

Cat Socialization Guide

Adapted from the Denver Animal Shelter for Adams County Animal Shelter



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









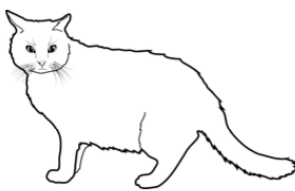

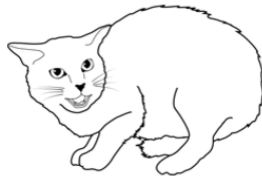



IRRITATED



DISGUSTED

Reading your cat's "body language"

Cats use different body postures to communicate their emotions. Below are some typical postures you may observe in your cat. When observing your cat, try to get an idea of its usual attitude when alone and in contact with other animals, including people. As cats become more anxious about their surroundings, they will try to avoid contact with threats. Their score may change very quickly depending on the seriousness of the threat. The highest scores usually are seen only when escape is not possible.

Score	Body Postures	Head Postures
1 Relaxed	<p>Activity – sleeping or resting, alert or active, may be playing</p> <p>Body – lying on side, on belly or sitting; if standing or moving, back horizontal</p> <p>Breathing – slow to normal</p> <p>Legs – bent, hind legs may be laid out; when standing extended</p> <p>Tail – extended or loosely wrapped; up or loosely down when standing</p>	 <p>Head – laid on surface or over body, some movement</p> <p>Eyes – closed to open, pupils slit to normal size</p> <p>Ears – normal to forward</p> <p>Whiskers – normal to forward</p> <p>Sounds – none, purr</p> 
2 Alert	<p>Activity – resting, awake or actively exploring</p> <p>Body – lying on belly or sitting; if standing or moving the back is horizontal</p> <p>Breathing – normal</p> <p>Legs – bent; when standing extended</p> <p>Tail – on body or curved back; up or tense downwards when standing; may be twitching</p>	 <p>Head – over the body, some movement</p> <p>Eyes – open normally, pupils normal</p> <p>Ears – normal or erected to front or back</p> <p>Whiskers – normal to forward</p> <p>Sounds – none or meow</p> 
3 Tense	<p>Activity – resting or alert, may be actively exploring, trying to escape</p> <p>Body – lying on belly or sitting; if standing or moving the back of the body is lower than the front ("slinking")</p> <p>Breathing – normal</p> <p>Legs – bent, hind legs bent and front legs extended when standing</p> <p>Tail – close to body; tense downwards or curled forward, may be twitching when standing.</p>	 <p>Head – over the body or pressed to body, little or no movement</p> <p>Eyes – wide open or pressed together, pupils normal to partially dilated</p> <p>Ears – erected to front or back</p> <p>Whiskers – normal to forward</p> <p>Sounds – none, meow, or plaintive meow</p> 
4 Anxious	<p>Activity – alert, may be actively trying to escape</p> <p>Body – lying on belly or sitting; if standing or moving the back of the body is lower than the front</p> <p>Breathing – normal or fast</p> <p>Legs – under body, bent when standing</p> <p>Tail – close to the body; may be curled forward close to body when standing. The tip may move up and down or side to side.</p>	 <p>Head – on the plane of the body, little or no movement</p> <p>Eyes – wide open, pupils dilated</p> <p>Ears – partially flattened</p> <p>Whiskers – normal to forward or back</p> <p>Sounds – none, plaintive meow, growling, yowling</p> 
5 Fearful	<p>Activity – motionless, alert or crawling</p> <p>Body – lying on belly or crouched directly on top of all paws, may be shaking; if standing the whole body is near to the ground, may be shaking</p> <p>Breathing – fast</p> <p>Legs – bent; when standing bent near to surface</p> <p>Tail – close to the body; curled forward close to the body when standing.</p>	 <p>Head – near to surface motionless</p> <p>Eyes – fully open, pupils fully dilated</p> <p>Ears – fully flattened</p> <p>Whiskers – back</p> <p>Sounds – none, plaintive meow, growling, yowling</p> 
6 Terrified	<p>Activity – motionless alert</p> <p>Body – crouched directly on top of all paws, shaking. Hair on back and tail bushy.</p> <p>Breathing – fast</p> <p>Legs – stiff or bent to increase apparent size</p> <p>Tail – close to body</p>	 <p>Head – lower than the body</p> <p>Eyes – fully opened, pupils fully dilated</p> <p>Ears – fully flattened, back on head</p> <p>Whiskers – back</p> <p>Sounds – none, plaintive meow, growling, yowling, hissing</p> 

Feral and Under-socialized Kittens

What are feral and under-socialized kittens?

- Kittens born to feral queens
- Kittens born to outdoor or pet cats that have limited to no interaction with people since birth
 - Mom might be perfectly social

What do they need to be successful?

- Intervention during their social developmental period- 3-7 weeks
 - Can make progress from 8 weeks-6 months old, but need more time, patience, and structure
 - After 6 months old behavior patterns are typically set
- Foster home committed to working on establishing positive associations to new people, things, and situations through fun play and food games
 - One on one time!
- Studies show that kittens that are handled from 15-40 minutes per day grow up to become healthier, more outgoing, and more explorative adults

What are some socialization tools?

- Food- Meat flavored baby food, stinky wet food, tuna
- Interactive toys
- Blinky eyes
- Wire dog crate(s)

How to be successful socializing:

- One on one time is imperative; when the kittens are together, they seek comfort from one another rather than you
- Only feed wet food or “the good stuff” when you’re working with kitten
- Start with approaching and gentle handling: approach slowly with food on a spoon, while kitten is eating very slowly and gently offer petting
 - Kitten will learn that good things happen when people approach!
 - Kitten will start greeting you
- Start off in a small, confined area – wire pop up kennel is best
- Once they’re comfortable in the space, take them out one at a time and provide good food while handling and petting
 - In a safe room! Work with under-socialized kittens in a room without too many hiding places and separate from household pets in case the kittens escape from you
 - Burrito wrap



These kittens are seeking comfort from each other and would benefit from one on one time with people.



- When kitten is no longer “darty”, bring out the interactive toys

Things to remember:

- The younger the kitten, the more quickly they progress and make generalizations
- You’re not sacrificing the kittens’ health by withholding wet food when you’re not interacting. It will be significantly easier and you will see more progress more quickly if they only get “the good stuff” when they’re interacting with you. For each session, provide a couple of teaspoons.
 - If the kitten won’t eat right away, don’t worry!
 - Have a variety of options
- If the kitten seems stressed, you’re going too quickly
- Talk softly, blink slowly
- ASK FOR HELP!

“Da Bird” and similar interactive toys are great tools to engage kittens



Fearful Adult Cats:

Many cats are fearful, stressed, and/or anxious when they find themselves in the shelter setting for a variety of reasons:

- Unfamiliar environment
- Unfamiliar people
- Presence of other animals
- Sensory overload;
 - Sights, smells, sounds
- Change of routine
 - Cats typically respond poorly to change, even under the best circumstances
- Generally under-socialized; inefficient and/or unsuccessful coping mechanisms

What do they need to be successful?

- Patience
- Stress reduction and comfort
 - Provide hiding boxes/shelter
 - Soft, preferably familiar bedding
 - Keep noise to a minimum
- Understanding body language
- Positive intervention
 - Not all intervention is positive! Better to have no interaction than a negative interaction.



Stress can cause previously friendly cats to exhibit unsocial behaviors

What are some socialization tools?

- Stinky food
 - Tuna
 - Meat flavored baby food
 - Real seafood chunks
 - Cooked chicken
 - Bacon
- Soft, blinky eyes
- Soft voice
- Gentle, comforting petting



Does this cat's body language look familiar?

How to be successful socializing:

- Go slow and be patient!
 - Remember that a positive interaction for you may not be the same as a positive interaction for the cat
 - Simply seeing and smelling you at the front of the kennel followed by a wet food treat may be a more positive interaction for the cat than a session that ends with petting
 - Pay attention to the cat's body language and cues to see what they are ready for
- Let the cat come to you; familiarize him/herself with your scent
 - Scent marking
- Allow for choices
 - Escape route
 - Don't force the cat into a corner or reach into their hiding box
 - Build trust with the cat by not invading their safe space (hiding box)
- Start out in the kennel, don't reach for the cat right away
- Approach and talk softly; blink your eyes slowly
- Audition food and/or toys; try to find the "jackpot" item
 - Stress causes anorexia (not eating)
 - Stress decreases the likelihood of engaging in play
 - Cat may not eat the food reward the first few sessions, keep trying!



What is this cat's body language saying?



Things to remember:

- Every cat is different; don't force it, take your time
- End on a positive