

SHELTER CAT ENRICHMENT

Enrichment in shelter settings is incredibly important for cats. Keeping cats stimulated mentally is as needed as caring for their physical needs. Providing enrichment for cats and kittens in shelters can help decrease stress and unwanted behaviors that result from stress. It can also help to decrease illness. Happy and healthy cats are more likely to become adopted and stay in long term homes.

PLAYTIMES

Using cat dancer and/or feather wand toy to promote appropriate play. This is a great outlet for cats to let out predatory behaviors, gets cats moving around, and build confidence. Just like us, not all cats love the same wand toys so try a few to see what the cat enjoys. Toys should be provided in their cages to stimulate self-play as well.

- ✓ Play is crucial in keeping cats happy and healthy
- ✓ Play behavior is a way for cats to exercise their hunting instinct. Toys that mimic predatory behavior, such as interactive wand toys, are a great way to not only encourage play, but for cats and humans to bond.
- ✓ Puzzle toys keep cats mentally challenged.
- ✓ Self-Play: provide a variety of toys in the enclosure and rotate them / develop a novel toy program
- ✓ Scheduled daily/weekly play times out of cage

ENRICHMENT IDEAS

When providing enrichment, remember to always provide your cats with variety and choice and see what they like best. Lastly, the types of enrichment you can offer your cat is only limited by your imagination, so have fun with it!

PAPER TOWEL ROLL PUZZLE TOYS: Cut a paper towel roll in half, fold in the ends and cut a few small to large holes, then place in treats. As cats begin to use these more, cut smaller holes to make them more challenging for the cats!

WATER BOTTLE PUZZLE TOYS: Take empty water bottles, remove the wrapper and cut a few small to large holes. Place treats inside! You can leave the lid on or off to increase the difficulty.

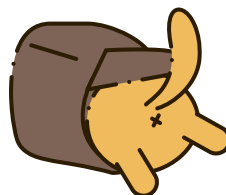
BOTTLE CAP "KONGS": Take bottle caps and fill with liver paste and/or chicken baby food, and freeze.

PLASTIC EASTER EGGS: Cut hole(s) and place dry or wet food inside



CRINKLE PAPER BALLS: Place catnip and/or treats (wet, dry or both) on a piece of paper and crumple into a ball.

LUNCH PAPER BAG/PAPER BAG: Put catnip or treats inside. They can explore, pounce, and kill (destroy the bag). It's a great hiding space and a fun toy all at the same time! Also try catnip covered toy mice inside the bag, this satisfies a natural urge to hunt and stalk.



BRUSH AND PETTING: Great for human-animal bonding and good coat and skin health, but also great ways to enrich a cat's life. Make sure to identify the kind of touch the cat appreciates. For example, cats rarely like their belly rubbed.

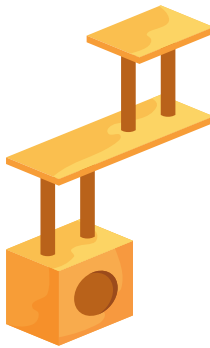
TOY ROTATION: be vigilant and rotate toys as often as possible. Each rotation is like getting a new set of toys, which brings excitement back to play and reduces boredom. The cats will be so much better off for it.



OLFACTORY ENRICHMENT: Placing a small amount of a scent in paper ball toys, boxes, bags, etc. Scent signals are an important part of cat communication and exploration. Cats exposed to new odors are more active and exploratory. Catnip, silvertop, cat grasses, safe houseplants, herbs (cinnamon, cardamom), toys with owner's scent and pheromones such as Feliway, all help encourage exploration and play. Again, switching the scents up and presenting them randomly, add surprise and delight during daily exploration.



SCRATCHING: Scratching is a normal behavior that serves many functions. It relieves anxiety; a form of exercise; feline nail care; strengthens and stretches their muscles; marking behavior and communication.



CARPET REMNANTS: Use a hole punch to make a hole at the top and bottom, then attach to cages with plastic shower hooks or zip ties

STRETCH AND SCRATCH: cardboard scratchers made to fit cages (stretchandscratch.com)

VISUAL ENRICHMENT: Interactive cat toys, placing a birdfeeder in a window, cat videos, a perpetual motion cat toy in an area outside of cages (panic mouse, flingamastrung), blowing bubbles, pinwheels, mobiles, etc.

PERCHES: Vertical spaces are important for cats. Here are some examples of vertical spaces that can be used in shelters

- Elevated cat beds (PVC)
- Desktop file holders
- Hammock
- Baskets attached to cages with zip ties
- Kuranda kitty cot
- Cat Carriers
- Hide, Perch, and Go box

HIDING PLACES: Every cat needs a place to hide. Hiding is a way for cats to cope with environmental changes and stressors. Boxes reduce stress and anxiety, give the cats some control of their environment, provides a resting place, provide insulation and preserves body heat. A box also provides them with a familiar scent and can be sent home with them once adopted.

- Bottom of carrier
- Box, Paper bag, Shoe box
- Cage curtain, towel over cage
- Hide, Perch, and Go box

CAT FRIENDLY LITTERBOX OPTIONS FOR CATS

MARKER TRAINING: Clicker training (using a clicker or word “yes”) is very beneficial for cats in a shelter setting. Clicker training can help make a cat more adoptable, prevent behavioral problems, and help cats be more comfortable and confident in their new home. With cats being more confident and comfortable, they are more likely to be interactive with their adopters and less likely to hide and exhibit behavior new adopters do not want, which will keep them in lifelong loving homes. It can also help keep cats enriched while at the shelter, and they can be taught behaviors to make them easier to handle for shelter staff as well.

CLICKER TRAINING: can help resolve common behavioral problems including counter surfing, introducing a new cat to resident cat, and socializing shy cats. Lastly, clicker training at the shelter helps to provide positive, consistent and predictable human-cat interaction which is crucial.

TARGETING: A great foundation behavior to teach is targeting. Targeting is the process of teaching a cat to touch an object, the target, with a part of her body, most often her nose or paw. This can be easily taught with a few 3-5-minute sessions a day while a cat is in a cage, which offers wonderful enrichment. Once the cat knows this behavior, it can be used to move a cat from one cage to another, go into a carrier, and can be built upon to teach many other behaviors. Targeting can also help cats overcome fear and gain confidence around scary objects or people.

BENEFITS OF ENRICHMENT

- Provides needed mental and physical stimulation
- Improves quality of life
- Gives the animals life skills that help them stay in their homes
- Decreases stress and boredom
- Decreases the rate of illness
- Decreases unwanted behaviors
- Decreases length of stay
- Increase adoptions

ROUTINE

It's important to provide positive and consistent social interactions but also to do your best to maintain a consistent routine when it comes to your cat's schedule, which includes feeding, playtimes, etc. Cats are extreme creatures of habit who thrive on routine.

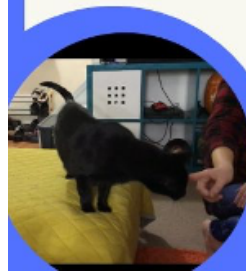
Do your best to be predictable and as consistent as possible (i.e. clean litterboxes, feed, play sessions around the same time daily)

- ✓ Provide positive, consistent and predictable human-cat interaction (Learn individual cats' preference for contact – note it for others (does he love being brushed, picked up, sitting on lap, played with etc.)
- ✓ Picnicking- Choosing a high value treat a cat likes and at the same time every day, simply place the treat in the cage and walk away. This is a very simple step that helps to create positive and consistent human interaction.
- ✓ Clicker Training
- ✓ Always assessing body language, listening, and respecting the cat

HOW TO GREET A CAT

Using Proper Cat Etiquette
#ASKFIRST

- Assess the cat's body language
- Move calmly and speak in quiet tones
- Extend out finger or soft hand
- If the cat rubs into you, that is them saying, "please pet me"
- If the cat sniffs and walks away, no insult to you, but they do not want to be petted right now
- Cats prefer gentle stroking on their head, shoulder, and cheek area
 - Let the cat initiate, choose, and control the type of human contact
 - When the cat ends the interaction, do not pursue more
 - Avoid direct eye contact



RESOURCES

Fear Free/Low Stress Handling	fearfreeshelters.com
International Cat Care	icatcare.org
Chirrup and Chatter	chirrupsandchatter.com
Considerate Approach	youth.be/wjLwxmMuv7s

ABOUT ME



Tabitha Kucera is an elite fear free and low stress handling certified RVT, CCBC, and KPA-CTP. She is the owner of Chirrup and Chatter cat and dog behavior consulting and training. She loves educating through writing, behavior consulting, and lecturing on all things cats including fear free, kitten socialization, feline friendly handling, working with fearful animals, and more. She enjoys the opportunity to help people better understand and relate to cats.



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