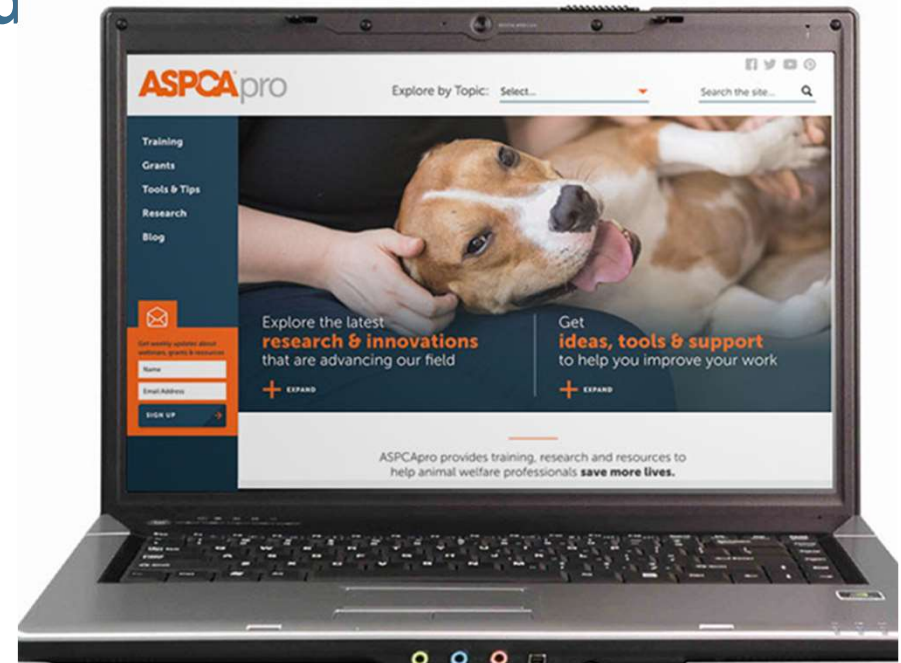


How to Help and Ultimately Adopt Out Undersocialized Kittens

Enjoy the music!

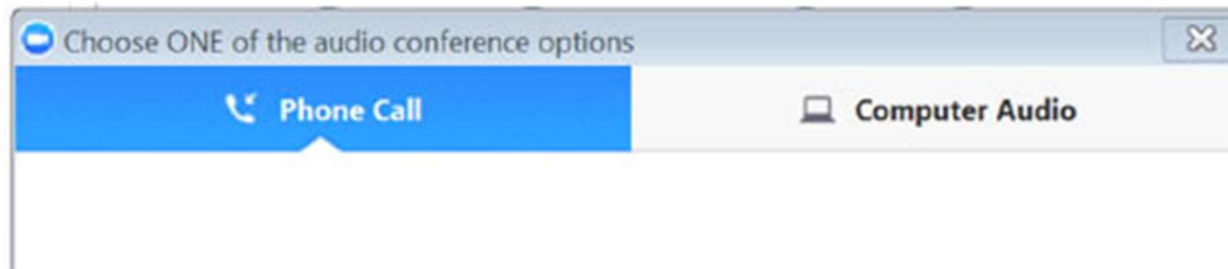
- The webinar will begin at its scheduled time.
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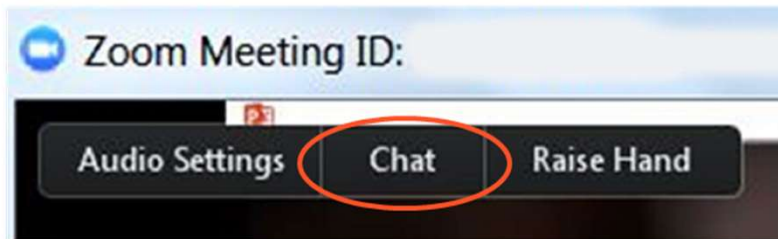


How to Adjust Your Audio

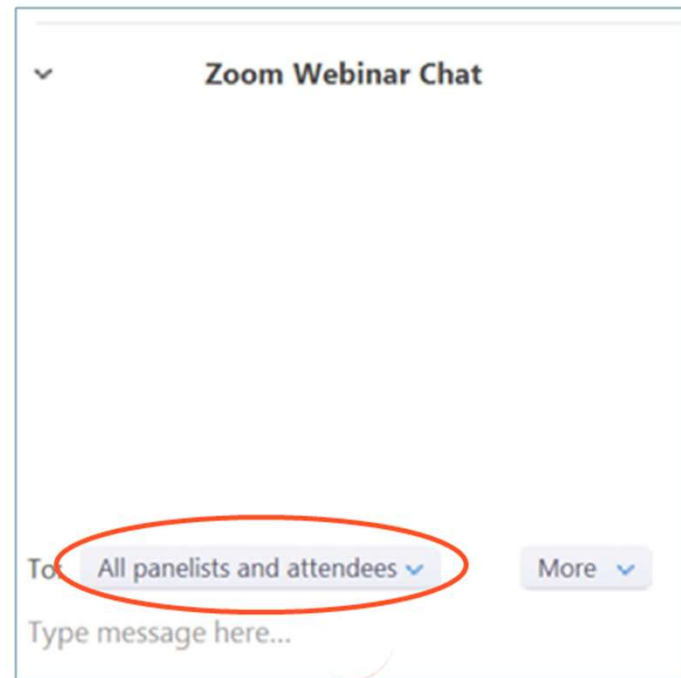
1. Select “Audio Settings” at the bottom of your screen.
2. Choose whether you’ll join using computer audio or your telephone. We recommend computer audio.



How to Chat



1. Select "Chat" at the bottom of your screen
2. In the chat window, select "All panelists and attendees" to share your message with everyone in attendance



How to Submit Your Questions

1. Click the Q&A button at the bottom of the screen
2. In the box that appears, type your question
3. Moderators and presenters will respond either during the webinar or in the Q&A session toward the end of the session



Presented by:



Adi Hovav

Behavior Manager, ASPCA Adoption Center



Gemma Smith

Administrative Manager, ASPCA Kitten
Nursery - NYC



How to Help and Ultimately Adopt Out Undersocialized Kittens

Gemma Smith
Administrative Manager
ASPCA Kitten Nursery

Adi Hovav
Behavior Manager
ASPCA Adoption Center



Agenda

- Foster operations during COVID
- Tips for intake and foster placement of undersocialized kittens
- Training fosters to use reward-based methods to socialize kittens
- Adoption tips for matching fearful kittens with loving homes



**ASPCA
Kitten Nursery**

Current avg in foster at one time:
150

Intake from
municipal
shelter & the
public



Send to foster
ASAP



Adoption at
6-8 weeks

Seasonal facility open from April – November

Foster Operations During COVID

- Virtual orientation and training
- Digital foster packet
- DocuSign paperwork
- Limited contact for pick ups and recheck appointments
- Adjusted vaccine schedule
- Automated surveys for supply refills



Behavior Check-in Survey

1. Are you able to pet the kitten?
YES/NO
2. Are you able to touch him/her without any hissing, growling, swatting or attempts to bite?
YES/NO
3. Are you able to handle (pick up/hold) the kitten without any hissing, growling, swatting, or attempts to bite?
YES/NO
4. Does the kitten engage in interactive play (e.g. chase a wand toy)?
YES/NO
5. Does the kitten seek out physical contact (e.g. climb into laps, nuzzle hands) with you or other members of the household?
YES/NO/SOMETIMES
6. When in a playful mood, does the kitten scratch or bite at hands, feet, or other body parts?
YES/NO/SOMETIMES
7. If you have other pets, is the kitten getting along with them?
YES/NO/SOMETIMES/NO OTHER PETS
8. When visitors come over, what does the kitten do?
HIDES ALL THE TIME/DOESN'T HIDE BUT DOESN'T APPROACH/GREET/N/A

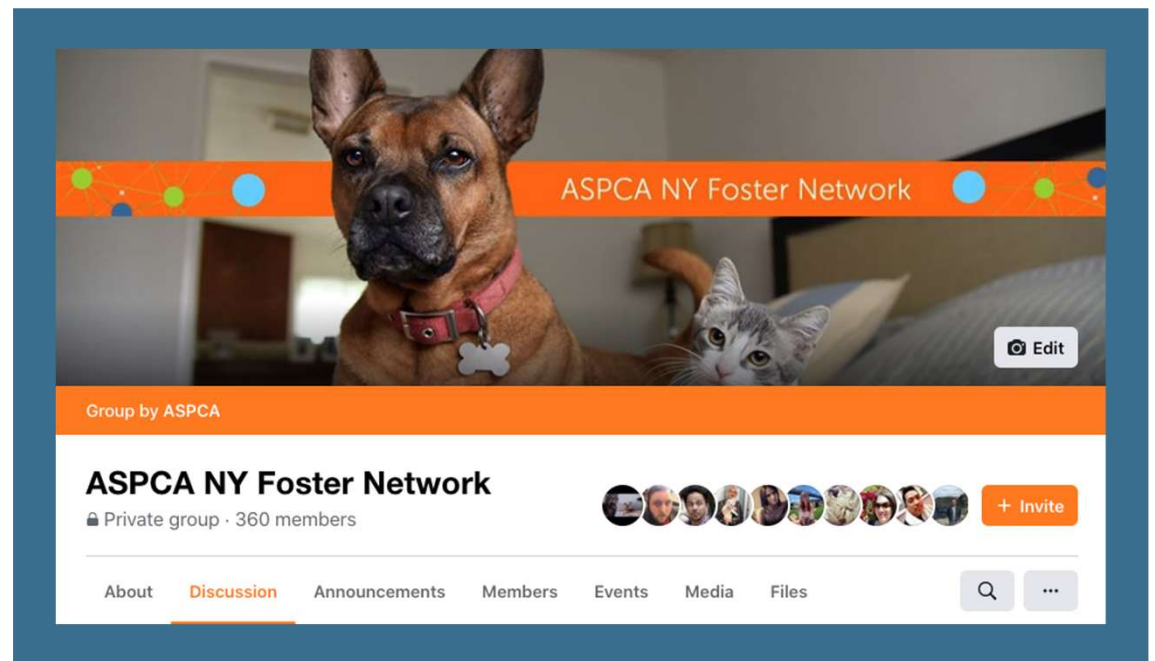
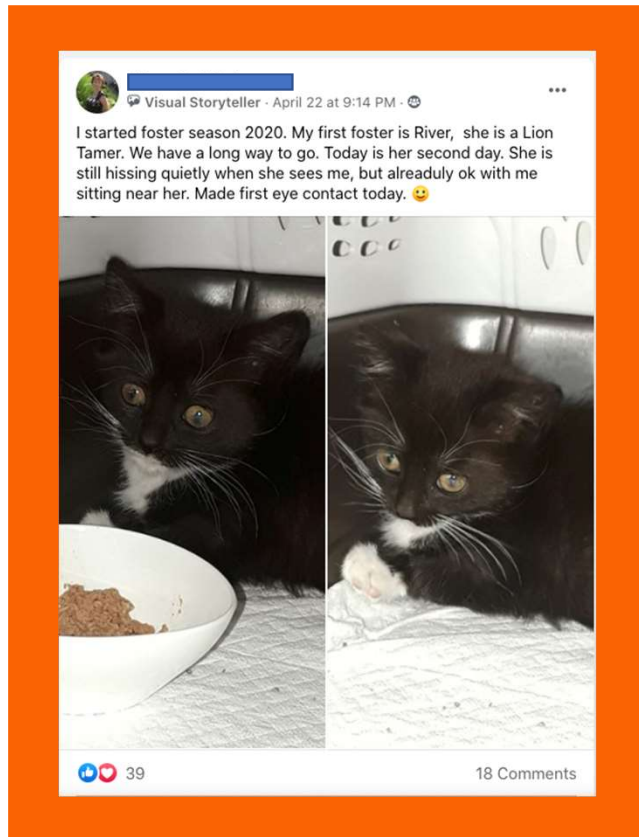
Communicating with Fosters

How are the kittens?

- Ask about common signs of illness
- Feeding Schedule/Appetite
- Current Weight
- Behavior update
- How is the foster doing/feeling?
- Does the foster need anything? Supplies? Support?



Creating a Foster Community



Virtual Foster Resources

- Training videos and handouts
- ASPCA Pro - COVID Information Hub
 - Tips for living with intact cats
- DIY enrichment and general care information on ASPCA.org
- Fear Free shelter module



Lion Tamers

- Focus on undersocialized kittens
- Goal: live good lives as companion pets
- Requires:
 - collaboration among teams
 - training and ongoing support for fosters
- Foster pre-reqs:
 - Quiet home
 - Cat experience
 - Ability to take and share video
 - Time commitment
 - Helper cats – ideal but not essential



Socialized or not?

- Difficult to tell the difference in a shelter environment
- Undersocialized kittens have had either no experience or negative experiences with people during the sensitive period (2-7 weeks)
- Socialization is not just exposure



Fear Response: Flight, Fight, Freeze



***“Flight”:** run away
(first option)*



***“Fight”:** defensive*



***“Freeze”:** immobile,
shut down*

Intake Process

- Capacity for care
- Age
- Medical considerations
- Fear Free
- Reporting and tracking behavior



What about litters?



What about litters with mom?



Sheltering Tips

- Hide box
- Low-traffic area
- Synthetic pheromones
- Drive-by treats
- Laser light play
- Small, quiet toys for self-directed play



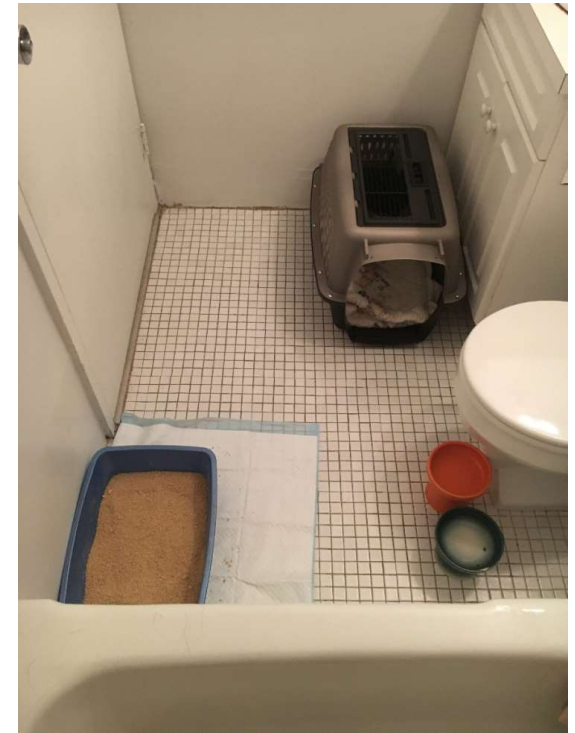
Setting Up Home Base: Security and Choice



Use a towel to
prop the carrier
door open



Keep toilets and
windows closed, and
toiletries put away



The First Few Days

- Confinement to home base
- Extra tasty treats after cleaning, passing by
- Provide daily care (food, water, clean litter)
- Decompression: less really is more



Myth vs. Fact

Myth: if you just hold them, they will come around

Fact: traumatic to be exposed to something scary without any option to escape, learned helplessness



The Science of Behavior

- Classical counterconditioning – changes the underlying emotion from negative to positive
- Desensitization – gradual exposure without triggering negative response
- Operant Conditioning – learning through consequences, positive reinforcement



The Learning Brain and Stress

Signs of the **high stress zone (no learning happening)**

- Hissing, growling (fight)
- Appear “calm” or “mellow” (freeze)
- Running away (flight)
- Huddled in litter box
- Increased respiratory rate
- Wide eyed with dilated pupils or eyes squeezed shut
- Inconsistent appetite
- Not engaging in play

Stay in the **low-moderate stress zone**

- Tense but still interacting
- Measurable progress
- Moving around
- Recovers quickly if becomes scared
- Normal elimination habits and good appetite



What is a reward?

Rewards are used to:

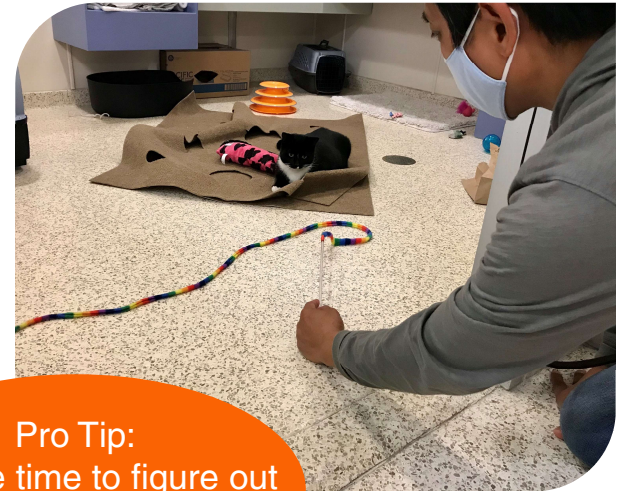
- make positive associations
- teach new behaviors
- encourage behaviors to happen more often

Food

- baby food
- tuna or sardines
- try different flavors and textures

Play

- laser light
- shoe string
- kibble “bugs”



Pro Tip:
Take the time to figure out
preferred reward type



Helper Cats



Four-Step Socialization Plan

1. Eating in your presence
2. Making contact
3. Petting: accepting then enjoying
4. Picking up and holding



Step 1: Eating in Your Presence

- Start after decompression
- Short, frequent sessions
- Human body language
 - Don't: touch, stare, reach toward, crowd
 - Do: sit on floor, slow movements, body to side, elbows in, keep voice down



Step 2: Making Contact

How to Teach Finger Targets:

- Tools: lots of small bits of favorite food
 - Size: 1-2 kitten bites worth
- Sit on floor, smear food on end of finger and in other hand, have food ready to deliver
- Offer hand with finger extended (elbows in!), below kitten's eye level, ~2-3 ft away
- Once eating food off finger, offer finger without food and deliver treat with other hand each time kitten touches her nose to your finger
- Takes practice!



Step 3: Petting

- Use pads of your index and middle finger
- Gently pet cheeks and under chin
- Pet → reward → repeat
- Monitor body language, give breaks
- Progress to touching face and head then full body pets
- Use short strokes with light pressure



Step 4: Picking up and holding

- Slide hand under belly → release
→ reward
- Slide hand under belly → apply light pressure → release → reward
- Look for:
 - Soft, loose body language
 - Anticipating treat
- Gradually increase time being held
- Squirmy and trying to get away?
Take a break, go back a step



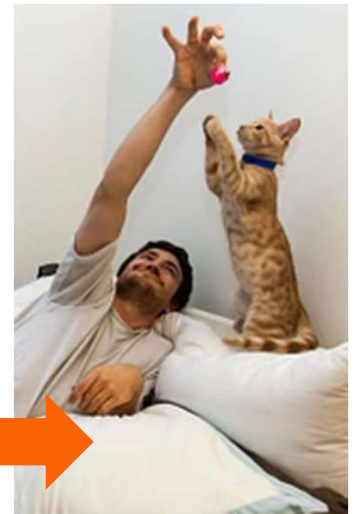
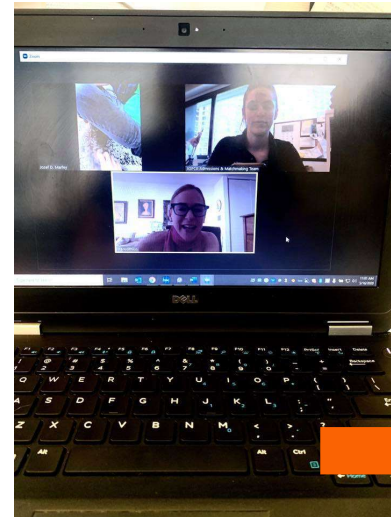
Troubleshooting

- Common foster mistakes
 - Low value rewards
 - Going too fast
 - Not confining
- Addressing lack of progress
 - Get video updates
 - Revisit rewards
 - Return to decompression period
 - Make environmental changes



Adoption and Post-Adoption Support

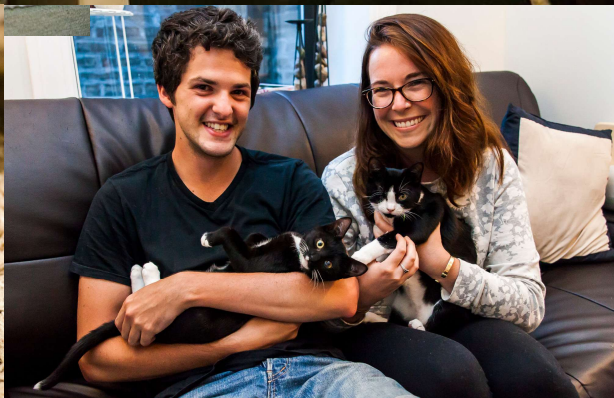
- Adopt out directly from foster homes
- Remote adoptions
 - Set fosters up to promote kittens through their networks
 - Virtual meet and greets
 - Be transparent about kitten's behavioral needs
- Proactive post-adoption support
 - Automated follow-up surveys
 - Staff or volunteer caseworkers for those at greater risk of return



Wyoming

- 8 weeks old
- Came in with 3 littermates
- Separated at intake then re-assessed following day
- Placed in foster with adult helper cat





Please answer our
anonymous poll!



Questions?

Join us for the 2020 ASPCA Cornell Maddie's Shelter Medicine Conference

July 11-12 2020

9-5 PM EDT

Free to Attend

**This program has been approved for 10 hours
of continuing education credit in jurisdictions
that recognize RACE approval**

<https://www.aspcapro.org/splash/aspcapro-cornell-maddies-fund-shelter-medicine-conference>

