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## 1. General Training Guidelines

Trust comes with practice: this is where patience comes in. Trust and confidence are about the cat knowing what you're going to do... So you want to repeat the same nice positive small interaction until the cat stops being afraid because they have learned to expect that nice positive small interaction.

### Cat Speed

Base your speed of progress on the **cat's comfort level**, different cats will progress at different speeds. There is no standard timeline.

- When acclimating a cat to a new person/place/thing you want each "step" or level of interaction to intrude on the cat's comfort zone so the cat is just slightly uncomfortable (not so stressed that there is hissing or hiding or swatting) and then stick to that level of interaction until the cat becomes comfortable with it
- Then take your next step —**This allows you to make continual progress, without overwhelming the cat** or causing too much stress.
- eg - To get a cat used to being picked up:
  - Hold the cat still by the shoulders for a few seconds, then give praise and a treat... repeat 3-4 times per day until cat is comfortable/no longer reacts
  - Lift the cat by the shoulders so front paws (only) come off the ground a few cm, then set back down and give praise + treat... repeat 3-4 times per day until cat is comfortable
  - Lift the cat so all paws come off the ground a few cm then set back down and give praise + treat - repeat 3-4 times per day until cat is comfortable
  - ...and so on
- IF cat were to hiss/swat/run+hide at any point, then you would return to a step they are fully comfortable with, and proceed with a smaller baby step next time.

- **Trust happens faster** if you go cat-speed, because you are building an additional layer of trust: the cat is learning that even if you do something unexpected, it won't be something overly stressful.

### **Give the cat choices**

- Don't sneak pets while they are eating or force them into submission.
- Always give them the treat whether they respond how you want or not. Never withhold food.
  - Try offering the treat in your hand for about 10 seconds. If no response, put it down in front of the cat and retreat.
  - They will build confidence if they feel like they are always succeeding, and once their anxiety about you subsides, it won't seem worth waiting for you to put it down

## **2. Setting Up the Space**

Cats are very territorial, and small cats are prey animals (as well as predators) so they go on **high alert in unknown territory**. Their survival instincts are telling them there might be a predator around every corner.

For this reason, cats are much more stressed in large, open, unknown spaces. More space = more potential danger. So cats should always be kept in a small, enclosed "sanctuary" space when they have been moved to a new home, especially when they don't know the people living there.

The restricted habitat allows them to explore their surroundings without constantly being confronted with new and unknown stimuli.

This can be a bathroom, spare room, or a large kennel. Kennels should always be situated on a stable surface, up off the floor and next to a wall in a "protected" location eg: in a corner, or next to furniture. You want the cats to **feel safe and have a good view of the room**.

A Feliway diffuser in the cat's room is recommended. The cat should stay in their sanctuary space until they are confident and no longer fearful of you.

### **Hiding Spots:**

Stressed cats will want to burrow and hide, which is ok, but in order for them to learn to trust you, they have to be exposed to you – if they are always hiding behind a dresser they'll never learn that you are safe or start to associate you with good things.

- Make sure any hiding spots provide a good view of the room and are reasonably accessible to you.

- A cat dome, travel carrier or cardboard box are all good options that give the cats security and privacy while still allowing them to see you.
- Kennels can be partially covered with a sheet or towel, boxes can have peepholes cut into them.

### **Provide Comfort:**

- Cats need to feel ownership of their territory:
  - Marking by rubbing their cheeks or scratching (cats have scent glands in their paws) is how they identify safe/familiar places for themselves.
  - Scratchers improve their confidence by allowing them to express their marking behaviours.
  - It's common for cats to initially have just one perch or safe spot where they are ok with petting/interacting with you... but nowhere else.
- Use environmental enrichment:
  - Place nice beds around the room and scatter treats and toys around the room whenever you go out or go to bed... This invites them out and encourages them to use their space and get comfortable in it.
  - Sunny window perches, cat trees, and warm cat beds will help cats be more relaxed.
  - Play relaxing music or talk radio will help them be more comfortable and less fearful of human voices.

## **3. Guidelines for Interactions**

### **Low-Intensity Interactions**

Let the cat observe you and get used to you with minimal stress.

- Spend time in their space reading, working on your laptop, having tea or coffee, writing, or even napping.
- Occasionally acknowledge/talk to them softly and toss a treat near them

### **Be Predictable**

- Always announce yourself before entering the room by saying hello and/or tapping on the door.
- Move slowly and calmly, and with confidence
- Give the cat words - eg "dinner," "petting," "treat" to communicate your intentions.

- Knowing why you are approaching/what you plan to do builds confidence and reduces stress.
- Incorporate **clicker training** into your regime to communicate more effectively through positive reinforcement
- Cats are easily startled by quick, sporadic movements — especially if they are uncertain or unfamiliar with their territory. Heavy footsteps and loud noises can also frighten them

### **Build Positive Associations**

- Give food or treats whenever you enter or leave the room, and after every interaction.

## **4. Body Language**

Speak in a soft, cheerful, **normal voice**.

- Cats associate loud, high-pitched voices distress calls.
- Loud, low voices are associated with aggression or territoriality.

**Keep your body relaxed** with open, non-threatening postures

- When approaching the cat or reaching out (to give a treat, etc) avoid facing the cat with shoulders square or looming overhead. Instead, angle your body off to the side so just one arm is reaching out - sideways, or even behind you.
- Avoid hunching or crouching, any position that suggests you might pounce or grab the cat.
- Get down to cat's level to interact: lie down or sit or on floor with legs crossed or straight out in front of you... or give the cat a high vantage point.

Remember **your palm is the "grabbing" surface** of your hand.

- Keep your thumbs folded across your palms when offering a treat.
- When offering your hand for a sniff, do so with your palm down or with one pointed finger.
- Initially use the back of your finger/knuckle or one pointed finger to pet.

**Avoid prolonged eye-contact**, look at the cat's mouth/chest/ears instead.

- If you do make eye-contact: blink slowly and look away.
- Sidelong glances are less threatening than facing the cat directly.
- Give 'blinkies.'
  - Cats will softly blink at another individual to show friendly intentions.

- Blink intentionally when you look at/near the cat.
- When your cat looks at you, blink slowly.
- Close your eyes for one full second, then open them slowly and immediately look away.

## **5. How to help a shy cat feel more comfortable:**

- There should be easily accessible cat rest and hiding areas in each room. Cats are often frightened of people walking/moving around.
- Feeding is a good opportunity for contact between you and the cat. Feeding the cat in a raised place (on a shelf or windowsill) can help them feel more comfortable. This way you seem smaller and less threatening, and it is easier for the cat to greet you and be pet before and after eating.
- Give the cat a high vantage point with a good view of the main area of your home. This allows the cat to watch you go about your daily life.
- Playing with shy cats can be a challenge. Some cats get scared by fast movements. Such cats often won't play games with a feather teaser, a ball or thrown toys. But there are some ways you can encourage the cat to play:
  - Play below them: When the cat lies on a high perch you can sit in a lower position below and play with cat toys by yourself. Then reach upward with a feather /toy/etc to tempt the cat - this way they will find your physical presence and movements less intimidating
  - You can try to push a CatDancer toy under a half-closed door, to tempt a shy cat to play while you're behind the door.
  - A long string tied around your foot encourages a shy cat to chase you as you move around the apartment. Approaching from behind you is easier for the cat than running towards you.
  - Give the cat interactive toys so they can play without you
  - A laser pointer is another good option for a shy cat