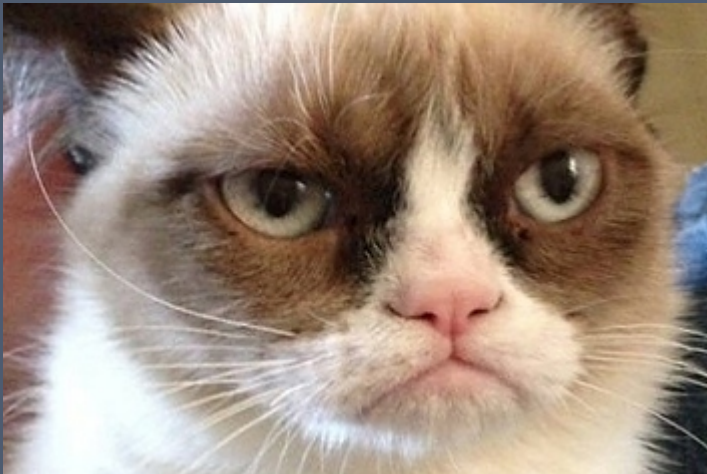


CAT SOCIALIZATION 101



Adams County Animal Shelter



Goals of the program

- To improve our knowledge and understanding of cat behavior
- Give foster parents the tools to assess and rehabilitate under socialized cats
- Improve successful adoption rate of an at-risk population of cats



What kinds of cats will we be working with?



- Feral or semi-feral kittens under 3 months old
- Adult cats with a successful home history that are fractious or scared at the shelter
- Under socialized adult cats that tolerate basic handling and are not showing human-aggressive behaviors

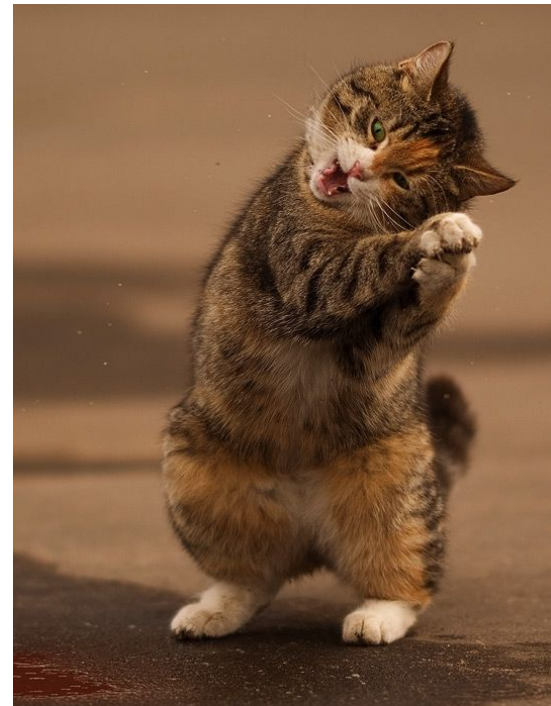
We won't be working with:

- Adult feral cats
- Under socialized adult cats that are showing aggressive behaviors
- Under socialized cats with medical needs



Body language

- Every part of the cat's body can give you more information about their mental state
- Context is important



CAT LANGUAGE



INTERESTED



FRIENDLY



ATTENTIVE



RELAXED



TRUSTING



FRIENDLY, RELAXED



CONTENT



CONFLICTED, CAUTIOUS



PLAYFUL



EXCITED



"THIS IS MINE"



ANXIOUS



PREDATORY



WORRIED



FRIGHTENED



THREATENED



TERRIFIED



SUPER TERRIFIED

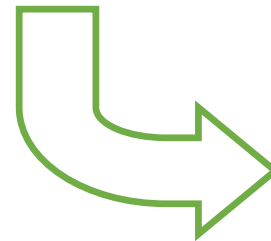


IRRITATED



DISGUSTED

What is this cat telling us?



How about this cat?

“Radar ears”

Pupils dilated



Standing with back flat

In center of kennel



You might see cues that reflect one or more mental states!



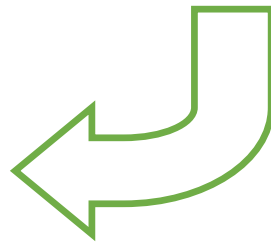
One more...

Ears back and flat

Body flat

At back of kennel

Hissing



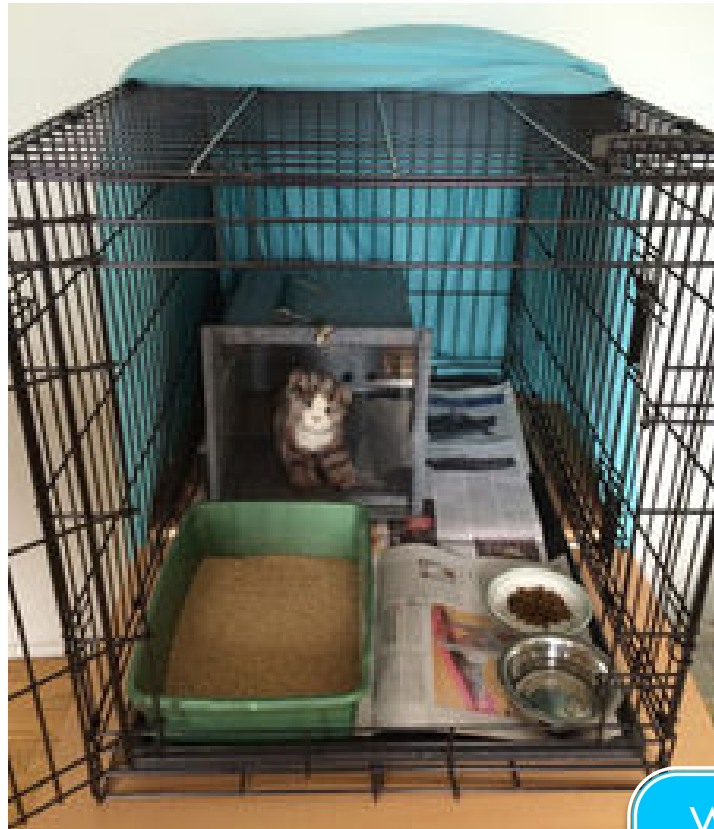
We've
pushed this
kitty too far!

What are our tools?



How to set up for your foster cat

- Pop up kennel or small, secure room
- Cover back and sides of kennel with a towel to help your foster cat feel secure
- Litterbox
- Clean water
- Dry food
- Hidey box



We're going to use wet food as our reward for interacting with us, so offer dry food only.

Method

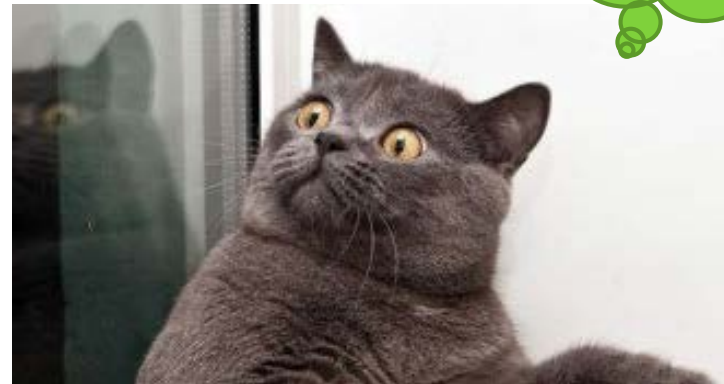
- Several short socialization sessions daily
- Using counter conditioning and positive reinforcement to change the cat's emotional response to humans
- Start slow and go at the cat's pace
- Always end the session on a positive note



Counter Conditioning

- Counter conditioning: a technique employed in animal training, and in the treatment of phobias and similar conditions in humans, in which a response incompatible with a habitual undesirable pattern is induced

Basically: changing the cat's emotional or physiological response to a situation



Positive reinforcement

- Rewarding a desirable behavior
- Increases the probability the cat will repeat the behavior
- Reward can be almost anything that the cat wants



Method



Try ignoring your foster cat and performing a quiet activity in their presence

- At first, sit quietly at the front of the kennel and do not interact
- After a few minutes, leave a small amount of wet food and exit the area
- After a few sessions, offer wet food at the start of the session and wait to see if the cat will approach

Method

- Once cat will eat wet food in your presence, try offering wet food on the edge of a spoon or tongue depressor
- Cat may not eat wet food during early sessions
 - Give them some space and try again later
 - Try different types of food to find their “jackpot” reward



Method

- If your cat is greeting you when you enter the room, you are ready to move on!
- While offering the cat wet food, gently place your hand close to the cat
- If they do not back away or avoid your hand, gently pet your cat on the head or back



Method

- Once your cat tolerates petting, you can try picking your cat up using a towel or blanket
- A “purrito” wrap can be helpful for keeping cats and kittens calm while they are being held
- Hold and handle your cat in a safe, secure room away from other pets



Wrapping your kitten in a thick towel or blanket can help them feel secure and minimize risk of scratches and bites during handling

Method

- For kittens and playful adult cats, interactive toys can be a good way to break through
- Highly social resident cats can be an “ambassador”
 - Do not introduce kittens under 8 weeks or unvaccinated cats/kittens to resident pets!
 - Keep your foster pet separate from resident pets for a minimum of 14 days
 - Supervise all interactions and keep your foster isolated when you are not home



Things to remember...

I need some
space!

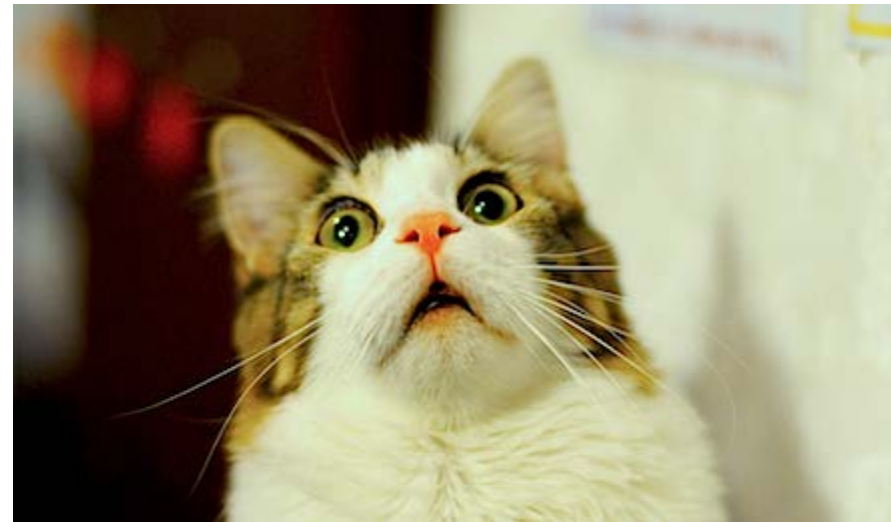


- The younger the kitten, the more quickly you will see progress
- If your cat is stressed, hissing, or swatting, you are moving too quickly
- Give your cat options
 - Allow your cat to have an escape route if they choose not to interact with you
 - Respect your cat's privacy if they are using their hiding box

Things to remember

- A positive interaction doesn't always mean touching the cat
 - ▣ Better to have no interaction than a negative interaction
- It's ok if the cat doesn't make progress every session!
- Safety first
 - ▣ Report any animal bites that break skin to the Foster Coordinator immediately
- Always end on a positive note

No need to force an interaction and traumatize your kitty



Let's try it out!

This test is
open note,
right??

