

Bonus Q&A from the 6/18/13 ASPCApro Webinar

Stress Reduction and Enrichment for Shelter Cats

Presented by Kelley Bollen Kelley Bollen, MS, CABC, Animal Alliances, LLC

Q: Is it a good practice to use sound machines to drown out loud noises?

Kelley: I would imagine that the sound machines would work nicely.

Q: Most of our cats go directly into general population on the adoption floor... what has been the response to cage covers from the public walking through for adoptions?

Kelley: I think it's a better idea to have a hide box on the adoption floor. Visitors will likely pull the towel back and disturb the cat who is trying to adjust.

Q: Is there a time that it is appropriate to remove the hide box to encourage the cat to receive attention and become more social?

Kelley: The cats who are hiding alot NEED to hide. If you take the box away you will increase stress. What we find is that if the cat has the option to hide when feeling overwhelmed they are more likely to come out and be social when things are calm. If the cat continues to hide for weeks and weeks perhaps its more humane to get him/her out of the shelter and into a foster home.

Q: [Hide, Perch & Go boxes are no longer available; any insights?] I just tried to order a couple of months ago and the distributor says they are no longer being made. I was very sad to hear that since we had used them since 2009. Has anyone actually ordered them recently?

Kelley: I was just contacted by a company who makes nice hide boxes that are also strong enough to be perched on. They are called Shelter Den. The company is C.Specialties Inc and their website is www.cspecialties.com. They are nicely priced too.

Q: I was wondering if there was a light level that was acceptable? Or if complete darkness is necessary. We need data to get our municipal system to move. We've been asking them to eliminate night time lighting for years!

Kelley: There is no data available that I know of regarding this subject. You should do the best you can to reduce the light at night and if you can't reduce it, cover the cages. I work with several shelters that can not reduce the night lights because of the fire code so they just cover.

Q: How do you get them out (for enrichment) when there are 60 or more cats? [referring to the 4 on the floor program]

Kelley: That's why I say 2 times per week but even one is better than none. With 60 cats - if you get 10 cats out each day for 15 minutes or so, you could do it.

ASPCA: Check out these [enrichment ideas](#) from our blog.

Q: We did the out of the cage for a while but a lot of our cats started coming down with upper respiratory so we stopped.

Kelley: You have to clean the areas where they go to prevent the spread of disease. That's why so many shelters resist this enrichment. But again, if you reduce the stress, you reduce disease. But cleaning is always important.

Q: Our shelter didn't like the cats to have toys in the play room, because of URI. What is your thought on this? I think mental health is more important, and just wipe off the toys.

Kelley: Toys can be sanitized.

Q: What do you use to sanitize? Anyone ever try steam?

Kelley: I do not have any experience with steam but I would imagine it would not work to kill germs that cause the illness in the shelter. Steam adds more humidity so it seems to me that it would increase germ growth. I would contact one of the shelter medicine programs for this answer.

ASPCA: See our webinar recording [Guidelines for Shelter Sanitation](#), presented by - Kate Hurley, DVM, MPVM, University of California—Davis; Natalie Isaza, DVM, Merial Clinical Assistant Professor, University of Florida

Q: At our shelter we set up pens for our rabbits on the floor of our cat show room about once a week in order to give our rabbits some enrichment - we noticed our cats watch the rabbits and seem very stimulated by them - do you think that is okay? Do you think it's the same concept as the bird feeder?

Kelley: The cats would love it but not so nice for the bunnies. So it would depend on if the rabbits can see the cats loaming over them. Not nice to put a prey species in with their predator.

Q: Anyone have a formal feline enrichment plan at their shelter? I've been trying hard to get one together, but limited time & other responsibilities

Kelley: I think a couple of people in the chat offered you some resources on this. I can send you what I have if you email me at kellybollen@animalalliances.com.