

Protocol for Training Cats in the Shelter

Training the shelter cats not only makes them more adoptable but also provides them with socialization with humans and mental stimulation.

Positive reinforcement methods will be used to train the shelter cats. This involves rewarding the behavior you want and preventing or ignoring the behaviors you don't.

It is not acceptable to use physical punishment of any kind on a shelter cat. The cats are under enough stress in this environment and the addition of negative experiences with their caretakers will increase the stress.

Methods

Marker-based training is the most effective way to train any animal, including a cat. You can use a clicker or the word “click” as your marker signal. We use the marker signal to “mark” the exact behavior that we want to reward. Rewarded behaviors will always be repeated. While you can do some Pavlovian conditioning to get started – pairing the sound of the marker signal with the treat – this is not always necessary because after the cat hears the click and immediately receives a treat a few times she/he will learn the association. Very quickly the cat learns “what I did when I heard the click earned a reward” and then will repeat that behavior.

Training Sessions

Training sessions should be short (no more than 5 minutes at a time) but can be repeated several times throughout the day.

You can train the cats in their cages, in their colony rooms, or in a small visiting room or office.