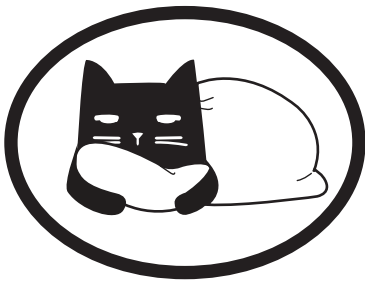


Working with Unsocialized or Fearful Cats

UNDERSTANDING BODY LANGUAGE, VOCAL CUES, HAVING PATIENCE,
and ALLOWING YOUR KITTY TO LEAD THE PROCESS

It is important to recognize that each case is unique because every kitty has different personality traits that influence their behavior. This means that you may not end up with a lap kitty but you can build trust and create a bond where you understand their needs and individual temperament. We have an arsenal of cat socialization skills and methods that you can reference here, so test them to see what resonates with your fearful feline. There is no set timeline for results when using each technique because you must work at your cat's pace without forcing progress. A cat's social structure does not inherently include people, and this is even more evident with cats who have had little or no human contact. They have only experienced a life without humans, so to socialize them, you must first earn their trust. Once you have done that, you can create a strong and loving bond that will last a lifetime!

1 PREPARATION



Planning your kitty's arrival space carefully is crucial to a smooth transition. Choose a room you can dedicate to your cat to give them a sense of ownership in their new and unfamiliar world. This will be their new SAFE ZONE.

SAFE ZONE:

COVERED BED, CARRIER or CRATE - A covered bed is a good way to give kitty a comfortable spot where they feel safe.

If using a crate or hard plastic carrier, line the furthest part of the back floor with a towel or blanket so kitty can rest there, but not hide under it. Place a towel over it to give kitty a more enclosed space. You can pull the towel back and expose more space to them as you build trust with them.

REMOVE all options where kitty can hide or use pillows, blankets or cardboard to block areas where they could seclude themselves.

It will teach them that their carrier or bed is the main "safe zone", and it also limits places they can retreat as you work with them. This will invite interaction as they feel comfortable in their space.

THE BASICS - Give kitty one litterbox, but offer two options if you are able. Provide fresh water and timed feedings to start. Give kitty a scratching post to claw and stretch their legs and back.

VERTICAL EXPANSION - Elevated space like a tiered condo or window perches allow kitty to survey their space and feel control.

WINDOWS - Allow window access so kitty can enjoy sights and sounds of their familiar outside environment.

SCENTS -- Cats are twice as sensitive to smells as humans. Here are a few ways to help their scent transition:

PHEROMONES are sprays that mimic the smells cats normally produce from their scent glands.

They can relieve stress and offer a sense of calm to cats. Spritz their room a few times a day, or plug in a diffuser.

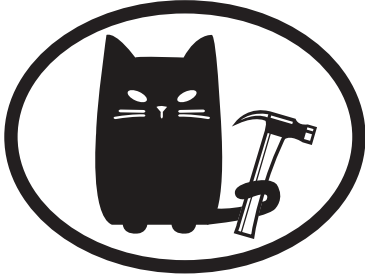
YOUR SCENT -- Leave a t-shirt or a blanket with your scent in the room so that kitty becomes familiar with you as a consistent and non-threatening addition to their world.

NOISE - Leave a radio playing softly on a talk station like NPR. This will allow kitty to become more used to human voices and "indoor noise". Pet relaxation music is soothing for them and you as well!

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2 TOOLS



The right tools can make a kitty's transition much smoother. Be prepared for trial and error using different tools to find the best combination to help your specific kitty and situation.

GLOVES may be necessary if your kitty is prone to swat, and a good glove will protect you as you start to interact. Oversized gloves can scare cats because of their size and shape, so be sure to use something that is protective but fits tightly to your hand. Find a thickly coated garden glove that can resist punctures and has a snug fit. You may not need the gloves, but it is safe to wear them as you begin to socialize your kitty. The goal with gloves is to remove them from your routine as soon as you feel safe doing exercises without them.

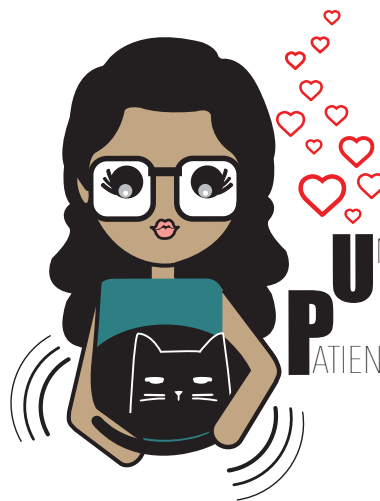
TOYS that make noise help kitty practice predatory behaviors. Pick ones that squeak, chirp, vibrate, roll, etc. **WAND TOYS** are also very good to start play therapy with fearful cats. They have a natural distance built into their design so you can play at arm's length as your cat becomes accustomed to you. Distance from unknown environmental factors helps your kitty to understand and process their world and mimics their innate behavior of surveying their territory in safety.

TELESCOPING WANDS allow manual shortening or lengthening, as kitty accepts or rejects your advances for food and play. If you don't have one, you can also simply use the non-lure end of a wand toy, moving your hand closer with time.

DOCUMENTATION is a good way to see progress and create motivation. It can serve as a reminder of how far you both have come and also be a source of inspiration for days when progress feels slow. This journey is almost never a linear progression, which means you will feel like you are taking steps backwards sometimes. Cats often go through an "extinction burst" during conditioning where behavior increases with high intensity right before it disappears.

TIME will be one of the most valuable tools you can offer your kitty. Work to hit milestones as your cat guides the rate of progress. All cats come around at varying times, so expect an individual journey. Don't be discouraged when working with your kitty – simply go at their pace and you will both be rewarded with a very strong and loving bond!

3 LET'S PURRRRRR



Now, let's
PURRRRRR!

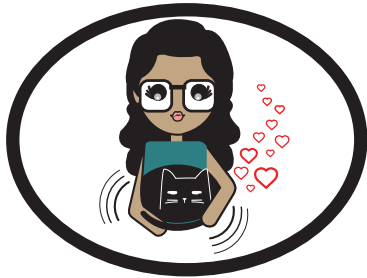
PURRRRRR
UNDERSTANDING
REMAIN CALM
PATIENCE
REWARD
RESPECT
REASSURANCE
READ BEHAVIORS
ROUTINE

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UNDERSTANDING BODY LANGUAGE, VOCAL CUES, HAVING PATIENCE, and ALLOWING YOUR KITTY TO LEAD THE PROCESS

Now you are ready to start interaction! As for your new housemate, we can guess that your kitty may be upset with this unfamiliar situation. You have placed them in unknown territory. Cats adore routines, so change is very bad for them until they understand their circumstances and make positive associations with you and their new home. It takes time and patience to build that level of trust.

3 PURRRRRR SKILLS and METHODS



You will encourage positive encounters using the following methods and develop skills that build trust. This will lay the groundwork for an affectionate and lasting connection with your kitty!

PATIENCE - Go slowly and don't feel stressed by time or progress at first. Patience is your best friend in this stage.

UNDERSTANDING - It is crucial to take time to understand the cues your kitty is giving you verbally and physically. A rule of thumb is to always walk softly and speak gently around them. Be aware of your own presence. Understand things that cause anxiety and remove them from your routine.

READ BEHAVIORS - Analyze kitty's actions and behaviors, and reinforce things they recognize as positive with rewards. Your kitty will start to know you by sight, scent, sound, and touch. Our Feline Behavior 101 literature has more details.

RESPECT - After learning a cat's verbal cues and body language, it is important to respect what they communicate to you. DON'T stare intensely at your cat - this is a predatory sign of aggression. Keep your gaze low and raise your eyes slowly to meet theirs while gently blinking to your cat. This will encourage them to see you as a friend and blink back at you. The "slow blink" is a sign of trust!

REMAIN CALM - You must try to remain calm even in high stress situations to help minimize unwanted behaviors. Try to remain still when swatted and make a squeal as a kitten would. This will help them learn boundaries. If you pull away, your cat will learn that they have made a successful move because they have forced you to retreat! So try to remain still and talk softly and soothingly to them, no matter what they do. Most times a swat is only a surface scratch, but use your judgment and seek medical attention if necessary. Continue to read their reactions to your advances and take a break when needed. You can stay in the same room and simply just move away from them to give them space. Keep talking to them and they will hear your voice as calming while they relax. You can bring a book and read aloud so they continue to hear you and get more used to you. Familiarity makes a cat comfortable, so even this kind of distanced interaction during a break is helpful and positive and it will reinforce good calm behaviors.

REASSURANCE - Your kitty is likely experiencing anxiety with this change and needs reassurance that this new situation is good to build trust with you. Positive reinforcement is a great way to let your kitty know when they have done something well. Use their name and a "praise phrase" to evoke calm when you approach. Offer treats, play, or attention to consistently reassure them and continue building a strong bond.

REWARD - Attention and food are the most common rewards for cats. With fearful cats, food can be the main motivator and a good starting point for interaction. Once you build trust, transition from food and treats to attention, play, and petting to reinforce positive behaviors.

ROUTINE - A consistent routine is very reassuring for cats. It allows them to recognize that you are a really great thing in their life that brings them food, toys, affection, and a sense of calm each day.

* ADVANCED ROUTINE NOTES

FOOD = the GREAT MOTIVATOR - Wet food is desirable for most cats and you can establish a routine easily using this.

At first, your kitty may not want physical contact, so a set feeding time will create an initial soft interface with them. If they are upset (hissing, swatting, growling, etc.) you can leave the food for them to eat on their own. As time passes and they relax, use food as a lure to interact directly with you. Their desire for food will override the fear they have for you as "unknown" because you are offering them something they need. Start with the telescoping stick or wand with wet food at the end. If they like hard treats, dot some wet food to "stick" a hard treat to the wand. Allow them to smell the treat and wand. Let them eat. If not, move it away and then back again to sniff. They may swat or pull away, but be persistent and continue trying. You can also place a small dot of food on their lip which will trigger licking. They may need to taste the food to make them want more. As kitty smells the food upon arrival, she will begin "seeking" you by moving towards the treat as you offer it. Knowing that food or a treat will be very motivating for kitty, make sure this time is on a set schedule so you teach kitty to anticipate her yummy mealtime and treats with your presence.

CAT CAMPING - If kitty is still visibly and audibly stressed after the first few days of consistent interactions, you can try a technique I call "Cat Camping". This is where you spend the night with kitty in her room, "camping" in her space so you have even more time with her. She may not be happy about you being there at first, but being mindful to have a gentle presence will invoke calm into the environment and start to naturally quell her fears of you. You can grab a sleeping bag and get your true camp on, or you can sleep on a futon or extra bed. Just the fact that you are there and bringing good things like yummy treats will make a dent in her anxiety and start to build trust. You can also throw a blanket over your legs and sit on the floor playing with a wand toy to entice kitty to run over your legs as she plays. This will seem harmless to her since she can't see your legs under the blanket and it will encourage her to get closer to you through play.

MAGIC WAND - Next, as you get closer to kitty using the telescoping wand or wand toy to deliver yummy wet treats, you can also start to pet their cheek or chin with the wand when they are relaxed. These areas have scent glands that release pheromones to mark things as "safe" to a cat. You can also try to gently touch their paw, to elicit a play strike. If they want to play, encourage them with the wand toy. Always finish the session with soothing talk and a treat. As they start to recognize you as the "one that brings good stuff", it will build trust and increase their desire to see you again. Their barriers to interaction will reduce, and they will look forward to the time they spend with you. Make actions with your hands on a consistent basis as well. Opening and closing their crate door or simply moving your hand slowly towards them will be a good test of boundaries. If they react negatively, go back one stage to a previous position with your hand to promote trust. Use your calm voice as constant reassurance that you are here to love them and mean no harm. Always offer a treat when they react positively. Continue working with the wand and moving your hand progressively closer to the end as you give them treats with it. Eventually, you will be able to replace the wand with your knuckle and offer them a treat from your hand. This could take a while, so again have patience and read your kitty at every stage. Once your kitty is comfortable with you putting your hand at their mouth to eat a treat, try to give them a light chin scratch. Pairing the moves of petting their chin with your offering of food gives them a positive association with your hand. Continue this and see how much of their head you can scratch as they eat. As you progress, move to their back next and pet them there while they enjoy their food. Once they are not afraid of your hands, you can encourage them to come to you.

EXPAND the CIRCLE - After kitty has built trust with you, bring over a cat-savvy friend to interact with them as well. This will help expand your cat's socialization skills and help you determine how much they will continue to progress. Taking this journey as it comes naturally to you both will galvanize a very strong and loving relationship between you!