CAT SOCIALIZING GUIDELINES

**General tips for handling shelter cats:**

1) When meeting a cat for the first time, **introduce yourself to the cat by trying the three-step cat handshake**:

* First, squint your eyes and slowly blink at the cat. Give it a few tries; hopefully the cat will blink back at you.
* Second, introduce yourself through scent. If you wear glasses, let the cat sniff the temple arm of your glasses. This can also be done with a pencil or pen that was behind your ear, or if the cat does not seem nervous or intimidated, your first finger.
* Lastly, reach your finger out and touch the cat’s forehead or cheeks. The cat will usually push against your hand.

2) **Avoid direct eye contact**, particularly with shy cats. Cats can associate staring with the beginning of conflict. Don’t pick up a cat at first; to a cat, cuddling by a stranger can sometimes be another form of restraint.

3) To enhance social response, **keep handling sessions varied and pleasant** - food treats and toys will be remembered. The next time the cat is approached, he will be more ready to come out for a handling, combing, or play session.

4) It is always ideal to **interact with a cat approximately at eye level** so that he feels secure enough to be curious. Most cats are reluctant to sit in the lap of a stranger but may approach in other friendly ways if given the chance. Sitting on the floor works well.

5) **Picking up cats:** Remember, most cats do not enjoy being picked up. Pick the cat up with one hand from under the front legs. With the other hand, gently support their bottom. Cats will struggle if they aren’t being held securely – they might think that you’re going to drop them, and they’ll try to hold on. If a cat is being difficult, try a kitty burrito. If a staff member or Experienced Cat Socializer is not available to assist you, try to reach down and control the cat’s head by a grip on the scruff of its neck; this will cause most cats to go limp--as they did when their mothers carried them as kittens. Support the cat’s weight with your other hand under his or her belly. Please avoid scruffing unless absolutely necessary.

6) **Putting cats back in their kennels can require staff help.** Don’t hesitate to ask a staff person, or Experienced Cat Socializer, to help you corral a cat – it is better than getting scratched, and our animal care staff and volunteers are experienced in handling the difficult cats.

7) **Remember that all cats, like all people, are different**. They all take different amounts of time to feel comfortable with new people, with new cats, and in new environments. Some cats like to sit in laps while others prefer to run around and play.

* If a cat if very shy and does not want to be touched right away, persist with the cat handshake. Also try touching the cat with things other than your hands. Hands can be scary to some cats, since they associate hands with grabbing and making them do things that they don’t want to do. Feather toys or long catnip toys are wonderful to use. Reach out to a cat with the toy, let them sniff the toy, and gently brush their cheeks with the toy. If this is going well, you can drop the toy mid-stoke and continue petting the cat with your hand.

**What to wear and do:**

A long sleeved shirt and athletic shoes and no or minimal jewelry are all good ideas to protect against cats’ claws. An apron can be helpful for holding a pen, hand sanitizer (so you don’t have to go to one of the wall dispensers), treats, toys, and a brush or comb. Write up health concerns about individual cats on the form by the clinic door.

**Interacting with visitors:**

Feel free to share positive information you know about a cat with an interested potential adopter. But be careful not to push – some people like to make decisions in private. Do feel free to answer questions, if you can, and send customers to the Front Desk or to a more experienced volunteer with questions you may not know the answer to. The Front Desk staff can help you find the answer to most questions. Please feel free to come to me with questions if needed.

Adoptable cats are located in the lobby, the Scratchin’ Post, Cat Rows 1-4, and the Catios. The large catio houses the shy/very fearful cats. Kittens will be in cages in the hallways.

If you want to handle kittens and cats, please always handle kittens first – this helps reduce the chance of spreading germs from the more resistant cats to the less resistant kittens. Sanitize hands before and after moving between kittens and cats, or anytime you move between cat rows/rooms.

We also have 2 multi cat rooms; these free roaming cats are located in The Scratching Post and the small Catio (between Rows 1 and 2). You may socialize these cats. Please be sure to sanitize your hands before entering and after leaving the each room to limit the amount of germs spread (be sure to check out Dr.Scheller’s 2 minute video on our YouTube page for more information on FIV).

**Want to learn more?**

Great Books:

* ***Starting from Scratch: How to Correct Behavior Problems in Your Adult Cat* by Pam Johnson-Bennett**
  + This is a great read for all cat lovers, whether your cat has behavior problems or not. It will help you keep your feline happy as well as mentally and emotionally healthy. Also a great resource for volunteers as it will better help you understand that cats in our care.
* ***Think Like a Cat* by Pam Johnson-Bennett**
  + Considered the gold standard by behavior professionals, ***Think Like a Cat*** will be your irreplaceable resource throughout your cat’s life.
* ***Cat Vs Cat* by Pam Johnson-Bennett**
  + This book shows how adding another cat to your home does not have to be the start of a kitty apocalypse. Although cats are often misunderstood as natural loners, Johnson-Bennett shows how to plan, set up, and maintain a home environment that will help multiple cats—and their owners—live in peace.
* ***Cat Sense: How the New Feline Science Can Make You a Better Friend to Your Pet* by John Bradshaw**
  + A must-read for any cat lover, *Cat Sense* challenges our most basic assumptions about cats and promises to dramatically improve their lives—and ours.

Great Websites:

* **catbehaviorassociates.com**
  + **By Pam Johnson-Bennett**
* **jacksongalaxy.com**
  + **By Jackson Galaxy**
* **alleycat.org**
  + **Alley Cat Allies**

Great Toys:

* **Go-Cat Butterflies**
* **Go-Cat Cat Catcher (aka Da Mouse)**
* **Go-Cat Da Bird**
* **Neko Flies**