

Pickens County Animal Shelter

Cat Friend Volunteer Manual

Cleaning Up

Volunteers and staff must work together to keep the cats' environments clean and healthy. As you are socializing with cats please note if their cage is in need of some spot cleaning and notify a staff member.

When socializing more than one cat during a volunteer shift precautions must be taken between cats to minimize disease transmission. Please wash your hands and forearms in the bathroom with antibacterial hand soap between each cat. The use of hand sanitizer is recommended but not always entirely efficient.

When using the Get Acquainted Room to socialize cats, please sweep the room after your shift is over. If a cat has been sneezing or showing other signs of illness please notify a staff member so the floor may be mopped before another cat is set down on it.

Please use your best judgment and ask a staff member if you have questions or concerns.

Get Acquainted Rooms

The fenced pen area can offer shelter cats a great opportunity to run and play. However, cats may not be left unsupervised in Get Acquainted Rooms if at all possible.

Priority use for Get Acquainted Room is for potential adopters and staff. Please vacate these areas immediately if asked.

Interacting with Members of the Public

Volunteers are asked to refer members of the public who have questions or would like to meet adoptable cats to the trained staff at the front desk. Members of the public should never be allowed to meet cats while volunteers are socializing them. This is for the safety of the public and the animals.

Choose Your Cat Wisely

Deciding who to socialize

Not every cat is suitable for socialization. Please use the following guidelines when selecting a cat to socialize.

- Never wake a sleeping cat. Rest is an essential component to a cat's ability to maintain its immune system and is also a coping mechanism used by over stressed cats.
- Cats who are fearful or stressed may crouch in a corner or shy away from humans. Forcing these cats out of their cages can not only be stressful for them but extremely dangerous for both the person and the animal. The cats may benefit from gentle attention given in their cages but should not be forced to come out.
- Kittens should be socialized BEFORE socializing any adult cats during a volunteer shift in order to avoid spread of disease to the susceptible immune system of kittens.

Keeping our cats Healthy

Disease transmission is a huge concern for shelter cats. It is estimated that approximately 70% of cats are carrying viruses.

Although many cats will never show symptoms of these viruses, increased stress levels lead to decreased immune systems which cause the viruses to become active.

Please keep our kitties healthy with the following guidelines:

- Wash your hands and arms with soap and water in the bathroom between cats. (unless socializing in an entire open cat room - then just wash between rooms)
- Do not “say hello” to all of the cats by putting fingers in each cage or pressing up against their cages.
- Do not socialize stressed or sleeping cats.

Clean Get Acquainted Rooms Between Cats

- Toys should not be moved from room to room or cage to cage.
- Consider them contaminated materials that must only be used by the same cat or group/room of cats.
- Place used grooming brushes or combs in the wash room to be sanitized after each cat. Cats should also never be forced to groom if it is stressful for them.
- Never socialize cats from multiple cages –only bonded pairs may interact together.

It's About Time

How long you spend with each cat is up to you, but ideally you should spend 20-30 minutes with each one. Remember our goal is to reduce stress and spending a larger chunk of time with each cat does just that! If you are socializing a group of cats in an open cat room you may want to spend a larger portion of your shift with them to ensure that each cat gets individual attention.

Some cats may begin to exhibit stress in the Get Acquainted Room, so take your cues from the cats. If they aren't doing well, return them to their cage. You may be able to continue socializing them later or at their cage. Just stand next to them and talk softly for a while so they become associated with positive experiences with people.

Many volunteers come throughout the week and staff spends time socializing cats as well. Please do not attempt to social every cat during your shift, this increases the spread of disease and the cat's stress levels – a deadly combination!

Cat Guidelines

Cats are not dogs! They respond to stimuli in different ways and have different ways of showing their stress and happiness.

Volunteers are critical in helping them to be happy and well-adjusted during their stay here. A few tips on general cat behavior and on cat behavior in a shelter environment can be helpful in learning to handle them properly.

From the familiar house cat to the 500-pound tiger, felines are social animals. Domestic cats form bonds with their owners, as well as with other cats and species in their household.

Cats communicate by smell, body language and voice. When a cat bumps its head against you, it is depositing its odor on you and, in effect, “claiming” you as its own.

Cats have especially expressive body language. Arching the back and puffing up the tail are warning signs: The cat is telling you to stay away! Hissing, flattened ears and backing away are defensive signs. Vocal communication also clues us in to what a cat is thinking. A hissing, growling or spitting cat should not be handled. Purring is generally associated with contentment, but cats often purr when they are stressed. Sick or injured cats also sometimes purr.

When cats first arrive at the shelter, they are often stressed. They are in an unfamiliar, frightening environment. Volunteers can help reassure the cats and put them at ease. Speak softly and keep your voice even. Pet them gently. Move slowly around them. Handle them firmly and with confidence, but carefully. If you are assigned to work with a cat that is exhibiting frightened behavior, leave it alone and report this to the staff. They will give it time to calm down and will work with it later.

Once cats have been here a while and have calmed down, they often seek attention. Do not underestimate how important you are, if you spend time grooming and petting cats. Never go home thinking that you didn’t do anything important, because you “just played with the cats.” What you did is very, very important!

Reinforce good behaviors. Don't tolerate things that you might tolerate from your own cats (play biting, etc.).

- Discipline by tone of voice
- Keep your volume level low. Don't get excited. Monitor visitors, especially children, for too much noise or activity.
- If a cat escapes from its cage or the free-cat room, follow it and say "loose cat" as you walk (not run). Others will join you in catching the escapee.
- Pay attention to the cat's body language. Cats aren't always predictable.
- Take health precautions. Obey signs regarding sick rooms; wash hands often; don't touch eyes, etc.
- Report observed behavior or health problems, including fur mats, excessively long claws, etc.
- Wear old clothing. Watch out for earrings and contact lenses.
- Fill water bowls, if empty.