



Co-Housing Animals in Primary Enclosures

Co-housing animals in their primary enclosures can be a terrific form of enrichment when done in an intentional manner with strong attention to health and well-being. However, the benefits need to be weighed carefully against the risks, especially if animals are housed together unsupervised overnight. **Co-housing is not a means of addressing crowding in shelters and should not be used as such.**

The *ASV Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters*, 2nd ed. provides several guidelines for co-housing in primary enclosures.

Must

- No cohousing of unrelated or unfamiliar animals until health and behavior are assessed
- The size of a primary enclosure for cohousing allows each animal to express a variety of normal behaviors and maintain distance from roommates when they choose to do so
- Appropriate resources (e.g., food, water, bedding, litter boxes and toys) are provided to minimize competition or resource guarding and ensure access by all cohoused animals
- Turnover within groups is minimized to reduce stress and social conflicts as well as the risk of infectious disease exposure and transmission
- Individual animals and group dynamics are monitored to recognize signs of stress and social conflicts in cohousing enclosures
- Individual enriched housing is provided for animals who are fearful or behave aggressively toward other animals, are stressed by the presence of other animals, require individual monitoring or are ill and require treatment that cannot be provided in cohousing

Unacceptable

- Random cohousing of animals
- Cohousing animals who fight with one another

Recommendations Specific to Cats

- A minimum of 18 ft² (1.7 m²) of floor space per adult cat should be provided for cohousing
- For cohoused cats, a variety of elevated resting perches and hiding places must be provided to increase complexity and choice within the living space
- No more than six adult cats should be cohoused in a primary enclosure

Recommendations Specific to Dogs

- Dogs should be introduced outside of their primary enclosures in pairs or groups to determine compatibility prior to cohousing
- No more than two to four adult dogs should be cohoused in a primary enclosure
- Puppies and kittens under 20 weeks of age must not be cohoused with unfamiliar animals except when the benefits outweigh the risks for all animals involved

Additional Resources

[ASV Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters](#)