

### Cat Behavior Team Training Manual & Canned Responses

#### Behavior Team Mission

The Austin Pets Alive! Cat Behavior Team's main purpose is to provide lifelong behavior advice and support to Austin Pets Alive cat adopters and fosters as well as the general public. All advice and support given is positive reinforcement based. Our goal is to both educate as well as support those that are experiencing difficult behavior issues with the cats in their care.

#### Team Responsibilities and Procedures

- There is one volunteer for each day of the week. Each volunteer is responsible for all of the inquiries that come in for one day of the week. For example, Mary might be responsible for all the emails and phone calls that come in on Mondays.
- Emails are to be responded to within 24 hours from the time it was sent.
- Phone calls are to be responded to as soon as possible but at a maximum of 48 hours after the phone call was forwarded to the behavior team. When figuring out when you should respond to an inquiry it is very important to take into consideration the tone of the email or phone call and detect if the owner seems desperate for help or seems like they might return the cat to APA if they are not helped very quickly.
- Responses should be made with positive reinforcement methods in mind. Aversive training methods or aversive reactions to behaviors should not be recommended or encouraged.
- If further assistance is needed or other opinions are wanted, the volunteer should always feel free to email the team and ask for help. If preferred, the volunteer can also email the team lead for advice.
- After each inquiry is answered, an entry must be made to the shared Cat Behavior Team spreadsheet that can be found in the Cat Behavior Team Drive. It is very important to remember to fill out this form each time you respond to someone, not just the first response to an inquiry.

#### Canned Responses

The following are some "canned responses," or example responses for common topics that we are contacted for. Feel free to copy and paste these responses as needed. Always make sure to make your email personalized though so try to edit the following responses to make them fit each situation appropriately.

#### Food Obsession

*Hello,*

*Thanks for contacting us! There are a few ways we can help a cat who seems absolutely obsessed with food. However, I would like to mention that cats who always seem ravenously hungry or have a shift in their weight may have an underlying health issue, so always speak to your vet about that possibility if you see a behavior change or change in weight.*

*One thing that can help is to break your cat's feedings up into multiple smaller meals each day. A timed feeder can help with this by dosing out exact quantities of kibble at set intervals throughout the day. If your cat is bothering you while you eat, make sure to put this feeder outside of the kitchen or dining room and never feed your cat in those areas. You can also combine activity with feeding, which will make food time a bit more challenging for the cat, add some to the house, hiding pieces of kibble or treats in different shaped holders and encourage your cat to find their treats. Hope those ideas help!*

*Please let us know if you have any additional questions or concerns. Tip: Check out [www.foodpuzzlesforcats.com](http://www.foodpuzzlesforcats.com) for some great ideas and reviews on cat puzzle feeders as well as some DIY options!*

## **Play Biting/Single Kitten-itis**

*Hello,*

*Sounds like your kitty is getting over stimulated and nipping inappropriately, not biting aggressively, which is good! That can be a pretty common behavior issue with cats, especially young kittens, and there's a few ways to help correct it:*

*You can usually tell when a cat starts to get overly excited, they get very amped up and you can tell they're about to act out. If you watch him for signs of this and can notice it, you'll want to stop the exciting behavior when he reaches this point and give him time to settle down.*

*With cats who bite a bit, I also recommend lots and lots of play time with feather wands with extra long wands. I recommend playing with the cat with the wand at least 20 minutes per day and only with long toys like this. Using a long wand toy puts a clear separation between you and the toy and helps reinforce that the toy is the appropriate object to bite and not people. He needs a clear visual sign that there is a difference.*

*When he does bite or behave inappropriately, he is seeking a reaction from you. The best thing to do when he does this is to quickly and unceremoniously reject him by putting him down and walking away, not paying him any attention. You're teaching him that this behavior means fun time comes to an immediate stop and he only gets attention when he is being well behaved. You may have to do this many times before he learns the lesson, but he will come to realize that when he acts out, it means you leave, and that's not fun at all. With cats who get over stimulated, it's also important to make sure we don't play rough or use our hands or fingers as toys. Again, we want him to realize what is an appropriate toy and what is not. So use wand toys liberally and when he starts getting overly excited, back away.*

*Hope those tips help. Please feel free to let us know how it goes and if you have any other questions or concerns!*

## **Meowing At Night**

*Hello,*

*Thanks for contacting us. Meowing at night is unfortunately very common, particularly in young kittens.*

*Usually the cat just wants attention and reassurance that her humans are still around and she has not been left on her own. Cats may also get into the habit of 'crying' in the middle of the night, sometimes through boredom, but often because they may be feeling anxious. This could be due to changes in their environment, or perhaps if they've moved houses. Cats are intelligent creatures, and they can learn pretty quickly what works for them and what doesn't. So as the cat owner will go to check on the cat because she/he worries that the cat is in some form of distress, this will soon become a habit. The cat has now learned that this form of behavior works and it will get her the attention she wants. By getting up and checking on the cat we ourselves are unintentionally reinforcing this kind of behavior (our cats 'train' us to do what they want us to do!).*

*To prevent your cat from disturbing you while you sleep, try the following suggestions:*

- *Schedule a few interactive play sessions with your cat during the evening before bedtime. Try using toys that can mimic the movement of mice and birds, such as toys that dangle and wiggle. Games with ping-pong balls, soft balls and furry mice toys are great for cats who like to fetch. Play until your cat seems tired.*
- *Feed your cat a main meal just before your bedtime. Cats tend to sleep after a big meal. If your cat continues to wake you during the night for food, purchase a timed feeder that you can he'll sleep at night. This can mean toys, hidden treats, perches that allow them to look outside, or catios.*
- *If your cat is social with other cats, consider adding a second cat to your family. If the two cats are compatible, they'll probably play with each other and leave you alone at night.*
- *Playful cats sometimes unintentionally injure their sleeping owners. For instance, your cat might notice your eyes moving under your lids as you sleep and swat at your face in play. If your cat tries to play with you or wake you while you're sleeping, you might need to shut him out of your bedroom at night. If he cries and scratches at the door, you can discourage him by placing something in front of the door that he won't want to step on, such as vinyl carpet runner placed upside-down to expose the knobby parts, double-sided sticky tape, aluminum foil or a Scat Mat (available at most pet supply stores or through online pet supply sites).*

*Unless you suspect that your cat is waking you up because he's hurt or sick, don't get out of bed and attend to him. If you get up and feed your cat, play with him or even interact with him, you will have inadvertently rewarded him for waking you. As a result, he'll try harder and harder to wake you each subsequent night. Even getting out of bed to scold your cat won't work well, because negative attention from you may be better than no attention at all.*

*I hope those suggestions help. Please feel free to contact us with any other questions or concerns.*

## **Scratching**

*Hello,*

*Here are a few tips for managing a cat's natural instinct to scratch:*

*If you trim the cat's nails weekly, it will drastically help the amount of damage she is able to do upon any surface. If you don't know how to trim nails, you might ask your vet to show you how when you go for a check-up. Pet groomers can also do this for you or show you how.*

*I'd also recommend you pick up a horizontal cardboard scratcher AND a tall vertical scratcher for her. Every cat has their own preference for scratchers and you might have to try a few to find the one that works well, but most cats tend to love the cardboard variety. You can lure her to it by sprinkling catnip on the new scratcher, too. One other thing to remember is that the vertical scratcher must be sturdy enough and tall enough to not topple over whenever the cat tries to use it. Take your own kitty's size into consideration when buying a vertical scratching post.*

*If this fails, there are nail caps one can buy at large pet supply stores. They adhere with a bit of nail glue, like artificial nails for people, and they last for about 6 weeks and prevent any damage being done to any surface. They're very affordable and work really well, the cats don't mind them, and they even come in fun colors. You can check them out at <http://www.softpaws.com/>*

*Hope that helps! Please let me know if you have any other questions!*

## **New Cat Introductions**

*Hello,*

*Thanks for contacting us, and for adopting!*

*I have some tips that may help out as you introduce the two cats. Don't feel discouraged that a friendship hasn't happened yet; it can take months! Thankfully, the overwhelming majority of cats can learn to coexist peacefully if we work at it and give them some time. You'll want to keep the cats separated for the time being. Each day it's ideal to increase their exposure to one another in some small way. The first step is to let them smell one another, but not see each other. This often means keeping them in separate rooms. I recommend you take a towel or blanket and rub it all over the new cat. Then, place that towel in with the existing cat. Do the same for the existing cat, so both cats have bedding that smells like the opposite cat. When both cats have stopped reacting poorly to that smell, move forward with the next step. This may take a couple of days or a couple of weeks. If it's possible to let them smell one another under a door, this would be a great next step. It's best if they can smell each other, but not see each other. Now is also a time to start using Feliway (a cat pheromone spray that helps calm anxious kitties and can be found at any pet store or online). Spray the Feliway in the specific area you are now asking them to share, the bottom part of the door, in this case, if this scenario applies to your home.*

*You can now also start making that shared area a really fun place, by giving each cat treats in that spot, feeding them near the doorway, using catnip there, yummy canned food, etc. You're starting to teach each cat that good things happen when that other cat is around. Once the hissing, growling, etc have stopped, we can again increase exposure to one another - this time allowing sight but no physical contact. Again, spray the area with Feliway. Make the area where they can see one another the Fun Zone and feed there, continue offering treats there, etc. When they have stopped hissing and growling at the sight of one another, it's only then that they can be allowed physical contact. Start small and offer short intervals, then let each cat go back to their safety zone. Reinforce the treats and Fun Zone plan where good things happen when they are near one another. One quick note on this is to remember not to force the cats to need to eat near each other. It is not a natural behavior for cats to eat near each other, they would much rather eat at a bit of a distance from other kitties. This doesn't mean you can't feed them within eyesight of*

*each other, just make sure bowls are not side by side.*

*Very gradually, through slow exposure and through teaching each cat that the other's presence means treats and fun, both cats should relax and learn that they can share a habitat without feeling threatened. The use of Feliway should help significantly and you may want to use it throughout the whole process.*

*I hope this helps - please let us know how it goes or if you have any questions!*

## **Dog/Cat Introductions**

*Hello,*

*Many dogs and cats get along very well. Dogs who are gentle and friendly and aren't squirrel-chasing, predatory types can be great housemates with cats. Even dogs who do chase small prey outdoors can often learn not to chase or harm cats indoors once they've grown accustomed to their household cats as family members. Although you should carefully prepare and supervise your new dog, you should have little trouble integrating him into your household if he's lived peacefully with a cat before or if your cat has lived with a dog. But keep in mind that dogs and cats, like people, need time to get to know each other. If they've never seen each other before, they probably won't be instant friends.*

## **Know What to Expect**

*Dogs who have never lived with cats usually react to them one of three ways:*

- **Play**
  - *Your new dog might treat your cat like another dog and try to play with her, particularly if your dog is young and your cat is inquisitive and approaches him. If your cat is young and your dog is small, this interaction can lay the groundwork for a strong, relationship between the two. However, it's more common for cats to react defensively to an invitation to play from a strange dog—or even a new, young cat. Cats generally don't play as rambunctiously as dogs, and dogs often chase and bite during play. If your cat is older or your new dog is large, your dog's playful behavior can be even more problematic. Play between dogs and cats should be closely monitored. Playful dogs often don't respond appropriately to a cat's signals to stop, and the tension or aggression between the two can escalate rapidly, causing the cat distress and putting her in danger. Keep in mind that a dog can kill a cat easily, even in play. And a scared or angry cat can use her claws to seriously injure a dog.*
- **Prey**
  - *Unfortunately, dogs often perceive cats as prey. This is especially likely if your cat runs when she sees a dog. Your new dog might respond to your cat's movement as he would to the movement of a fleeing prey animal. He might chase and even kill your cat. Similarly, cats who have never lived with dogs will likely view them as predators and will run or become defensively aggressive.*
- **Cautious interest or avoidance.**
  - *An older or quieter dog might be intimidated by your cat, particularly if she's young or rambunctious. He might approach your cat cautiously or watch her from a distance and avoid her whenever possible. Cats who have never lived*

*with dogs generally react to them one of two ways:*

- *Cats who were raised with dogs, young or confident cats, and cats living in multicat households might accept a new dog as a safe and interesting intruder. Their reaction might be to watch the dog from a distance or approach him inquisitively.*
- **Defensive Antagonism**
  - *Many cats don't accept the introduction of new animals well. They consider other animals as intruders in their territory. And cats, unlike dogs, don't have a built-in social system that helps them to peacefully share territory. They react defensively. How to Set Up Safe, Successful Introductions It's up to you to protect your cat and set up introductions carefully so that she feels safe and has a pleasant experience getting acquainted with your new dog.*

*Here are some suggestions for making the most of introductions:*

- *Trim your cat's claws to keep the interaction as safe as possible for your new dog.*
- *Begin by identifying some treats that she likes best. Most cats prefer soft foods heavy with scent, like tuna or small pieces of chicken.*
- *Bring your cat and the treats into the room where you'll likely do your introductions. Then wait for her to look away from you. When she's not looking at you, say her name. When she looks back, quickly praise her and give her a treat. Gradually allow her to get further away before you call her name so that she has to move toward you to get the treats. Never yell or discipline her if she doesn't react to her name. After some practice, she'll begin to respond consistently because she'll learn that when she responds to her name, you give her treats. If you attempt to discipline her for not responding, she could easily associate her name with your anger—and that's the opposite of what you want to teach her!*

## **Dog/Cat Introduction Techniques**

*Before you introduce your new dog and your cat, work with your dog separately to teach or refresh some obedience skills. Two important exercises for him to learn well are a recall (coming when called) and a "leave it" exercise. When your dog has learned these skills, you can control him if he gets over-excited around your cat.*

1. *At first, confine your new dog to a room using a baby gate. Don't restrict your cat or change her environment any more than necessary. You can start to introduce your cat and your dog near the doorway to that room, with the baby gate between them.*
2. *To prepare for this first meeting, start by taking your dog outside and running him around to help him work off a bit of energy. Bring delicious treats that your new dog will love, like bite-sized pieces of chicken or cheese. Practice sit, down and stay after he's run around for a while and seems to be getting tired. Then bring him inside and put him in his room, behind the baby gate.*
3. *Next, fill your pockets with your cat's favorite treats. If your new dog is rambunctious, put his leash on him and have someone on his side of the gate to handle the leash.*
4. *Sit in front of the door and call your cat. Have your dog lie down or sit to keep him from behaving threateningly as she approaches.*
5. *When your cat comes, toss her a treat. Praise and treat your dog as well if he*

*behaves calmly in her presence. Do this several times each day for a couple of days. This way, your cat will associate your dog with delicious treats and vice versa.*

- a. If your dog overreacts to your cat and does something that makes your cat back away from him, distract him and get his attention focused on you. Avoid accomplishing this by using leash corrections. Instead, get your dog's attention by asking him to sit or lie down. Use treats to reward him for his fabulous obedience when something as interesting and distracting as your cat is nearby! Your cat should be free to approach the baby gate and get closer to your dog or to retreat if she wants to. Reward her anytime she approaches the baby gate by tossing her treats.*

## **Tips**

- *Let your cat set the pace. Never attempt to force any interactions by holding your cat, putting her into a crate or carrier or restricting her movement in any way. If she doesn't seem afraid of your dog, or if she even tries to jump over the gate to see him, you can introduce them in your living room or another large room with your dog on leash. Once you're in the larger room, make sure your cat can get away from your dog during the introduction. She should have the freedom and room to retreat, run and hide, slip beneath a piece of furniture where the dog can't follow, or jump up on something that puts her above your dog. Continue introductions until your pets interact in a calm, friendly manner. Cats often bat at a dog they accept with their claws sheathed or rub against him, and dogs respond by gently nudging back or offering a play bow.*
- *Keep your dog on-leash during these introductions in the living room and for the first couple of weeks. Allow the leash to be loose, but hold it firmly in case your dog decides to try to chase your cat. Use your recall and "leave it" exercises if your dog starts nosing or following your cat and she seems perturbed. When you ask your dog to come to you or leave your cat alone and he responds, be sure to give him a special treat.*
- *If your dog seems friendly or cautious, not much intervention on your part is required except to praise and reward your dog for his good manners and your cat for her tolerance.*
- *Be careful to watch your cat as well as your dog. One well-aimed cat paw with all claws extended can cause serious injury to a dog.*
- *Interrupt any chasing, barking or agitated behavior from your dog by using a leash to move him away from your cat. Redirect his attention to another activity, or ask him to do some easy obedience exercises for food rewards. To redirect your cat's attention, call her name and use treat rewards like you practiced before bringing your new dog home. Avoid scolding your dog, yelling at him or jerking on his leash. A positive approach is crucial because you want your cat and dog to associate each other with pleasant experiences. You don't want them to learn that everyone gets tense and angry and that bad things happen when the other pet is around. Dogs are more likely to engage in chase or prey behavior when they're tense or aroused, and cats develop many undesirable behaviors—such as urine marking, excessive grooming, hiding and aggression—when they're stressed or anxious.*
- *When you're not around or can't directly supervise, keep your cat and dog confined in separate areas of your house. Most dogs and cats can share a home in harmony once they've gradually become accustomed to each other over time. However, if your dog chases your cat or ever shows intolerance toward your cat in your presence—such as growling when she walks past while he's chewing a bone or being petted by you—keep them separated in your absence.*
- *Your dog shouldn't have access to your cat's litter box. If he does, it will be highly*

*stressful to your cat, and your dog might eat the feces and litter.*

- *To prevent your dog from eating your cat's food, consider feeding her on a high surface, like a windowsill, a dresser, a shelf or cat tree furniture.*

We hope this helps, feel free to reach out if you have any questions!

## **Litter Box Avoidance**

*Hello*

*Thanks for contacting us! 50% of litter box avoidance issues are caused by urinary tract infections, so our very first step will be to make sure the cat doesn't have a painful infection. This will be a quick trip to the vet where they'll check the urine. When cats have UTI's, like humans, it hurts to urinate so they quickly associate the box with pain and avoid it at all costs. It'll be important to rule that out first because if it is infection, all of the behavior modification we can offer won't help. Fortunately, UTI's are easy and inexpensive to treat most of the time.*

*Should you get the kitty home from the vet and there is no infection, then there are still some other things we can try:*

- *Litter boxes - if you have one cat, make sure she has two boxes. Some cats will only pee in one and poop in another, some are lazy and won't travel to the box if they're in another area of the house, etc. So give her two boxes and place them on opposite ends of your home so she always has a convenient option. Choose the largest box you can. The best rule of thumb to follow for litter box size is to pick one that is 1.5 x the length of your kitty. You also want to make sure the litter box is uncovered. Humans like covered boxes more, but cats like them far less. A covered box creates an outhouse effect inside with odors trapped inside and they can be seen as a trap for the cat as there's only one way out.*
  - *If you have covered boxes, try removing the covers. Also make sure the boxes are not next to an appliance that could kick on and scare her, like a washing machine, and away from any strong smells or anything that may spook her and make the box seem scary or unpleasant.*
  - *If you have recently changed litters, this can be enough to trigger an avoidance problem. The general rule is to find one litter that kitty likes and stick to it. They can be sensitive to smells so a very fine, clumping, unscented version is recommended.*
- *The next thing I recommend is picking up a bag of Cat Attract cat litter, which you can find at any Petsmart/Petco. This litter contains an herbal blend that is irresistible to cats and makes them want to use the box. It works GREAT, in my experience. You do not have to use it forever, just until the problem is solved. I'd try placing the Cat Attract in one box and her normal litter in the second. You'll also want to thoroughly clean all soiled areas with a product made just for cat urine. I like a brand called Anti Icky Poo that you can get online. Remember, cats can smell much better than we can so even if we can't smell anything, a cat can. So it's important to use a product that destroys all evidence of the smell.*

*Give those things a try and let me know how you make out at the vet. Please let me know if you have any other questions, too!*



## **Vet Visit Training**

*Hello,*

*Thanks for contacting us!*

*Most cats get stressed when it's time for a veterinary visit. I have known only a handful who handle it with extreme grace! Thankfully, there are ways to help your cat relax and become confident at the vet.*

### **At Home**

- *Start getting the cat used to the type of handling and touches that she will experience at the vet, such as examining the ears and mouth, feeling the hind quarters, etc.*

### **The Carrier**

- *If your cat is stressed by the sight of the carrier, try acclimating the cat to the carrier several days before the visit. Leave the carrier out in the home, open, and place treats and toys inside. Put comfy bedding inside that contains smells familiar to the cat.*
- *When your cat is confined to the carrier and you are ready to leave, a couple sprays of Feliway inside the carrier a few minutes beforehand will help calm the cat and reduce anxiety.*
- *Always put your cat in a carrier when going places. Cats are often startled by loud noises and fast-moving objects and may escape your grip and become injured.*
- *Once your cat has become acclimated to the carrier, you can start taking her on stress-free trial runs.*

### **The Car**

- *While in the carrier, place your cat in the car and start it. Reassure your cat with praise and treats until your cat becomes more relaxed. (This may take a few sessions.)*
- *As your cat becomes more comfortable with being in the car, you can start taking short rides, gradually increasing the distance until you and your cat reach the veterinary hospital. The hospital visit:*
- *Call your vet's office and schedule time to just "drop by" for a mock appointment.*
  - *Introduce your cat to the waiting area and veterinary medical team to get him/her used to the sounds and the smells of the hospital. This will get your cat to experience all of the steps of a routine visit without the physical exam.*

*It is important to remain calm and work at your cat's pace, being aware of your cat's responses. Avoid the use of punishment, either verbal or physical, because this can have negative consequences such as higher anxiety.*

*These steps may not cure all of your cat's anxiety, but with continued exposure and positive reinforcement, you can help your cat become more confident and less anxious before, during and after a visit to the vet.*

*Hope those tips help! Please let us know if you have any other questions or concerns.*

## **Chewing On Cords**

*Hello,*

*Chewing on cords or cables is not only destructive, but cats who chew cords can receive electrical shock, burns, and the damaged wires may present a fire risk to our homes. Covering wires has become increasingly easy thanks to new products on the market meant just for this. CritterCord is a plastic cord cover infused with a citrus scent that cats hate. Your cords hide safely inside and kitty has no desire to nosh on the citrus taste.*

*Bitter Apple Spray is an option if you don't mind spraying the item or area you want to deter your cat from.*

*If you are crafty, you can save a few cents by encapsulating your cords in split wire loom. A 100 foot roll is around \$10, making this an affordable option for those who have many cords to cover.*

*If you have just one area you need to deter your cat from, be it a counter, plant, or an outlet full of delicious iCables, you might consider the SSSCat Training Aid which emits a blast of spray when kitty gets near. (I've gotten rave reviews for this product keeping cats out of Christmas trees.) Other simple solutions you may have overlooked include tucking cords behind furniture, bundling cords with reusable velcro cord organizers so they aren't dangling which beg for a cat's attention, and putting away as many cords as you can when not in use.*

*Not to be overshadowed though, make sure your cat has an enriched home environment that keeps her busy enough not to want to chew on dangly cords. Give her ample appropriate play-things, rotated often to keep them interesting, interactive toys that make her think and work a little bit, and provide healthy items to chew on like cat grass. Most of the time, cats grow out of the cord-chewing phase by their second birthday, but a stimulating environment is always your best defense against a bored house cat with a penchant for chewing!*

*Hope that helps. Please let us know if you have any other questions or concerns.*

## **Pica (eating strange objects)**

*Hello,*

*There are cats that eat strange substances like cardboard, wool, plastic, rubber, paper and cotton. This is commonly referred to as "pica". Some cats chew and rip but don't eat and some cats just lick these odd materials. This behavior mainly starts in the first year of life and may coincide with the time the kitten goes to a new home.*

*Sometimes eating strange things (like telephone wires) is a cat's way of getting attention. The cat chews on the wire, the anxious owner lifts it away from the wire, and the cat has got its owner's attention. Therefore, if the cat looks at you while it is beginning to eat, turn your eyes away and walk out of the room. This takes nerve if you are worrying about the animal being electrocuted. If you do this every time the cat starts chewing at the substance, the behavior should stop – if it is an attention seeking behavior.*

*However, some cats will eat strange items when their owners are not present. One theory is that eating strange things like wool or cotton may be a disorder of the cat's natural hunting behavior which is to stalk, pounce, tear off feathers and skin, and eat. Not only does skin and feathers pass through the cat's stomach, but the cat has an instinct to do the tearing and plucking before swallowing. Some pet cats get compulsive about this part of the predatory sequence – tearing off feathers and skin bit and swallowing it all. Since ordinary cat food gives no chance of tearing and ripping, the cat looks for this somewhere else. They will tear and rip and then eat — wool, cotton, paper, cardboard, wicker baskets, etc. Some cats go out and steal soft toys, bring them home and tear them – imitating the whole hunting sequence with teddy-bear prey! The danger from eating wool and other materials is that they will get an internal blockage. It is important to put away plastic bags or items you know will be chewed, to try and minimize chances of ingestion.*

*Also, try and give the cat the chance to hunt! Many cats with pica are indoor cats, so get a fishing rod toy or just a piece of string, and try to give the cat 30 pounces on this every day. It is always worth checking whether the cat's environment can be improved, since it may be that stress may play a part in triggering or maintaining this disorder. Stress can be caused by boredom, anxiety about cats outside, anxiety about cat companions, changes in routine, moving home etc. Never punish, as this will just add to the stress. Providing a calm environment and rewarding good behavior (ie. times when not indulging in pica) may be helpful.*

*If you think there is something that triggers the cat to eat strange objects, start keeping a diary to see if it really is a stress-trigger or not, and then we can start to work through how to correct the issue that the cat is upset about.*

*I hope that info helps. Please let us know if you have any other questions or concerns!*

## **Providing Safe Outdoor Access**

*Hello,*

*There's really no way to totally ensure safety outside if allowed to roam free without supervision, but you can provide safe outdoor access through an easy pop-up outdoor cat tent, leash and harness system, or an outdoor catio system.*

*Outdoor access with supervision, or being contained outdoors in a cat tent or catio or walked on leash/harness are the only ways APA recommends allowing cats outdoors due to the multitude of dangers outdoor cats face. In addition to the obvious dangers they face like being hit by cars or attacked by predators, outdoor cats can be exposed to fatal diseases like Feline Leukemia as well as parasites like fleas, ticks, and worms of all manner.*

*Between allowing access outdoors in a safe manner and enriching the home environment indoors, we find that most cats can be quite happy and content and have all of their natural needs fulfilled. There are a multitude of ways you can enrich the life as an indoor kitty. Everything from window perches with bird feeders outside, cat towers, motion activated toys, toys that dispense treats when activated, catios, etc.*

*This is a handy link with loads of ideas:*

*<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/cat-behavior/enriching-your-ca>*

*ts-life Hope those suggestions help - please let us know if you have additional questions or concerns!*

*Thank you,*

## **New Cat is Scared/How to Bond with your New Cat**

*Hello,*

*Thanks for adopting! New cats can be very scared by big changes like a new home, even a very welcoming, loving one. It's common for scared kitties to not eat during the day, or when people are around, but they will often come out at night to nibble at their food and drink some water while they settle into a new home.*

*There are a few over-the-counter calming aids you can also try to help her settle more quickly - Bach's Rescue Remedy is a herbal supplement you put into her food and/or water, and while it's not effective in 100% of cats, when it works it works within a few days. Feliway diffusers are another option that mimic a cat calming pheromone and in my experience work very well, but it can take up to a month before you see results.*

*In the meantime, it's often easier for cats to develop a sense of security when they have a small space of their own they can explore, so I recommend keeping her in a smallish room like a spare bathroom or a single bedroom. Make sure she has easy access to all the necessities: food, water and a litter box, and that the room is in a low-traffic part of your home so that she won't be frequently disturbed.*

*If your kitty is hiding, try sitting in the bedroom (or wherever her space is) with her for an hour or so a day, doing something quiet like reading or being on the computer. Don't approach her and don't try to get her out of the hiding spot, just let her know you're nearby and let her get used to having you around.*

*Never pull your cat out of her hiding place except in case of emergency (vet visit, etc) as that's going to make her more nervous around you. Try instead to entice her to come out by giving her treats. This will help her associate you with good things and teach her that you're a friend. Try rolling a treat to her in her hiding place, then after she eats it, try rolling one a little closer to you and see if she'll come nearer to you for it. Don't reach out to pet her immediately, just let her have the treat and help her learn that nothing scary is going to happen. Do this when you're certain there will be no sudden movements or noises that might startle her. You want her to feel comfortable coming nearer to you for the treat. It may take some time for her to start coming closer, even with the treats, so it's important to have patience with her.*

*Try not to make direct eye contact with her. Cats find staring aggressive, and it may make her more uncomfortable to have you watching her. Once she is more comfortable and out of hiding, even if she won't approach you, you can try to gently catch her eye and do a "slow blink" which is a way of telling a cat that you're not a threat. Here's a Jackson Galaxy video on it that explains a little more:*

*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdLf6I8oE-0>*

*If she comes out nearer to you for the treat, you can try petting her slowly. Make sure she sees your hand, let her smell you first, and then pet her back or head. Those are the places a cat feels safest being touched--the feet and belly are going to be reserved for after you two know each other a lot better!*

*When she does start coming out of hiding with you in the house, try not to make a big deal of it. Again, don't stare at her. It's best to just sit quietly and let her explore on her own. Once she's been out a few times, you might want to try playing with her with something like a wand toy, which puts distance between you and her and might be a good starter toy for helping her warm up to you. Playing can be great for bonding, and we typically suggest trying to play with a kitty at least 10-15 minutes per day.*

*It often takes time for a cat to settle into a new home; try to be patient with her and let her acclimate at her own pace.*

*Please reach out if you have further questions and let us know how things go!*

### **Getting a cat into a carrier:**

*Getting your kitty into a carrier for transportation to the vet can be difficult. Cats typically do not like being held and the carrier is seen as a scary thing.*

*We suggest purchasing some Feliway spray and spraying that into the empty carrier 30 minutes before trying to put your cat inside. Feliway is a synthetic pheromone that mimics the calming pheromones cats naturally produce, and it's available at most pet stores and Amazon. The Feliway should help the cat relax in the carrier.*

*It is often easiest to lower your cat into the carrier from the top. Some carriers open from the top, but most open on the side. If the carrier has an entrance on the front/side, set the carrier on its end with the entrance facing up, so you can lower your cat in. Make sure the carrier is stable on its end so it will not fall over and scare or injure your kitty as you attempt this. Using one hand, hold the cat's back feet together to keep him from catching them on the carrier door, and use the other hand to hold the front feet or the scruff of the cat's neck. If you are holding the scruff, make sure you are also supporting the cat's back feet; never hold the cat just by the scruff of its neck. Lower him into the carrier. Close and lock the door, then slowly and gently ease the carrier down so it is sitting horizontally and you can carry it.*

*If you are unable to hold your kitty to put him into the carrier (too much squirming), we suggest wrapping him in a towel first, in order to keep him more contained. This can also help him feel more secure, depending on the cat.*

*We suggest leaving the carrier out and open in the house at all times, so that your cat is used to seeing it, and does not associate it only with scary things like travel or the vet's office. This will also help it smell familiar, as your cat may eventually start rubbing against it or even sleeping in it!*

*Finally, it can also be helpful to try carrier training your cat. Some cats take very well to this, and it can reduce the stress of trying to force your kitty into the carrier. The caveat is that it takes time, weeks to months, and working a few minutes daily or every other day to*

*fully train this behavior.*

*Here is a website that takes you through the steps of carrier training:*

*<https://icatcare.org/advice/how-guides/how-train-your-cat-use-cat-carrier>*

*Please let us know if you have further questions.*

## **Next Steps**

Thank you for reading through this material so far! The next step is to learn a bit about the natural behavior of cats and some general tips on how best to respond to owners/fosters when they contact us. The best way to learn these steps is to read through the Humane Society of the United States' Guide To Cat Behavior Counseling. Please read through this from page 1 through page 18.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact the team lead! Welcome to the team!