the caller to ask).
- Local TNR groups or shelters may be able to offer additional advice or assistance to finders of sick or injured cats.

Section 4: LIFESTYLE CHANGE ISSUES

Allergies

Many people feel forced to give up their pet when they develop allergies. As discussed above, it's always worth encouraging people to work the problem out. We have helpful information on coping with allergies that can be sent to them.

Basic advice for coping with allergies:

- Have an allergy test done to see if you are actually allergic to the cat. (This is a very important thing to impress upon them – the animal may not be the cause of the allergy.)
- Keep the cat out of the bedroom.
- Try Allerpet (there are different formulas for cats and dogs). This product can be purchased in pet supply stores and simply rubbed onto the pet's coat. It is quite effective and, as far as we have heard, harmless to the animal.
- Use an air filtration system or air purifier with a HEPA filter.
- Vacuum the house and furniture completely and often. Be sure your vacuum has a HEPA filter to remove dander and other allergens. The allergic individual should wear a mask when vacuuming.
- Use washable scatter rugs in your home, rather than wall-to-wall carpet. If you cannot eliminate carpeting, steam clean it often.
- Wash the pet weekly and groom the pet often.
- Wash your hands immediately after petting the animal.
- Wash bedspreads, sheets, throw rugs, and slipcovers frequently.

- Add a coat conditioner to your pet's food to prevent skin dryness, which can increase shedding.
- Have someone without a pet allergy brush the pet outdoors and clean litter boxes.
- Consult your doctor about allergy shots or medication to control the allergy symptoms.

If these things do not help and the animal must be rehomed, keeping the pet in the basement or a single room until a new home or space in an adoption-guarantee shelter becomes available can save the animal's life rather than taking them to an open-admission shelter.

Moving and Cannot Take Pet

One of the most common reasons that people give up a pet is because they are moving and cannot take the animal. In many cases the caller believes that it will be easy to find a new home for their cat. In some cases people even feel that it will be better for the cat to go to the shelter than to endure a long-distance move. It is possible to change some people's minds about these preconceptions. Ask when the move is planned and how much time they have to resolve the situation. Encourage people to find a way to bring their cat with them if they are moving or to find a new home for their pet themselves.

Provide the two compelling reasons why they should make the extra effort to do this:

- Millions of cats and kittens in the U.S. are dying in shelters each year. Many of them are cute, lovable, young, healthy, and special, just like their cat. (Some people are simply unaware that it will be difficult to find a new home, or they think that the cat may prefer the shelter, or a new home, to the stress of moving.)
- Remind them that the kitty, who has been their friend over the years, is truly depending upon them now. If they can, find a way to take kitty with them (truly the best option) or if that is not possible, invest the time and effort to find a good new home themselves, they will have made a life-saving difference for their cat.

When addressing this issue refer to the Finding a New Home section of this handbook (page 23), ask a lot of questions, and offer a lot of suggestions. In some cases the move is a compounding factor; the cat has a behavioral or medical issue that also needs attention. If you can discover this by talking with them, you can sometimes address this underlying problem. (Cultivate your own creative problem-solving skills!)

Here are a few things you could suggest:

- Keep looking for an apartment or rental property that will allow cats.
- Ask friends or parents if they could lend a spare room (or the basement) for their pet to stay in temporarily while they look for a new home.
- Ask for permission to keep the cat temporarily until a new home can be found. (Putting up a pet deposit can help.)
- Board their cat until a new home can be found.
- Ask a friend or relative to take care of their cat until a new home can be found.
- Put up posters (with a photo) at work, places where they shop, their church, the local elderly housing development (if pets are allowed), health clubs, the public library, pet supply stores, and vet clinics.



In the case of a cat that is very ill or extremely frail and elderly, it is often advisable to suggest that going to any shelter, no matter how nice, may be very stressful for the animal. In some cases it may be worthwhile to suggest that they talk with their vet about the situation and consider taking the cat to their veterinarian's clinic for euthanasia. While this may not be your personal first choice, sometimes it is the most humane thing that can be done, given the situation. At least the cat will have the familiar comfort of a loved one at life's end, rather than dying alone, in confusion and fear, in the hectic environment of a shelter. Additionally, the veterinarian is sometimes able to succeed where we could not, by treating an underlying medical problem or solving a behavior issue that the person is reluctant to admit is the real reason.

“Pets-Allowed” Housing Resources

- Develop a list of local pets allowed rental properties and their requirements
- www.rentwithpets.org provides:
 - Resource listing by state
 - Advice for finding rental housing when you have a pet
- Best Friends for Life: Humane Housing for Animals and People
www.ddal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/best_friends_for_life.pdf is a booklet that covers the following:
 - Information on laws that protect disabled individuals and their pets as well as federally assisted housing pets-allowed guidelines.
 - How to convince your landlord to adopt a “pets welcome” policy
 - Model rental guidelines that protect the rights of renters and animals

New Baby

Many people decide to give up their cat when a new baby enters the family. First, ask the callers why they feel they need to place the cat in a new home. Some people believe that cats pose a great risk to their newborn child.

Dispel this myth by telling them that:

- While pets and small children should not be left alone together without adult supervision, with reasonable care, they can deeply enrich each other's lives. There are several studies that show that children who grow up with pets are less prone to allergies and better socially adjusted than children without pets.
- If you grew up with animals or raised a family with pets, you can share your own experiences! Tell them about how you happily and safely included your four-footed friends in your family and how it has been a source of satisfaction to all of the family members.
- If the callers are still concerned, offer to send them information on this subject. There are several simple techniques that can be employed to help a cat adjust to the presence of a new baby.
- Other people simply do not feel that they can make time for the animal along with the baby. If you cannot change their mind, the “Finding a New Home” section of this handbook (page 23) will provide the best advice.

Section 5: SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Suspected Cruelty or Neglect

You will occasionally get calls from people who have noticed cruelty toward or neglect of an animal and want to do something about it. Cruelty and neglect cases are often complicated; there may not be a good, clear-cut solution.

There are three primary ways for the caller to help in a case like this:

1. Improve the animal's situation in the current home.

This may mean helping with providing food, supplies such as feeders and shelters for outside cats, spay/neuter assistance, and transportation to and from the clinic. This option is particularly appropriate in a case of neglect, rather than abuse, or when the cat would not easily be placed into another home. If the animal is in serious danger, and the caller feels that the only option is to contact animal control, then he/she should not try to improve the situation beforehand. Otherwise, when animal control shows up, everything will look fine to them.

2. Offer the owners assistance with placement.

With the owner's cooperation, and, ideally, his assistance, the cat may be placed into a new home, which is more appropriate to his/her needs. If the animal is young, healthy, and behaviorally sound (no extreme fearful or aggressive behavior), this alternative may work out well. If the caller thinks this may be an option, it should be tried before reporting the owner to animal control. The owner will be less likely to want to work with the caller if he/she thinks the caller has complained to animal control.

3. Attempt to have the animal removed from the home by animal control.

In most counties, an owner may be cited by animal control if food, water, shelter, or vet care is not provided. Almost without exception, an owner will not be cited for not providing attention or physical abuse (unless the abuse is witnessed by an officer or the animal's life is clearly in danger from the abuse). Although this option may seem inappropriate, there are a few things to consider. First, it is quite unlikely that the animal control officer will actually remove the animal from the household because most laws protect the rights of the pet's owner and animal control can only operate within the constraints of the law. A citation may incite an owner either to further abuse, or to improve the animal's situation – it's not always possible to tell which way they will go. Even if an animal is removed, there is no way to prevent the person from simply getting another pet and continuing the cycle.



Here's some advice to offer the caller:

Communicating with the animal's owner.

Tell the caller that it is extremely important that he/she come across as nonjudgmental when communicating with the owner(s). While the frustration is understandable, criticism will NOT help the animal.

For instance, instead of using this approach:

Your pet is miserable, and you're not taking care of him. He needs...

Try this approach:

I know you have a lot going on, and taking care of a pet is a lot of work. If you would like, I could ask around and try to find him a new home.

The demeanor, as well as the words, should be empathetic, non-aggressive, and open. Understand that in extreme cases of abuse, an owner may react to criticism by abusing the animal more aggressively, or may even go after the caller's pet(s). Advise callers to use caution.

Stealing an animal.

No matter how bad the current situation is, stealing an animal is an illegal and punishable offense. It is often tempting to people to just go get the animal and deal with it on their own. We cannot encourage this. If the person is prosecuted, the punishment could be severe, and the animal may end up going back to the owner. Even if the person is not caught, there is no way to prevent the owner from going out and picking up a new pet the next day.

Accepting the situation.

Remind the caller that not every animal has the life that we would wish for them. We cannot control the actions of others. Legal authorities can only limit and/or control actions that are illegal. Is the cat okay in her situation? She may not be inside, or be involved in the owner's life, but is she okay with that? What are the options for that cat? If the animal is not going to be adoptable, remember that the alternative to the current situation may be death at a local shelter. If the situation is quite extreme, that may be preferable. However, in many cases, it may be best for the pet to stay in the home, and for the caller to try to improve the care the animal receives.

Please advise callers to consider these options carefully.

This is a complex and emotionally charged issue. You may want to invite them to call back if they have any questions, or would like to discuss the matter further.

Hoarding

Psychologists use the term “hoarder” to describe an individual with an emotional illness characterized by keeping a large number of animals, who are usually in poor condition. Often these animals are not fixed and have not received regular veterinary care. Sometimes they are kept in small cages, or in dirty, overcrowded conditions. Hoarders are generally unwilling to give up their animals – they believe the animals could never be happy or well cared for by anyone else. They are often in denial about the condition of the animals and their home.

There is a clear difference between a hoarder and a rescuer who may have gotten in over his or her head.

A rescuer who may have a large number of animals, but who provides good quality care to the animals and is trying to place them into new homes, is not a hoarder.

Hoarding cases are tough for many reasons.

First, there are usually quite a few animals involved (sometimes as many as several hundred).

Second, when the animals have been confiscated by animal control, they often have to be held until there is a trial. (The individual has legal ownership of the animals until it has been determined by a judge that they are truly being neglected. Sometimes animal services is able to convince the owner to sign the animals over to avoid prosecution, which may be in the best interest of the animals if it allows their rescue and placement into new homes.)

Third, the animals may be in bad shape physically, emotionally, and behaviorally, and may not be deemed suited for adoption into homes.

Sometimes animal control intervention is not needed because the caller is willing to help address the situation (they may be a relative or friend of the hoarder). The place to start is to ask for a comprehensive listing of the animals needing placement so that local organizations can be recruited to help out by taking some of these animals in. If the animals are still under the control of the hoarder, and the hoarder is not cooperative in terms of getting care and finding homes for the animals, the caller will need to involve local authorities (animal control or the board of health) in order to get the animals away from the individual. If the animals have been removed from the hoarder and taken to animal control, we recommend offering to help find adoptive homes.

Additional resources:

- Tufts University’s resources: www.vet.tufts.edu/hoarding
- Practical Guidelines for Handling Hoarding Situations in Your Shelter, Liz Finch and Bonney Brown, Webinar: guide for handling each step of a cat hoarding case, including documentation, evaluation, care, and communications.
www.pschar.pub30.convio.net/resources/handling-hoarding.html



Lost Cats

You may get calls from people wanting help finding their lost pet cat or a cat from their feral colony.

Here are the steps to share with them for locating a lost animal:

- Do not waste any time. Begin your search as soon as you notice that the animal is missing.
- Ask EVERYONE: neighbors, children, mail carriers, EVERYONE! Show them a photo of your pet. Even if they have not seen him, they may be able to keep an eye out for him.
- Hand out flyers with your pet's photo and your phone number.
- Put ads in the local papers.
- Create posters with your pet's photo and your phone number. The poster should clearly say "LOST CAT" and include the date that the animal was lost, where it was last seen, a clear brief description (breed, color, sex, age, wearing a collar?) and the name that the animal will answer to. Be sure that the poster is really LARGE, big enough for people driving by to read from a distance. Post them everywhere: telephone poles (at eye level for drivers), libraries, stores, vet clinics, etc.
- Go to all the shelters in the area – give them a color photo of your pet with your phone number on it. Ask to see all the animals in the shelter and visit every cage.
- Don't depend on someone remembering that an animal like yours was brought in. Shelter employees are often very busy and many shelters handle a huge number of animals daily. Also different people interpret a description differently. So you must go back and check all the shelters every day. Cats can take a while to show up, sometimes weeks, so return to the shelter regularly.
- If your pet has a microchip, be sure that your contact information is on file and up to date.
- Call area vet clinics and send them a photo of your pet. Ask if any animal fitting that description has been brought in.
- Report your pet missing to animal control/services. They may also be able to tell you if there have been any similar animals hit by cars (or they may know who else in town – such as the public works department – handles this).
- Call the local animal control officers in all the surrounding towns. Send them a photo and visit the town shelters as often as possible.
- Read the found-pet section in each of the local papers daily and online on Craig's List. Many papers run lost and found pet ads for free. Follow up on any ad that sounds close, since you cannot count on the finder to describe your pet in the same exact way that you would.
- Look around the neighborhood carefully and talk to your neighbors. Cats can wander into neighbors' basements or garages, fall asleep, and accidentally get shut in.
- Go to the place where your pet was lost, late at night or very early in the morning, when the area will be quiet. Bring his favorite food (a can of tuna intended for human consumption works well with many animals), a flashlight, and a friend (for safety). Call his name and wait quietly to see if he shows up. Try this repeatedly. Use a flashlight to search under shrubs, storage sheds, any place at all where a cat could hide.
- If the pet is an indoor cat that does not usually get out, place his litter box outside, where he may be able to get his own scent, and recognize his home. (Do not clean it out first!)
- If your pet is registered with a lost pet network organization, call them right away.
- DO NOT GIVE UP! Animals have been found after months, even years, of being missing!

Multiple-Cat Placement

We receive many calls and emails from rescuers or owners with multiple cats to place in new homes. Most shelters will not be able to take in more than a couple of cats at the same time. The best chance of success involves multiple strategies: reaching out to several shelters and rescue groups in a broad area for help, as well as looking for homes for the cats with individuals. After all, if the caller can place one or two in one shelter and one or two with another, and find individuals who will adopt the rest, the problem will be solved.

If possible, the caller may want to request the assistance of volunteers (from area shelters, rescue groups, friends, and family) to gather some of the vital information on the cats who need placement. The first step toward placing the cats in “no-kill” shelters is writing a letter or email in which callers introduce themselves, explaining the situation and their relationship to the animals. The letter should then provide some basic information on all the cats involved (photos of the cats helps immensely). They’ll need to list the details on each cat, including the name, breed/description, age, gender, general health, special medical or behavioral needs, and temperament. The information on temperament should describe how they get along with other cats and pets, strangers, adults, and children, if known. Most rescue groups or no-kill shelters are going to need this detailed information to seriously consider taking in a cat.

If any pictures of the cats, their living situation, or small group photos are available, they will also be helpful to let facilities know more about the animals they are considering. The next step is for callers to obtain a listing of shelters in their region. They should also work on placing cats directly into new homes using the guidelines described in the *How to Find Homes for Homeless Pets* manual. You can also offer them advice from the “Finding a New Home” section of this handbook. Invite the caller to keep in touch. Moral support can go a long way!

Senior-Cat Placement

Older animals can be difficult to place. It’s too bad that more people don’t realize the peace and pleasant company a mature pet provides. Unfortunately, there are not a lot of options for older cats, beyond placement with friends and family. An important concern, particularly with older pets, is finding a situation that will provide the pet with a good quality of life. Often, for older cats, a change in lifestyle is very stressful.

For example, we have found that senior cats that have come to shelters from loving homes often have a very difficult time and may never adjust to the shelter environment. This is an important consideration when placing an older cat in any new environment, particularly any facility.

Chapter 4:

Feral Cats, Community or Outdoor Cats

Usually the caller starts by saying:

“I found a stray.” OR

“There are cats outside behind my home (or where I work, where I had dinner last night.)”

Basic Questions to Ask

When a caller makes one of the statements above, start by asking questions:

- Where did you see/find this cat?
- Where is the cat now? (While this may be unnecessary to ask in some calls, you cannot always assume that it will not reveal helpful information that people sometimes neglect to mention on their own. For example, sometimes they already have the cat confined.)
- Are there others? How many are there?
- Ask for visual clues, things that a novice will be able to observe. If they do not know, ask them to try to make these observations.
- Is the cat friendly or shy? Does he come right up to you? Does he rub up against you or allow you to pet him? (These are good questions to determine if you are dealing with feral cats. If you just ask if they are feral cats, the caller may not know what you mean.)
- Does the cat appear to be healthy? Is his coat (fur) in good shape? Are his eyes clear? Is he sneezing, coughing, or limping? Are there any apparent wounds?
- Does she appear to be pregnant?

Encouraging Involvement

Encouraging compassion and involvement is a key aspect of our work. Explaining to callers that there are many animals in need and telling them that we receive a great many calls each week can help them understand the scope of the problem, and the need for their involvement. There are many more animals in need than the local shelters can accommodate.

Friendly Homeless Cat: Getting Them Involved

The caller may ask, “Should I take him to the shelter?” In a very few communities, people are legally bound to turn found dogs into the local shelter, but this is rarely the case for cats; and even for dogs, a growing number of communities allow finders to care for the dog in their home and simply report that they have found a dog. In general, we explain that most shelters are stretched to maximum capacity and routinely put animals down for lack of space. Relatively few animals end up finding homes in many communities. So, the best thing would be if they are able to work with you to help the cat. Reinforce that if they are willing to help the animal by providing temporary care, actively seeking a good home, and perhaps working with a shelter that does not euthanize for time or space, they can help save the cat’s life.

If they do not mention the shelter, you can ask if they can consider providing care to the animal until a new home or space in a shelter becomes available.

Often it's helpful to suggest how they may be able to help the animal. Do they have a spare room, basement, garage, or enclosed porch where they can keep the animal? Advise people that they shouldn't allow a strange animal to mix with their own pets until the animal has received a veterinary checkup (for example, an infected cat could pass a virus to other cats).

Advise the caller that you can help them find reduced-cost (and, in some cases, free) spay/neuter and veterinary care for the cat, but you need them to be willing to care for the animal in his or her own home. If they cannot care for the cat, do they know anyone who can – such as a friend, family member or co-worker?

Once the caller has agreed to care for the animal, you can provide all the standard information from the “Finding a New Home” section of this handbook (page 23) and providing the How to Find Homes for Homeless Pets guide.

Handling Strays

Advise the person against just picking up an unfamiliar cat and trying to put the cat into a carrier. Even a tame cat can become frightened and bite or scratch when being put into a carrier. Some state laws require that an unvaccinated animal that has bitten (or, in some cases, even scratched) a person must be put to death. Others require prolonged quarantine. Since all homeless and feral animals have uncertain vaccination histories, it's especially important that the rescuer exercise caution in handling the animal for their own and the animal's well-being.

To minimize the risk of being scratched or bitten, we recommend the use of humane traps for feral cats. For friendly strays, we suggest that the rescuer put a small amount of fish-flavored cat food or tuna fish (intended for human consumption) in the back of a cat carrier. A little hunger makes the cat more likely to enter the carrier. After the cat has completely entered, close the door with a gloved hand (an oven mitt will work, too). If the cat will not go in or if the person does not have a carrier, they may be able to borrow a humane trap from a local rescue group or rent one from a local rental company. We do not lend humane traps to people who want to have healthy animals removed and destroyed, but may have traps on hand for rescuers and those providing TNR to borrow.

Feral Cats: Getting Them Involved

We recommend Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) as the most humane and effective way to manage feral cat populations. If the person is not interested in TNR, we will be unable to help them and the cats. So our challenge is to share information with the caller about the benefits of TNR and the ineffectiveness of other approaches.



Explaining the scope of the problem can be helpful. In each of our local communities, there are hundreds, and in some towns thousands, of feral cats. Large numbers of cats are still brought into animal control shelters and most of the friendly cats and all of the feral cats are killed at taxpayer expense. (Verify and provide accurate local information.) Further, this is not an effective solution to the problem, as most neighborhoods that remove feral cats just end up with more cats in a short period of time. This is known as the “vacuum effect” where new animals move into a vacant area to take advantage of food and housing opportunities there. TNR effectively and humanely reduces the number of cats in the area while improving their health and quality of life.

Feral Cats: Basic Questions to Ask

If you suspect that someone is calling about a feral cat colony, ask these questions:

- Where are the cats?
- How many are there?
- Are there kittens? Are there pregnant cats?
- Are you, or is anyone else, feeding the cats? The caller should look around the area for signs of feeding (empty cans, bowls).
- Do the cats appear to be healthy? (Is their coat/fur in good shape, dirty or matted? Are they emaciated/skinny? Are their eyes clear? Noses clean? Sneezing? Coughing? Limping? Any apparent wounds?) Ask for visual clues, things that a novice will be able to observe.

If callers do not know the answers to these questions, encourage them to observe the cats to find out. If they see signs of feeding by others, ask them to leave a note to the feeder at the feeding site. If the person does not want to get involved, you should take down the location and follow up with volunteers in the area or known feral cat colony caregivers in the area.

To determine if the cats are feral, ask:

- Are any of the cats friendly or are they all very shy?
- Do any of the cats like to be petted?
- Do any of them approach people?

Many people don’t know what “feral” means, so it’s best to ask these specific questions. If any of the cats are friendly, refer to the previous section on homeless animals.

Explaining the Best Way to Help Feral Cats

People often think that the best thing for feral cats is to be adopted into a home. So you may need to explain what a feral cat is and the Trap-Neuter-Return method to them. (See separate section below on TNR.)

If necessary and appropriate, it can help to repeat the facts:

- We do not remove feral cats; we endorse a humane management program called Trap-Neuter-Return.
- Feral cats do not belong in an animal shelter because they are too fearful to become household pets.
- Caging them for prolonged periods would be cruel and stressful for them. We recommend the Trap-Neuter-Return method of controlling feral cat populations because it is the only thing that really works.
- We do not have places to relocate cats, and even if we did, the problem with removing them is that in short order new cats move into the area, starting the cycle all over again.

If the person is interested in TNR, you can provide trapping how-to information and other feral cat information sheets and/or put them in touch with [__ role of person or organization__](#) for trap loans, spay/neuter services, or seek volunteer assistance if the caller is infirm or elderly and unable to trap on their own. (Some organizations provide volunteers to help with TNR at business locations, too.)

Basics of Trap/Neuter/Return

Since feral cats are fearful of people and are not usually happy living in a household situation, we recommend Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) as the best, most humane solution for ferals. TNR allows the cats to keep their freedom, while dramatically improving their quality of life, preventing further breeding, and increasing their long-term survival. At the same time it minimizes some of the concerns people may have about the cats, preventing the spread of disease, eliminating feline mating behaviors which can be annoying to people, and reducing the cat population in the area humanely and cost effectively.

Understanding the Nature of Feral Cats

An important consideration with feral cats is their quality of life. Not unlike a wild animal, the outdoors is home to feral cats, and we rob them of that if we place them somewhere where they will be contained. Unfortunately, allowing them their freedom means sacrificing a certain degree of safety. However, we must consider that a feral cat may prefer life on its own turf. After all, the feral cat may be safe if he is contained, but if he is miserable, what's the point? (It can help to note that wild animals face these same challenges, but the outdoors is home to them.)

It can be helpful to emphasize that a feral cat does not want a home. He has his own life, with his own territory, favorite places to hang out, friends, and family. He lives much like a wild animal would, and like a wild animal, would not appreciate being held captive.

There is a common misconception that a feral cat will warm up to being a house cat if someone “works with him.” The caller may say something like, “I’m sure if someone took him in, he’d come around.” Well, it is possible, but not likely (unless the cat is actually an abandoned pet and is just scared – not truly feral). A feral cat may get used to one caretaker and approach that person or accept petting from that person. However, if the cat only lets that one person near, it is most likely still feral and should be left with its colony.



The Most Important Thing

If someone is feeding the cats, they must be neutered! Feeding intact cats only increases the population and leads to more problems.

If the person can do nothing else for the cats, encourage him/her to have them fixed. Their chances for survival are much better if they are neutered even if the person will not be able to provide food, water, shelter, and ongoing care. Be sure to provide low-cost spay/neuter referrals or information on free services for feral cats in the community.

If the caller is interested but needs help with implementing TNR for the cats, you should refer them to ***__role of individual or name of organization__***.

If any of the cats are tame and friendly, or if the individual will be taming and adopting out feral kittens, you'll want to provide all the standard information in the "Finding a New Home" section of this handbook.

It is usually possible to tame feral kittens if they are under 8 weeks of age, and if they are four weeks old, it's generally fairly easy. But if the kittens are 9 weeks old or older, they have passed a threshold in their development that makes it very difficult to tame them sufficiently for them to become friendly house cats, and so trap/neuter/return is generally the best bet for older kittens.

If the caller is not interested in TNR, there may not be much help available for them. It can be helpful to explain the benefits of TNR (see below) and to inform the caller that trap and removal programs are not effective, since new cats will simply move into the vacated area and start breeding. Ignoring feral cats is not a workable solution either. If left unchecked, they breed quickly, and contribute to the number of cats in need in the community.

With a little patience, it is sometimes possible to open an individual's mind to considering this kinder and gentler approach to solving the problem.

Some Feral Cat Facts

- Nationally, it is estimated that there are over 60 million feral cats. Feral cats can be found throughout the world.
- In most communities, there are hundreds and, in some areas, thousands of feral cats.
- In most communities, the shelters are not able to save all the friendly homeless cats that are in need of shelter and care, so there is even less chance for feral cats.
- True feral cats, like other wild animals, do not make good pets. The experience of living in a house with people is foreign and frightening to them. It's unfair to try to force them to conform to our human standards. Many feral cats have family groups and friends in their colony. Their home is truly the outdoors, as it is for wildlife. The best thing we can do for them is neuter them and return them to their home turf.

Benefits of Trap-Neuter-Return

TNR has several advantages over other ways of dealing with the cats (destroying them or ignoring the problem):

- TNR puts an end to the breeding. It stabilizes and over time reduces the size of the colony.
- It prevents the spread of rabies and disease because the cats are vaccinated.
- It ends annoying feline mating behaviors, such as fighting, howling, and spraying.
- It keeps the rodent populations under control naturally (rodents would otherwise be killed with traps or poison).
- It eliminates the risk of accidentally trapping and killing someone's pet cat.
- It minimizes the cats' wandering.
- It is a practical and cost-effective solution. Cats will gather wherever a food source exists, so when cats are removed, new ones often come into the area, necessitating an endless cycle of trap-and-kill. The neutered and returned cats defend their turf from newcomers, which prevents the need for repeat trap-and-kill efforts.
- It is humane, demonstrating a respect for life.
- It has the endorsement of many U.S. and international humane organizations as well as many cities and counties across the country.
- It's a proven effective program, used successfully around the world and in local communities.
- It saves taxpayer dollars.

How-To's of Trap/Neuter/Return

Here are the steps for implementing the program:

1. Each cat is trapped in a humane trap and taken to a veterinarian who has experience with feral cats.
2. The cats are tranquilized, examined (for general good health), vaccinated, and neutered or spayed. They are also ear-tipped for easy visual identification as a neutered feral cat.
3. After a brief recuperation period (usually 8 to 24 hours, if there were no surgical complications and the weather is not extremely cold), they are returned to their home site, where they are fed and monitored daily by volunteers or local residents. It is good to get a photograph of the cat while they are in the trap for future identification.
4. Kittens and tame cats should be placed in adoptive homes. (Feral kittens under eight weeks of age can easily be tamed. Older kittens usually do not become adoptable, because they have passed their critical socialization period.)
5. Ideally someone will commit to ongoing daily care for the feral cats and shelter should be provided. But the most important thing we can do for outdoor cats is ensure that they are neutered.

Observation of the colony and advance planning are important to the success of the program.



Tips for Successfully Implementing TNR

Trapping

Local shelters and animal control agencies often lend out humane traps. Some organizations offer training in their use, low-cost spay/neuter assistance, and, sometimes, help with trapping. Advise the caller not to handle an unfamiliar animal and not to try putting the cat into a carrier. Even a tame cat can become aggressive and bite when being put into a carrier.

We have detailed instructions on trapping in our standard resources, which may be helpful to the caller. The notes include information on trapping difficult-to-catch cats.

Feeding the cats

Keep the cats' feeding area free of leftover food and debris. Do not overfeed them, since leftover food draws insects and other animals, which can trigger complaints.

Putting food out during the daylight hours and removing any remaining food before dark can minimize interaction with wildlife.

It is advisable to move the feeding area and any shelters provided for the cats away from public view. This prevents human/cat interactions, which may be disturbing to some people who do not like cats. It is rarely in the best interest of feral cats for them to become too familiar with people. Their natural instinct to be fearful of people helps them survive. Keeping the cats out of sight helps to keep them safe and prevents abandonment of pets at the site.

If the cats are presently being fed in a public area, their feeding location can easily be changed by gradually moving their feeding site, a bit each day, toward the newly selected, more secluded spot.

Note: This method is only effective for moving the cats several hundred yards (for example, around the corner of a building, into a nearby wooded area, or over a property line); it is not advisable over longer distances.

Adopting out friendly cats and kittens

Generally, whenever possible, friendly cats should be adopted into a suitable home. How to Find Homes for Homeless Pets manual can be sent to the individual to assist with the placement of adoptable cats. Feral kittens under eight weeks of age can easily be tamed. Most kittens can be successfully tamed up until the age of 9 weeks.

Resolving Neighbor Disputes

The caller usually says something along the lines of “Help! Someone complained about the cats!” Try to calm them down and get them thinking about solutions.

It can help to say something like: *“It’s upsetting to think that someone is complaining and that this might result in harm coming to the cats you are caring for. But don’t panic, there are solutions.”*

Then walk them through the basic steps and provide the related information sheets.

The goal is to find a mutually agreeable solution that addresses the concerns so that the person who complained can accept the cats in the neighborhood. The first step in resolving any issue is to determine exactly what the root of the complaint is. Perhaps the cats are going someplace they are not wanted, digging in a garden, walking on cars, or making a lot of noise at night.

Helping the Cats Be Good Neighbors

The old adage about an ounce of prevention is true. Even if a complaint has already been lodged, as part of trying to negotiate a solution, there are a few things that can often be done right away to help alleviate any stress in the neighborhood around the cats:

Be sure all the cats are spayed or neutered.

Neutering the cats is the best way to reduce feline mating behaviors that can be annoying to people. If all the cats are not neutered, provide information on low-cost spay/neuter services and trap loans in their area. It’s a good practice for the caregiver to keep a copy of each cat’s medical record and rabies certificate, along with a photo of each cat, in a file folder.

Move the feeding area and shelters away from public view.

If they are currently feeding the cats in plain view, suggest that they move the feeding place to a more discrete location nearby. Cats adapt quickly to such a change.

Keep the feeding area neat and clean.

There should not be any trash or excess food lying about. Advise against overfeeding the cats and/or feeding them directly on the ground. Always use a bowl or tray.



Successful Negotiations Step-by-Step:

These steps will help you walk the person through the negotiation process with the person who complained.

Step 1: Make contact with the person who has complained and really listen to them

Listening is the first step to successful negotiation. When they finish talking, ask questions to gather more information about what is happening and about their concerns. The time put into listening and asking questions is a worthwhile investment; it gives you the information you need to successfully address the issue and it allows them to become more open to your input.

When you ask someone about their concerns and just listen – without trying to immediately jump in with explanations and solutions – it puts the other person in the mood to listen to you. Let them get it all off their chest. Once they have had their say, most people are in a better frame of mind to listen to you.

Step 2: Understand their perspective and look for any common ground

Try to see things from their perspective. Perhaps all you can agree with them about initially is that they are upset about something they are experiencing. In that case perhaps you can honestly say something like “I can see how this has created a problem for you.” From their perspective it has, so you can be genuine in saying this. We all feel better and more open when we feel understood. Perhaps you can also agree that you want to find a solution that works for all involved.

If you can find some point of agreement, some common ground, then you are on their side and are looking for a solution with them, rather than being in opposition.

Step 3: Use active listening

Explain that you want to be sure that you understand their concerns so that you can develop effective solutions. Then try recounting the concerns back to them, so that they can further clarify them for you. Take care to be sincere and not to sound judgmental. Even if you do not think their concerns are very serious or legitimate, by trivializing them you will lose credibility and the opportunity to effectively advocate for the cats.

Step 4: Explain why there are cats out there

Feral (wild) cats, like raccoons and possums, have become part of the landscape of our communities. They are found in virtually all communities across the country and around the world. These cats and their offspring are the victims of abandonment, accidental loss, and human failure to get pets spayed or neutered.

It might appear that if you just stopped feeding them that the cats would go away, but in practice this is not what happens. Instead it usually leads to an increase in nuisance behavior, such as scavenging through trash, as the cats search for food.

Step 5: Explain why removal is not a good option

Removing the cats is not really the solution, it might appear to be. In reality when cats are removed, new cats and other animals migrate into the area to fill the void. This is known as the vacuum effect.

With Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), the cat population is controlled and the resident cats maintain the turf, preventing other animals from migrating into the area. (If the neighborhood has removed cats in the past, that would be evidence that removal doesn't work.)

Providing examples of other local TNR successes (or trap and remove failures) may be helpful for some people.

Step 6: Explain that the cats will be killed if they are removed

Many people are not aware that the fate of most animals that end up in shelters is that they are killed. Feral cats are not adoptable, so most are killed right away. While some people will not care about their fate, many others will be more open to exploring other solutions – they may not really want the cats around, but they do not want them to be killed.

Step 7: Propose some solutions to their specific concerns

Once you know what the specific complaint is you can go about solving it, by moving the feeding station, providing litter boxes and deterrents to digging in the garden, or building new shelters to keep cats off of cars.

You will need to let your neighbor know exactly what you plan to do, and why this ought to help solve the problem. While you do not want to let this drag out, it may be helpful to tell your neighbor that you are going to do some research and will get back to them in a day or two with a proposed plan to address their concerns. This gives you time to consult the Addressing Common Concerns about Outdoor Cats information sheet, to think through possible solutions, and to devise a plan to run by your neighbor. Also taking time to work out a solid plan helps demonstrate to your neighbor that you are taking their concerns seriously and are not just giving them a canned response.

As part of the plan, include when each action will be taken and a date for checking back with them to see if there has been an improvement.

Step 8: Follow up

Be sure to do what you have promised to do promptly, including contacting the neighbor at the agreed upon time to see if the solution is working. If it is, that's great! If not, don't give up. Try a different strategy to address the problem, again setting a time frame for checking back with them. Persistence usually pays off!



Tips for Reaching an Agreement with the Person Who Complained

Advice you can share with the caregiver for their discussion with the neighbor:

Stay calm

Try not to react emotionally to the complaint. Remember that if you lose your temper, you will lose the neighbor's desire to resolve the problem and the cats will likely be the ones to suffer as a result.

If you are not able to remain calm, enlist the help of a cool and collected friend who is willing to talk to the neighbor on your behalf.

Don't dismiss the complaints as silly

While the issue may seem silly to you, it's real to the other party, and for the sake of the cats, you want to find a way to work with this individual.

Saying things like: "Cats just don't do that!" or implying that the issue is trivial and the person ought to just live with it, will usually only serve to make the individual dig in and cling to their position.

The almost magical power of listening

Listen respectfully and carefully to what your neighbor has to say. What you learn will help you resolve the concern and protect the cats.

Remember:

The complainant is going to give you the clues to fix the problem! For example, you may learn that the concern is not about the community cats in the area, but about someone's pet cat that is wandering. Or you may gain an understanding of the specific concerns the individual has and be able to address them using the solutions offered in the "Addressing Common Concerns about Outdoor Cats" fact sheet.

Show a genuine interest in understanding the problem

Politely ask for any other information that may help you address the concern. What time of day do they see/hear this behavior? What does the cat look like? Where is this occurring? Ask to see the location(s).

Ask if you may come by to observe the behavior so that you can see the cat in question. Sometimes you will discover that it is not a colony cat, but a neighbor's pet, a wild animal, or a new colony cat that you did not know about.

Get into problem-solving mode

Genuinely try your best to resolve the problem. Some neighbors will appreciate the mere fact that you are trying and will be more willing to work with you not to have the cats removed.

Don't make it about you

Remember the goal is to get your neighbor to feel okay about having the cats around.

Don't tell the neighbor about how much you have done or how upset the complaint made you feel. If you are even tempted to start talking about you, stop yourself! Instead focus on understanding how he or she feels, what his or her problems are, and then calmly explain how Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)—rather than removing the cats—is going to benefit them and how you will address their specific concerns.

Know your facts

Find out all you can about TNR. Explain why removing the cats will not work. You'll want to be able to explain the vacuum effect to your neighbors. Below is a list of TNR benefits that may provide some helpful sound bites.

Go in pairs

You do not want the person to feel outnumbered, but it can be helpful to bring a calm friend or a skilled fellow cat advocate along to talk with your neighbor. Let the neighbor know up front that you would like to work together to solve the problem, that you are there to gain an understanding of his/her perspective and to resolve the issues and you have brought your friend along to help.

Provide a timely response

Once you reach an agreement, be sure to take timely action to keep your end of the bargain. Check back to see if the neighbor notices a difference.

Know when to bring in outside mediation help:

Sometimes it's not really just about the cats, it's about an issue the neighbor has with you or your family. If the cats are just one of several complaints the neighbor has expressed with you or your family, it's best to get someone else to help with mediating the grievances.

Avoid these three misconceptions:

“How can people be so uninformed!!??”

Many people do not understand why removing all the cats will not solve the problem, or why they cannot be put into a shelter to be adopted or to live out their lives. Others think that if you just stop feeding, the cats will go away.

Most people will not be as knowledgeable about cats as you are, but don't be aggravated with them; instead view it as an opportunity to share information. You need to be able to explain TNR calmly and in a manner that is not condescending — after all, no one likes to be spoken down to.

“They must be cat haters!!”

Many caregivers say that if someone complains they must be a cat hater, but in fact, most people do not hate cats – but they do dislike having to cope with what they view as a problem. If you assume that the individual hates cats, you'll miss the opportunity to address the problem and protect the cats. In most cases, if you can resolve the concerns, people will agree to coexist with the cats in the neighborhood.



“To know cats is to love them!”

Don't expect everyone to love cats: The fact is that not everyone will love cats the way you do. Telling people that cats are beautiful animals, or that they have a right to be there, is not going to convince everyone. The more effective approach is to respect their viewpoint and focus on finding a solution to their specific complaints.

Providing factual information about why TNR works and removal does not can help win over people who do not “like” cats, but can accept that TNR is the most effective way to deal with them.

Closing the Call

Try to end the dialogue by encouraging the caregivers; they are the cats' guardian and public relations agency, and in most cases the only source of help for the cats should unhappy neighbors or property owners complain. It can feel like a heavy responsibility for sure, but it can also be a very rewarding experience to be part of creating a lifesaving solution for the cats and helping people find ways to live in harmony with animals in the neighborhood.

Advice for People Who Are Upset about Cats in the Neighborhood and/or a Neighbor Who is Feeding Them

Often the caller will say something like:

“There are these cats hanging around in the neighborhood, and they are causing a problem.”

Common concerns and questions people have about cats in their area and answers for each

Why are there cats in our neighborhood?

When you notice cats outdoors they are neighbors' pets, lost or abandoned pets, or feral cats. Feral cats are the “wild” offspring of domestic cats. Kittens that grow up outdoors without human contact are naturally fearful and inclined to stay away from people.

Feral cats are the result of owner abandonment and failure to spay and neuter pets. Colonies of cats can be found behind shopping malls or businesses, in alleys, parks, abandoned buildings, in urban as well as rural areas, across the country, and around the world.

Won't the feral cats just go away if people stop feeding them?

While you might expect it to work that way, feeding the cats (and getting them neutered) actually keeps the situation in check. If caregivers are prevented from feeding them, the cats are instead forced to forage and scavenge for food, possibly seeking food in nearby trash bins and on neighboring property.

Feeding locations can be established away from public areas to help reduce chance encounters between cats and people.

Couldn't we just have these cats trapped and removed?

Removing the cats is not really the solution it might appear to be. In reality, when cats are removed, new cats and other animals migrate into the area to fill the void. This is known as the vacuum effect. Removal of cats is also a very expensive strategy especially considering that it provides only short-term results. Removed cats are housed and killed at taxpayer expense, costing on average over \$100 per animal.

Fortunately there is an effective, long-term solution; Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR). With TNR the cat population is controlled and the resident cats maintain the turf, preventing other animals from migrating into the area. TNR is typically done by volunteers, at no cost to taxpayers.

Surveys conducted in San Francisco and Chicago suburbs found that whenever a neighborhood TNR program was implemented, the number of cats in the area decreased. Conversely locations that employ lethal methods of controlling cat populations continued to struggle with cat population growth.

Do the cats pose a risk to public health?

A study conducted by Stanford University's Department of Environmental Health and Safety found virtually no risk to human health or safety from feral cats. Research at the University of Florida has found that feral cats and owned cats share similar health status, confirming that the cats do not pose a risk to public health or to other cats.

People sometime worry about rabies, but this is unjustified. Cats are not a natural carrier for rabies. There has not been a single human death from rabies attributed to transmission from a cat in the U.S. in over three decades. Also, as part of a TNR program, cats are vaccinated against rabies and then provide an immune barrier between humans and wildlife in the community.

In relation to *toxoplasmosis*, the British Medical Journal states that: "contact with cats, kittens, cats' feces, or cats who hunt for food was not a risk factor for infection. . . No significant associations were detected between infection and presence of cats. . ." The study concludes that eating undercooked meat is the primary risk factor in contracting toxoplasmosis.

Are feral cats vicious?

Feral cats are naturally wary of people and will not approach humans they do not know. Feral cats will not attack anyone unless they are cornered.

It's always a good practice to avoid touching or cornering any animal you are not familiar with. Parents and caregivers should teach children to not approach or touch any unknown animal.

Wouldn't the cats be better off brought to an animal shelter?

More than 99% of the feral cats who are taken to animal control are killed. Since they are not friendly toward humans, they are not candidates for adoption. Feral cats are at home outdoors, and TNR is truly the most humane way to deal with them.

Even if the cats are friendly, there are not yet enough adoptive families for every friendly stray cat in our city.



Don't the cats live short, miserable lives?

Generally, feral cats are healthy animals, experiencing no more or worse medical issues than housecats. Spaying/neutering, a key part of a TNR program, further improves cat health by reducing wandering, mating, and fighting. It is not uncommon for feral cats to live ten or more years, a lifespan comparable to many pet cats.

While feral and abandoned cats may face hardships, we don't believe that death is better than a less-than-perfect life. Many animals, such as raccoons, foxes, and field mice face similar hazards and do not live extraordinarily long lives, yet we would never consider "euthanizing" them "for their own good."

Don't the cats kill many birds?

Studies have shown that the bulk of the feral cat diet consists of insects, plants, and scavenged food. In terms of their hunting ability, cats are rodent specialists, widely recognized to have low success at bird predation.

The World Watch Institute lists habitat loss, pollution, pesticides, and drought as the primary factors affecting bird populations today. Other significant factors include collisions with windows, cell phone towers, and automobiles. Cats do not make the list.

If you feed birds, use hanging or pole feeders, rather than feeding them on the ground. Place the feeders away from shrubbery that may provide cover for predator animals.

What is TNR?

Trap-Neuter-Return (or TNR), humanely controls and effectively reduces outdoor cat populations. Each cat is trapped in a humane trap and taken to a veterinarian. The cats are tranquilized, examined for general good health, vaccinated for rabies, and neutered. After a brief recuperation they are returned to their home turf, where they are fed and monitored daily by volunteers.

But how can anyone afford to get these cats spayed or neutered?

Free (or low-cost) spay/neuter services are available in our community.

Concerns about Cats and How to Address Them

“The feeding area is messy and attracts insects.”

Ask the caregiver to keep the cats’ feeding area neat and free of leftover food and trash.

“Too many cats around!”

Ensuring that all of the cats are neutered, and adjusting the physical location where the feeding occurs can usually address the number of cats you are seeing. Ask the caregiver to move the feeding area and to be sure that all the cats are neutered.

“Cats are sleeping under my porch.”

Refer to page 75.

“Cats are getting into my trash.”

Refer to page 75.

“Cats are hanging out in my yard...”

Refer to page 75.

“Cats are digging in my garden.”

Refer to page 76.

“Cats are drinking from my swimming pool.”

Refer to page 76.

“I can smell cat urine.”

Refer to page 77.

“Cats are making a lot of noise, fighting and yowling,”

Refer to page 77.

“Cats are walking on my car.”

Refer to page 77.

“We’ve tried these solutions and are still having difficulty with the cats and/or the neighbor.”

Offer to talk to the feeder to see if we can resolve the conflict.

“No one seems to be taking care of the cats in our neighborhood.”

Check with _____name_____ to see if they have a volunteer in the area who can check the situation out and try to recruit someone locally to manage the colony.



Other Outdoor Cat-Related Situations and Possible Solutions

Medical Emergencies

If the caller reports a sick or injured feral cat, ask for the location and if he/she is able to get the cat (often the caller is the cat's feeder).

In the event of an injured cat, try to encourage callers to provide some assistance on their own – for example, removing the cat (carefully!) from immediate danger.

Take care to advise the individual to exercise caution in moving an injured animal. A suffering, frightened animal may lash out at the person who is trying to help. It's usually best to slide a board or other sturdy flat surface beneath the cat to minimize movement as the animal is transported. Putting a blanket over the animal, including over their face, can help the animal stay calm.

Refer callers to the local community cat or TNR program (if the community provides this kind of assistance). Most do provide treatment for sick or injured feral cats. Alternatively, make a referral to a local clinic that is willing to handle feral cats.

If you must bring an injured or sick feral cat to a clinic that does not routinely treat feral cats you may need to advise the vet and clinic staff that the cat will need to be sedated before being removed from the trap to be handled.

Taming/Socializing Feral Kittens

You may also suggest that people could order the Urban Cat League's video; "Tough Love: Socializing Feral Kittens." Information about ordering it can be found online at: www.urbancatleague.org/TamingVideo.

Basic Advice on Socializing Feral Kittens by Tompkins County SPCA

Kittens that are not exposed to humans early in their lives learn from their mothers and quickly become feral. However, if they are caught and handled at a young enough age, feral kittens can be socialized and placed in loving homes.

Remember that spay/neuter is the single most important thing you can do to help feral cats. It is best to alter as many cats in a colony as possible before you begin socializing them.

Kittens under four weeks old can usually be socialized in a matter of days, and kittens up to eight weeks old can take approximately two to four weeks to socialize. Taming older feral kittens can be difficult and they may never be fully socialized to people.

Getting Started

Kittens cannot be socialized while they are still in their colony. They must be brought inside and confined so you have regular access to them. If you cannot do this, have the kittens altered and return them to their colony.

Kittens can be taken from their feral mothers when they begin eating canned food on their own at approximately four weeks of age.

Housing the Kittens

You will need to confine the kitten(s) at first, preferably in a dog crate, large pet carrier, cat condo, or cage. If you do not have a cage or carrier, you can keep the kittens in a small room. Be sure to block up anything they could crawl into or under and remove anything that could injure them.

Do not let feral kittens run loose in your house. They can hide in tiny spaces and are exceptionally difficult to find and coax out. In addition, a large room can be frightening and hinder the taming process.



If possible, kittens should be separated from each other to facilitate taming. Left together, one kitten can become outgoing and playful while another remains shy and withdrawn. If you cannot separate them, the kittens can be housed together, but be sure to spend time alone with each one.

The cage should contain a small litter box, food and water dishes, and something to cuddle in, like a soft towel, small fleece throw, or old sweater.

Socializing

Food is the key to taming. Make dry kitten food available at all times and give the kitten a small amount of wet food at least twice a day. The kitten may hesitate to eat in your presence at first, but be patient. Eventually the kitten will associate your presence with food.

Chicken-flavored baby food is a special treat that almost no kitten can resist.

How soon you begin handling the kitten depends on the kitten's age and temperament. Older kittens and those who are more feral are harder to handle. With these kittens, start by offering baby food or wet food on a spoon through the cage. Once they are used to this, you can begin handling them.

Younger and less feral kittens can be picked up right away. Wear gloves if you will feel more comfortable, as it is important to be confident and gentle when picking up any animal. Wrap the kitten in a towel allowing her head to stick out. Offer baby food or wet food on a spoon. If she does not respond, dab a tiny bit on the end of her nose. Once she tastes it, she will soon want more.

When petting a feral kitten, approach from behind his head. Gradually begin to pet the kitten's face, chin, and behind the ears while talking gently. Try to have several feeding/petting sessions (15-20 minutes) with each kitten as many times a day as you can.

Progress will depend on the kitten's age and temperament. Each day you will notice improvement. Falling asleep in your lap, coming toward you for food, meowing at you, purring, and playing are all great signs. Once the kitten no longer runs away from you but instead comes toward you seeking to be fed, held and petted, you can confine her to a small, kitten-proofed room rather than a cage. Siblings can also be reunited at this point.

Expose the kittens to a variety of people. Everyone should use low voices at first, and approach the kittens in a non-threatening manner.

Important Tips

- Handle feral kittens cautiously, their claws and teeth are sharp.
- Do not give kittens cow's milk, it can make them sick.
- Once the kitten is willing to play, offer toys and use a string (not yarn) or a cat dancer for him to chase. Do not let the kitten bite, scratch or play with your hand.
- If the kittens are staying awake at night, try to play and socialize with them more during the day and cover their cage(s) at night with a towel or blanket.
- Leave a television or radio on (not too loud) during the day so the kittens get used to human voices.

Some Helpful Guidelines for Socializing Feral Kittens by Mike Phillips

Kittens under eight weeks of age can usually be socialized without much difficulty following the guidelines detailed below. Kittens over eight weeks of age who've had no positive interaction with humans often take much longer to socialize. However, these same guidelines are often effective up to six months.

Location

The best place to socialize kittens is where the socializer can get on the same level as the kittens and comfortably interact with them without the kittens feeling "backed into a corner," or hiding out of reach. A dog pen large enough for the socializer to enter can be set up in any room and has the added advantage of more frequent exposure to typical human activity if placed in a busy room of the house. Most bathrooms work very well although they are isolated from continual household activity. A small room without hiding spots under couches and beds or behind furniture can also work very well. Radio and television sounds can contribute to getting outdoor ferals accustomed to the indoor environment.

Small cages or carriers don't work well since the cats always feel cornered when we reach in and they have no room to make the important "mind shift" where they decide to approach us out of self-interest in order to get the food they desire. They need to have the option not to be near you in order to make that decision to approach.

CATS SOCIALIZE THEMSELVES BY CHOICE! We only provide the incentive... FOOD.

Food

Food is the most important tool to facilitate the socialization process. Growing kittens have an insatiable appetite which will give them the courage to approach you and be touched when they might normally never allow you anywhere near them. Putting food down and walking away takes away any incentive for them to welcome you into their world.

The following guidelines are not hard fast rules. You may find that the kittens skip to advanced stages very quickly or you may find they follow a sequence of their own design.



Evaluation

If the kittens are healthy, using the litter box, and eating in front of you, you can safely begin delaying meals just enough to give you the advantage of hunger. (If not, you may decide to give them a “free ride” until this situation stabilizes. Once they seem calmer or the vet gives the OK, you may begin the “tough love” stage of socialization where you space out the meals so that the kittens are eager to learn.)

Tough love

Never put food down and walk away. If the kittens will eat in your presence, progressively pull the dish as close to you as possible. Stay with the kittens until they have eaten and then take the food away with you when you leave. Always provide water.

Eating off your finger

When the kittens are eating from a dish right beside you, start offering something tasty off your finger. Gerber or Beechnut baby foods are favorites in turkey, chicken, or beef flavors. You may want to try this in place of step 2 if they won’t move close to you to eat from the dish. The order is of no importance as long as they are improving on some level. Be flexible but don’t let them hold you hostage.

Lead them onto your lap

Once they are used to eating off your finger, use that to lead them up into contact with your body by their choice. You can also try putting a dish in your lap and let the entire litter climb up on you to eat. The braver ones will start and the shy ones may need to be worked with individually. Let the braver ones get as close as possible and see if they will make eye contact with you while licking from your finger. That’s a biggie for them!

Initiate Contact

Initiate contact at the beginning of a session where the kittens are particularly hungry and eagerly engrossed in eating. Start with them eating from a dish or while eating off the finger and eventually progress to touching and petting them while they are in your lap eating. Start in the head and shoulder area only. If one runs off, lure him/her back with baby food on the finger and any bad experience should be soon forgotten. (This approach works at any stage. Back up to a stage that they’ve mastered and work up to where they “freaked-out.” Don’t stop the session until they’ve forgotten the bad experience and are happily doing one of the steps with which they feel comfortable.)

Preparation for lifting

Expand petting and touching around the head and shoulders by moving to touching the underbelly to desensitize them for being picked up. Also try nudging them from one side to the other while they are engrossed in eating. Just having your hands near them and gently pushing them around is an important preparation to being picked up.

Moving on the ground

Set up two dishes and gently scoot a kitten the short distance from one dish to the other. If the kitten is engrossed in eating, s/he won’t mind being lifted if it goes smoothly and quickly. If not, lure the kitten back, back up, and start over.

Picking them up

Start sitting on the floor. Have a full jar of baby food opened and ready before you try the first pick-up. Try this when they are engrossed in eating right next to you rather than scrambling after the kittens on the run. Lift them under their chest with the food right in front of them. Hold them as loosely as possible onto your knees and eventually to your chest. Young kittens are often reassured if they feel the warmth of your body and can feel your heart beat. If it works, you can try it on your knees the next day and eventually standing up.

Handling without food

After a good long session where the kittens are very full and getting sleepy, try gentle petting and work up to holding and petting without the incentive of food being present. If this works, you should be able to try it at other times between meals. It may be hardest just before feeding when the kittens are very hungry and confused and stressed by being held when they have only food on their minds.

Transition to adoption

Before putting them in a cage in an adoption center, test them with a few different socializers. If the volunteers at the adoption center can continue the baby food training, there is often a smooth transition. Older and especially shy kittens do better when they go directly to an adoption and bypass the adoption center altogether. A crash course in socializing for the adopting family may be needed to assure that the transition to the home goes well. If the adopter starts them in the bathroom rather than giving the kittens the run of the house, it will assure that they can bond with the kittens and that the kittens will know where the litter box is. If not the kittens often run off under the couch to hide for the foreseeable future.

Interactive Play

Most feral kittens are frightened by interactive play when first exposed to humans. There is no rule for when to introduce it, or when they will accept it, but the best way to start is with a toy which isn't threatening. A string on the end of a stick or some toy that allows you entice them from a distance allows them to get involved with your game without being face to face with you.

Save baby food (or whatever proves to be their favorite food) as a reward for new steps or to break through a plateau. Once a step has been mastered, only offer regular food as a reward for that step saving special treats for new territory. Remember the Mantra is "tough love."

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Relocation of Feral Cats

If the cats cannot stay where they are because they are in imminent danger, relocation may be a solution. Relocation is stressful for feral cats and should always be a last resort. Exhaust all possibility of negotiation before relocating feral cats. Remind callers that fixing the cats eliminates many of the annoying mating behaviors (fighting, howling, and spraying) that are the cause for complaints from the public.

Sometimes the problem can be solved simply by moving the cats' feeding location a short distance away, to a spot out of public view.

If the cats must be relocated to a more distant place, there are particular steps that must be taken to ensure their well-being. At a minimum, relocated cats must be confined at the new site for three weeks; otherwise, they may attempt to return to their old site. During the adjustment period at the new site, they will need to be kept safe from predators (the cage or place where they are being held needs to provide protection from dogs and wildlife), and they need to receive daily food and water and be furnished with a litter box.

The idea is for the cats to become familiar and comfortable in the area so a view of some of the surroundings is helpful. Moving cats with others from the colony (keeping the group or at least some of the group members together) helps the cats remain at the new location as well.

Other suggestions for relocation:

Advertising for barn homes for the cats may be an option. To find an appropriate site, rescuers might try advertising in the horse or in the livestock section of the classified ads or local horse publications; distributing flyers or hanging small posters in feed stores; and contacting stables, farms, ranches, or even warehouses (which may be interested in the cats as mousers). Rescuers need to be sure that the owners of these places will commit to providing food and care to the cats.

In some cases, the individual can relocate the cats to his or her own yard. Building an outdoor cat enclosure (cattery) or putting up a cat fence around an area for the cats can be an option in some situations.

Feral Cats That Can't Be Released

Rarely, you will run into a situation with a feral cat that cannot be released back into a feral cat colony. These are generally limited to:

- A cat with a very serious disability that makes survival outdoors impossible (blindness, for instance)
- Feral cats that were taken in as kittens but were never tamed

These cats are in a tough spot, stuck between two worlds – they aren't equipped to be released, but since they are feral, they can't be adopted. We usually recommend building an outdoor cat enclosure, or cattery, which will offer the cats the protection they need, but also the opportunity to be as feral as they please. We can provide instructions for building catteries and/or cat-proof fencing.

Cats without a Caregiver

If the caller reports that the cats are not being cared for and you are unable to convince them to get involved (or if they are unable to do so), you may want to consider contacting name to see if any volunteer help is available to verify whether there is a current feeder. Then, if needed, they can seek to identify a nearby feral cat colony caregiver or to recruit a local resident to take on the colony's care.

Unwelcome Cats

You may get calls from people who do not want feral cats wandering onto their property, or from people who are trying to resolve a neighborhood dispute about the cats.

The list below includes most of the common concerns that may come up regarding feral cats and Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR). A variety of solutions are offered for each issue. The solutions are often most effective when several are implemented at the same time.

“The feeding area is messy and attracts insects/wildlife.”

- Keep the cats' feeding area neat, clean, and free of leftover food and trash.
- Do not overfeed the cats; leftover food draws insects and other animals, which can trigger complaints.
- Remove leftover food after an hour. Be sure to remove dry as well as canned food. The cats will adjust to a specific feeding time.
- Feed during daylight hours and remove any remaining food before dusk to minimize cat/wildlife interactions.
- Always feed in bowls, never directly on the ground.
- Pour out the water bowl and refill it with fresh water daily to prevent mosquitoes.

“There are cats hanging around!”

Adjusting the physical situation can usually address this concern – the old adage; “out of sight, out of mind” applies here.

Locate the feeding area, and any shelters provided for the cats, away from public view.

If the cats are presently being fed in a public spot, the site can easily be changed to another nearby location. For example, the feeding area can be moved from in front of a building to an out-of-view place at the back of the parking lot, or from in front of the dumpster into a nearby wooded area or behind a fence. In some cases they can be moved several yards over a property line to a place where they are welcome. The cats usually adapt quickly, but depending upon the situation you may want to make the move incrementally over the course of a few days.

Keep in mind that the cats' natural instinct to be fearful of people helps them to survive. Keeping the cats out of sight helps them retain their wariness and prevents injury to the cats, as well as complaints and drop-offs.

Do not feed at peak hours when people are most likely to be in the area and see the cats. For example, if you always feed on your way into work and someone else entering the building sees the



entire colony waiting for you, they may think there is a population explosion! Change the feeding time and location.

Discourage others from leaving handouts for the cats. If other people are leaving food scraps around, invite them to join you in creating a feeding schedule for the cats at the designated feeding location. (If you cannot identify the feeder in person, try leaving a polite note with your phone number or email address where the food was found.)

If you provide a feeding station or shelter for the cats, it's best to make it as inconspicuous as possible. Painting them green, brown or some other natural color helps shelters and feeding stations blend into the environment.

“Cats are sleeping under my porch.”

If cats are sleeping under a neighbor's house, in a shed, or other locations, the cats are seeking a warm, dry, safe shelter from the elements.

Recommend that the property owner physically block or seal the location the cat is entering with chicken wire or lattice when they are sure the cat is not there. (You could offer to help with this.)

Provide shelters for the cats. (The Alley Cat Allies website provides information on how to build a shelter: www.alleycat.org/BuildAShelter) Multiple shelters may be needed for a colony. Place the shelters away from public view and paint them an inconspicuous earth color.

“Cats are getting into my trash.”

Cats and many wild animals are opportunistic scavengers.

- Scavenging can be reduced by providing regular food for the cats at a set time and in an out-of-the-way location.
- Keep trash properly covered and secured to avoid attracting raccoons, skunks, and possums, in addition to cats.

“Cats are hanging out in my yard...”

There are many safe, low-tech methods to discourage feral cats from hanging out where they are not wanted. Offer to provide and apply these methods at your own expense. If there are other caregivers, consider pooling resources to cover the cost of such items.

Be sure the cats are neutered; this curtails the urge to roam and mark territory.

Use a repellent to keep cats out of the area. There are several types of repellents:

- Chemical repellents (keep in mind that these need to be reapplied routinely). Cat and dog repellent (get the yard and garden type) can be purchased at most large garden centers, home improvement stores, pet supply stores, as well as online. Some of the common brands include: “Repel Away From My Garden,” “Havahart Cat Repellent” (uses capsaicin pepper and oil of mustard), and “Reppers.”
- Repellants should be sprayed or distributed around the edges of the yard, the top of fences, and on any favorite digging areas or plants.
- Motion-activated water sprinkler/repellers, such as “The Scarecrow” work to keep cats out of yards.

- Ultrasonic devices, such as “Cat Stop Automatic Outdoor Cat Deterrent” or “Yard Control Cat Repeller, Model P7810” emit a high frequency sound that is annoying to cats, but not perceptible by people. The key to their effectiveness is matching the capacity of the device to the size of the area to be covered; if the device is not powerful enough for the area, it won’t work. Devices designed for rodents will not be effective with cats.
- Household items and herbs that repel cats (keep in mind that these need to be reapplied routinely): Cayenne pepper, citrus peels, coffee grounds, pipe tobacco, citrus scented sprays, and oils of lavender, lemon grass, citronella, peppermint, eucalyptus, and mustard all repel cats.
- Plants that repel cats include: The border plant “Coleus-Canina,” is now being marketed as an effective scent deterrent for dogs and cats. The herb rue can also be planted to repel cats.
- Do not feed birds on the ground. Use hanging or post bird feeders that cats cannot reach.
- Put up a six-foot fence that comes right to the ground.
- As a last resort your own yard can be enclosed with cat fence to keep the cats confined to your property. Purrfect Cat Fence and Cat Fence In Systems are two manufacturers of cat fencing that can be found online.

“Cats are digging in my garden.”

- Use one of the repellents listed above.
- Create a physical barrier to digging:
 - Gardens and flower beds can be protected from digging with “Cat Scat” plastic mats that can be purchased online and pressed into the soil. Each mat has flexible plastic spikes, which are harmless to cats and other animals but discourage digging. A heavy plastic carpet runner (pointed side up) also works.
 - Cover exposed ground in flower beds with attractive rocks.
 - Take branches from a thorny plant and lay them on the ground in a lattice-type pattern, then plant flowers and seeds in the openings. Wooden or plastic lattice fencing material can be used in this same way.
 - Chicken wire can be firmly set into the dirt (sharp edges rolled under).
 - Pine cones, wooden chopsticks, skewers, or plant stakes can be embedded into the soil every eight inches.
 - Keep sand boxes covered when children are not playing in them.
- Make an outdoor litter box in an acceptable place (works especially well when combined with a deterrent to digging in the old favorite spots).
 - Dig up, loosen, or till the soil as you would for a garden in an acceptable, out-of-the-way spot in your yard.
 - In a very large plastic storage container, make drainage holes in the bottom and fill with sand-box sand. Some people use a taller storage container and leave the lid on to protect the sand from the elements, cutting large entry and exit holes on both ends. The sand will need to be scooped regularly and replaced periodically. Putting a couple of pieces of the cats’ feces into the boxes initially helps them get the idea.
 - Cats love peat moss for doing their business. A 4 foot square area, 6 to 8” deep, in a corner of the yard, replaced once a month or so, works nicely. It’s very inexpensive and easy to handle and dispose of.

“Cats are drinking from my swimming pool.”

If cats are coming to drink from a swimming pool or landscaped pond, provide alternative water away from the pool. Be sure to change the water frequently.



“I can smell cat urine.”

Eliminate the smell of cat urine by rinsing the area thoroughly with white vinegar, which can be purchased inexpensively by the gallon at the supermarket, or with products available in pet supply stores. Trail Instant Odor Control can be ordered online and is effective outdoors and on soil.

Neutering the cats is the best way to dramatically reduce or eliminate their desire to spray-mark and make the smell of cat urine less pungent.

“Cats are making a lot of noise, fighting, yowling, spraying, and/or breeding.”

These are all behaviors associated with feline mating. The solution is to humanely trap and neuter the entire colony. Once a cat is neutered, the hormones leave their system within three weeks, and the behaviors usually stop.

“Cats are walking on my car.”

- Purchase a car cover to protect the car from cat prints.
- Cats like a high platform from which to view the world. Provide a table, create a platform in a tree, or provide a shelter that cats can lay on top of as well as inside – anything that gives them a higher vantage point.
- Move shelters and feeding stations away from the area where cars are parked. The cats will follow the food and shelter.
- Sometimes in the winter cats will lay on top of a car for warmth. Providing shelters with outdoor heating pads (available online for dog houses) will keep them warm and away from automobiles.

“The cats might have fleas.”

If fleas are a problem in your area, have your veterinarian treat for fleas when the cats are spayed or neutered. Revolution works well and can sometimes be reapplied if you are able to touch the cats while they are eating. Another option for ongoing flea control is Capstar, which can be put into the food.

Change the straw bedding material in the cats’ shelters regularly. Sprinkle a nontoxic herbal flea powder, other flea powder that is safe for cats, or diatomaceous earth (be sure to use food grade) beneath the bedding material inside the shelters. Spraying the interiors of the cats shelters with Insect Growth Regulator, available online in a concentrate without insecticides, is effective in long-term flea control. Allow it to dry before the cats come in contact with it.

“I’m worried about our (or our children’s) health and safety.”

- Feral cats are naturally wary of people and will not approach humans they do not know. Feral cats will not attack anyone unless they are cornered.
- It’s always a good practice to avoid touching or cornering any animal you are not familiar with and to wash your hands thoroughly after gardening. Parents and caregivers should teach children not to approach or touch ANY unknown animal.
- Studies show that feral cats and owned cats share similar health status and do not pose a risk to public health. (Refer to www.alleycat.org/CommunityHealth for further details.)
- TNR involves vaccinating and neutering the cats and providing ongoing care to them. It is the very best way to protect the public, as the cats create an immune barrier between humans and wildlife.

“The area will become a dumping ground for cats.”

- Keep feeding stations and shelters out of view so that it's not obvious that cats are cared for here.
- As part of TNR, a new cat that appears must be humanely trapped then either reunited with his owner, adopted into a home (if tame), or neutered, vaccinated, and returned as the other cats have been.
- If dumping is already a problem in the area, post official-looking signs stating that dumping cats is criminal abandonment punishable by law and that the area is monitored. Ask all caregivers and neighbors to keep an eye out for cats being dumped and to try to get the car license numbers so that an official police report can be filed.

Cat Enclosure or Cattery as a Solution

People may inquire about using a cattery as an alternative to letting their cats run free outdoors. An outdoor enclosure can be a wonderful haven for a cat. Cats love to enjoy fresh air and watch birds, bugs, and other animals, and a cattery provides a way for a cat to do so without danger of being attacked by another animal, struck by a car, lost, or stolen. A cattery might be any range of shape or size, made with various materials, free-standing or attached to a house or garage, inexpensive or higher end, plain or fancy, bought or built.

There are a few basic elements to consider when building or buying a cattery:

- Although you can build a short cattery, cleaning and spending time in the cattery will be much easier if the cattery is a standard 6 feet tall.
- The cattery will need to have a door to the outside for access for cleaning, maintenance, emergency care, etc.
- The cattery will need a top on it, not necessarily a roof, but something to keep the cats in and everything else out. Chain link, hardware cloth, or even strong shade cloth, securely attached to the sides should suffice.
- The cattery will need a firm base with hardware cloth, etc., on the floor to keep the right animals in and the wrong animals out.
- Use the vertical space. A cattery does not have to be large, but it will make a huge difference if you provide logs, shelves, etc., for the cat to climb and perch on. Not only does it make better use of the space, but most cats LOVE being up high!
- Provide a litter box. This isn't always necessary if the cat has access to a box in the house, but even so, many cats prefer to use the great outdoors. The box will need to be sheltered, either with a hood or with some shelves over it.
- Provide food and water. Again, you'll need to shelter the food and water area. If you have ant or bug problems, look into bug-proof food dishes. Remember that an outdoor cat needs more food, especially during the winter, to keep warm.
- Provide a shady area.
- Provide a cat house or access to a heated room or garage.
- Provide environmental enrichments. Provide logs or posts for scratching; hang bird feeders nearby (but not in) the cattery; and perhaps consider planting a tray of cat grass. Anything you can do to make the environment more interesting will improve your cat's quality of life.
- Be creative! You can make the cattery a nice place for your cat, and a pleasant place for you to visit.



Kits and Building Plans

The Purrfect Cat Fence offers a very nice cat fence that is very effective and easy to install. There are freestanding models as well as attachments for existing fences: www.purrfectfence.com

Cat Fence In also offers kits for existing fences: www.catfencein.com

You may order a kit for a cattery from C&D Pet Products: www.cdpets.com

Building plans are available from Just4Cats: www.just4cats.com

You can get ideas for creating your own enclosure by doing a search online on the subjects of “cat enclosure,” “catteries,” and “catios.”

Orphaned Kittens

If people call about orphaned kittens they have found, they need some basic information RIGHT AWAY (feeding the kittens on their backs or failing to help them to relieve themselves can be fatal mistakes). Providing the following basic information over the phone can be a lifesaver. (There is additional information that can be emailed as needed.)

- Ask where the mother cat is. If she can be found, she is best able to care for the babies. It will be necessary to follow up and ensure that she is spayed as soon as the kittens are weaned. (Strangely, some people do not realize that it will be best and easiest to have mom raise the babies.)
- The kittens must be kept warm.
- Try to get them to a veterinarian as soon as possible so that their approximate age, and the amount and timing of feedings, can be determined.
- Purchase formula at a pet supply store or vet clinic: KMR or Just Born. Buy a plastic feeding bottle and make a hole in the nipple with a hot needle. The hole must be big enough to allow milk to drip out when it is held upside down. (In a pinch it is possible to make a formula out of common household food items; a recipe can be found online.)
- Kittens must be held in the upright (feet/belly down) position for feeding – holding them on their backs can cause them to inhale formula into their lungs, which is usually life-threatening.
- They need assistance to urinate. The mother cat would usually provide this assistance by washing them with her tongue. After each feeding, use a warm, moist cotton ball to stroke up between the kittens’ legs until each urinates. Failure to do this can result in the kitten’s death.
- Ask the caller if they can provide ongoing care for the kitten. If not, advise the caller to contact local vet clinics and other shelters to ask if they have a nursing mother cat or experienced volunteer available to bottle-feed the babies.

Chapter 5:

Resources

Suggested Readings

Books on community cats:

- Ellen Perry Berkeley. *TNR Past, Present and Future: A history of the Trap-Neuter-Return Movement*. Bethesda, MD: Alley Cat Allies, 2004.
- Sharon Darrow. *Bottlekatz: A Complete Care Guide for Orphan Kittens*. Raleigh, NC: Lulu Press, Inc., 2013.
- Becky Robinson. *The Evolution of the Cat Revolution*. Brooklyn, NY: Lantern Books, 2015.

Books on cat behavior:

- Dr. Nicholas Dodman. *The Cat Who Cried for Help: Attitudes, Emotions, and the Psychology of Cats*. New York, NY: Bantam, 1999.
- Pam Johnson-Bennett. *Cat Love: Understanding the Needs and Nature of Your Cat*. Storey Communications, 1990.
- Pam Johnson-Bennett. *Think Like a Cat*. Penguin Books, 2011.
- Pam Johnson-Bennett. *Twisted Whiskers*. Crossing Press, 1994.

Starter List of Available Resources

Your Cat Help Desk can develop this list to include helpful resources from other organizations as well as any documents used by your group.

- Conduct TNR Guide (Alley Cat Allies)
www.alleycat.org/TNR
- Colony Care Guide (Alley Cat Allies)
www.alleycat.org/ColonyCare
- Community Relations Resource Center (Alley Cat Allies)
www.alleycat.org/CommunityRelations
- Alley Cat Allies Publications & Research (Alley Cat Allies)
www.alleycat.org/Research
- Taming Feral Kittens (Feral Cat Coalition)
www.feralcat.com/taming.html
- Taming Ferals (Urban Cat League)
www.urbancatleague.org/TamingFerals
- Animal Behavior Assistance (Nevada Humane Society),
www.nevadahumanesociety.org/animal-resource-center/animal-behavior-assistance



- Addressing Common Concerns About Outdoor Cats (Nevada Humane Society), www.svgid.com/Files/dLink/121114_14.pdf
- Finding Homes for Homeless Pets (Best Friends Animal Society), www.bestfriends.org/resources/how-find-homes-homeless-pets
- Guide to Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) and Colony Care (Alley Cat Allies, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), and Mayor’s Alliance for NYC’s Animals), www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/TNR_workshop_handbook.3.pdf

Suggested Additional Resource Topics to Offer:

- Neighborhood Disputes handout I: complainant info sheet
- Neighborhood Disputes handout II: caregiver solutions tips—humane deterrents
- Neighborhood Disputes handout III: conflict resolution tips
- Introducing a New Cat
- Aggression Toward Other Cats
- Petting-induced Aggression
- Litter Box Problems
- Urine Marking in Cats
- Cat Leash Training Basics
- Facts about Declawing
- Fearful Cats
- Fear of Other Pets
- Fear of Sounds
- Fear of Sudden Movements
- Nighttime Activity in Cats
- Using Behavior Modification to Help Your Cat
- Top 10 Reasons to Spay/Neuter Your Cat
- Outside Cats Harassing Indoor Cats
- Introducing a Cat and a Dog
- How to Write Pet Profiles
- Taming Feral Kittens
- Orphaned Neonatal Kitten Care
- Cat shelter/house building instructions
- Low cost S/N referral listing
- Local Veterinarian clinics, Emergency clinics listing
- Finding Homes for Homeless Pets (Best Friends Brochure)
- Lost Pet info sheet
- Cattery info sheet