

Stress Reduction Protocol for Cats

The shelter environment is very stressful for the cats and efforts should be made to reduce stress whenever possible.

Intake

During intake cats should be placed inside a carrier or box while their owner is interviewed. The carrier should be covered with a towel to prevent cats from seeing the goings on of the intake room. The carrier should also be on a counter or chair, not on the floor. The below picture shows a carrier that is not sufficiently covered - the entire carrier needs to be covered.



All efforts should be made to keep the cats away from the dogs. The best option is to have separate cat/dog intake rooms. If this is unavailable - scheduling intakes will prevent cats and dogs from being in the intake room at the same time. If this is impossible, make sure to follow the above instructions.

Cats should be settled into their cages as soon as possible. **It is imperative that EVERY incoming cat is provided with a hiding box. If this is not possible, a towel should be hung on the cage door.** Hiding is the best coping strategy cats have to deal with stress. Having a place to hide immediately will help the new cats adjust to the shelter environment.



Every cat should be provided with soft bedding in their cage.



Efforts should be made to make the morning cleaning process as quiet as possible. This is a hectic time made worse by slamming doors, loud music or yelling.

Cats feel better with predictable routines. Try to make sure the daily maintenance is performed roughly the same time each day.

Cats feel better in familiar settings with familiar scents. Do not move the cats to new cages each day. Daily spot cleaning of the cage rather than removing all items for complete disinfection is the current recommendation from shelter medicine veterinarians. If the entire cage must be cleaned, leave at least one item with the cat that carries their scent. It is recommended to hang a 'rubbing cloth' (wash cloth or strip of fleece) on the inside of the cage door that will pick up the cat's scent. This cloth can then stay with the cat for the duration of its stay for maintenance of a familiar scent.



Cats are very sensitive to vibrations. Never place a radio on top of a bank of metal cages, as the vibrations will be felt by every cat housed there.



Cats feel more comfortable being up high. Provide the caged cats with some kind of platform to perch on. Adding a perch to the cage in addition to a hiding box also allows the cat some choice, which is important for the cat to feel an element of control while living in captivity.



Soft music should be played in the cat rooms during the day at one-hour increments with one hour of quiet in between. Certain music has been shown to reduce stress in animals. The music should be turned off completely at night, as cats need quiet to sleep.

Calm human interaction can go a long way to reducing stress in socialized cats. Provide the cats with daily social interaction.



Feliway - a synthetic feline facial pheromone can be used to reduce anxiety in cats. A plug-in diffuser can be used in small cat rooms while the spray version can be used in larger rooms. Spray the Feliway on a washcloth or stuffed animal and place it into the cage of any cat exhibiting signs of stress.



Time outside of the cage is important for stress reduction. Each caged cat should be allowed at least 15 minutes out of the cage, at least twice a week.

