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Shelter Guidelines: *Animal Handling*



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Shelter Guidelines - Content

Operational Issues (Policies, Protocols, Record Keeping)

Facility Design and Environment (Primary enclosures, HVAC, Light, Sound)

Population Management (Capacity for Care, Monitoring Statistics)

Sanitation (Cleaning, Disinfection, Fomite Control)

Medical Health and Physical Well-Being (Preventive health care, emergency care, pain, nutrition, response to disease/illness, population well-being)

Behavioral Health and Mental Well-Being (Considerations on intake, behavior evaluation, in-shelter care)

Group Housing

Animal Handling ←

Euthanasia (Technique, environment and equipment, record keeping, staff training)

Spay-Neuter

Animal Transport (Responsibilities at origin, during transport, at destination)

Public Health (Zoonoses, Animal-related injuries, emerging diseases)

Cats and Dogs Enter Shelters...

- Owner relinquished
- Unwanted litters
- Animal Control
 - Running at large
 - Cruelty cases
 - Trapped due to nuisance complaints
 - Injured animals
- Good Samaritans



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Shelter workers handle them day to day

- Intake
- Exam/treatments
- Care during holding
 - Daily feeding
 - Daily cleaning
- Longer term housing
- At the time of euthanasia



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The Impact of Stress...

- Stress can lead to physical illness
- Stress can lead to problem behavior
- Animals may experience fear imprinting and fail to adapt to the shelter environment
- Unadoptable and/or “permanent emotional scars”
- Put the population at risk



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Animal Handling in the shelter

- *Proper handling is crucial for stress reduction*

Low stress handling techniques:

- ✓ Are more humane for the animals
- ✓ Are generally safer for the handlers
- ✓ Are the right thing to do



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Rule #1

The way we handle animals impacts...

- The way they behave later
- Our professional image



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**The way an animal is
handled always matters.**



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Shelters ARE Stressful

- Imagine YOUR pet in a shelter
- *How would you want your animal to be handled?*



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ASV Guidelines...

- Must always be as humane as possible
- Must be appropriate for the individual animal and the specific situation
- Rule of thumb: Use low stress handling techniques
 - Use the least amount of physical restraint necessary to accomplish the task without injury to people or animals



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How does animal stress impact the success/safety of animal restraint?

- “Resistance to handling and restraint is almost always the result of fear or anxiety, which are compounded when force is used.”
- “Overly forceful handling is more likely to result in increased fear and aggressive behavior, and injury to animals and people.”



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Proper animal handling requires...

- Appraisal of each animal's behavior
- Adequate numbers of properly trained staff
- Suitable equipment that is readily available and in good working condition
- Appropriate choice of:
 - Location for procedures
 - Personal protection (if needed)



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“Adequate training is key to limiting the use of unnecessary force during handling and must be provided to anyone who will be handling animals.”



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What do we need to know?

- Knowing how to care for animals is more than just learning about the basics—such as keeping them fed, watered, sheltered and clean...



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What do we need to know?

- **Recognizing animal stress is essential.**

- For animal welfare
- For staff safety
- For proper handling and care

How do we know they are stressed?



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Staff Training

- Animal behavior
 - Basic understanding of “who they are and why”
 - Why they do what they do?
- Animal language: Dog and cat speak
 - Body language
 - Vocalization
 - Passive signs of stress
 - What are they telling us?

**The best care –
“Dog savvy” and “cat savvy” staff**



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Dogs – what do we know about them?

- “Man’s Best Friend”
 - Domesticated to be companion animals
- Highly social
 - Bond strongly; do not cope well with isolation
 - Usually respond to human comfort
- Finite socialization period
 - Fight or flee anything they are not socialized to
- Predatory species with predatory behaviors
 - Search, stalk, rush, chase, bite, shake, kill, eat, guard your share (often rehearse some of these behaviors during play)
- Resolve conflict through complex patterns of aggression
- Instincts – guarding, hunting, herding, scent work...



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Canine senses

- What do they smell
- What do they see
- What do they hear
- What do they feel



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What cats are and why: Understanding the feline mind

- True carnivores: Prey - predatory species
- Not “actively” domesticated
- Evolved from African wildcats



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Evolved and Equipped

- Catch small prey
- Escape from large predators – always suspicious!
- Hearing
- Sense of smell
- Vision
 - Movement sensitive
 - Night
- Uniquely agile
 - Pounce/sprint/balance/explode



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Hard-wired

- Faced with two evils...
 - Cats will choose the lesser
 - Better at escape than defense



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Cats possess a variety of lifestyles...



Common physiology...

- Fight or flight
- Adrenaline (epinephrine) release
 - Prepares body for action
 - Increase blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory rate, cardiac output



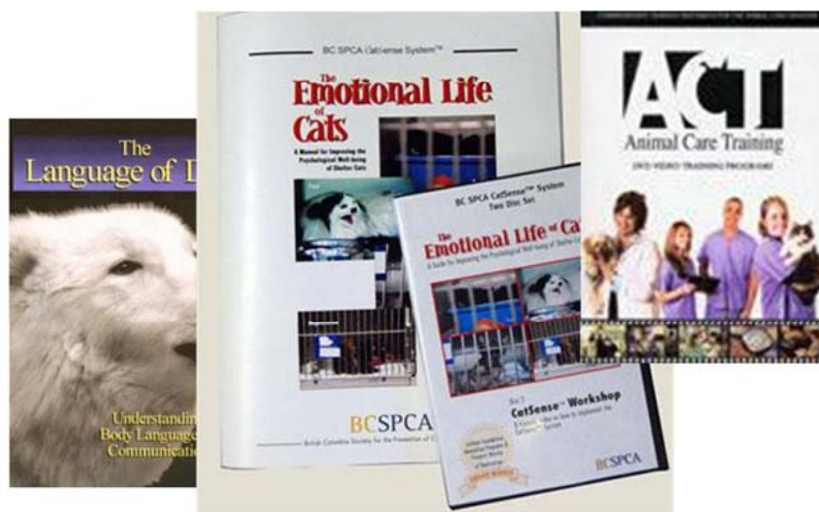
Keep in mind their keen senses

- What do they smell
- What do they see
- What do they hear
- What do they feel

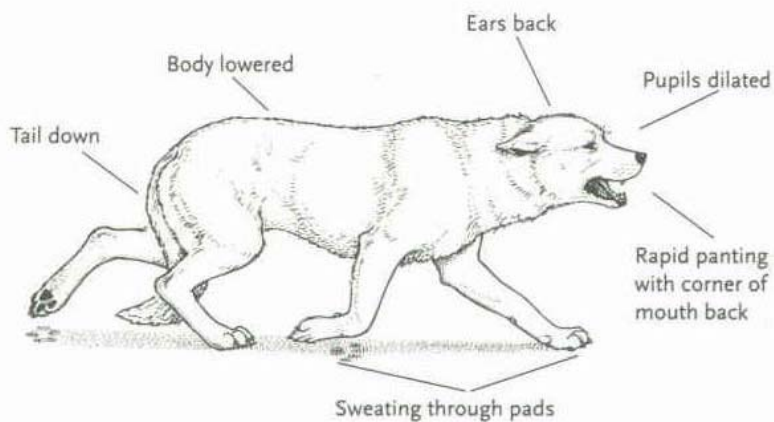


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Staff training – Body Language



Stress and Anxiety





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What are they saying?



NATIONALGEOGRAPHIC.COM

Photograph by George Mobley

Submission

- Crouching
- Ears down
- Avoidance
- Tail tucked
- Hair flat
- May be pushed to defensive aggression ---> watch for paw to come up/ ears/ears change



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Fearful

- Ears flat, point back
- Eyes staring at target, dilated pupils
- Body crouched, tense
- Tail may whip back and forth
- Moves cautiously



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How are we at reading the body language of dogs?

- Veterinarians?
- Dog trainers? (min 2 yrs)
- Dog owners? (min 2 yrs)
- Non-dog owners? (never)

Tami and Gallagher 2009



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Materials and Methods

- 9 dogs video taped during introduction to a “stooge dog” (4 yo female BC)
- The footage was reviewed independently by behaviorists who categorized the predominant behavioral display
- Indifferent, fearful, confident, friendly, submissive, aggressive, defensive, playful-actual contact play, playful-inviting play.



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Observers

- Viewed clips in random order
- Selected from the given adjectives the predominant behavior pattern they saw
- Described what it was about the dog's body that suggested that to them



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Actual Behavioral Pattern in Video Clip	Observers Correct %	Alternate description given by observers	
Indifference	90	-	
Fear	67	Indifferent Submissive	
Confidence	38	Friendly	
Friendliness	73	Confident	
Submission	50	Friendly: Playful	
Defensiveness	53	Submissive: Fearful: Friendly	
Actual play	30	Aggressive Confident	
Play solicitation	62	Fearful: Defensive	
Aggression	38	Playful: Confident Defensive	

Who did the best?

- Vets
- Trainers
- Dog owners
- Non-dog owners



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No differences within the 4 categories!

- Some individuals scored very high irrespective of their category
- Tail movements were the most common body cue used to interpret behavior



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Take Home Messages

- Formal knowledge/training is needed—including hands on experience
- Working or living with dogs is not necessarily enough
- Cats?



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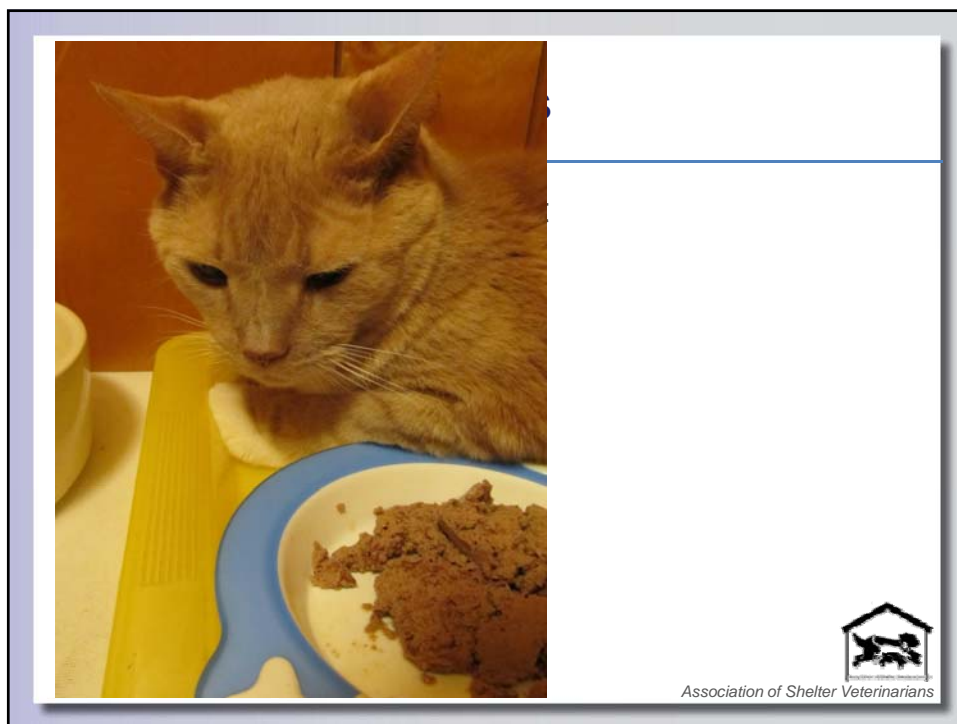
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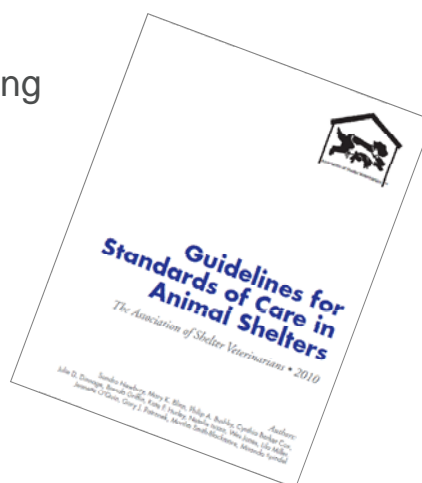






Shelter Guidelines

- Restraint
- Location and timing
- Equipment
- Feral cats



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Restraint

- When physical restraint is necessary to avoid human injury or injury to an animal, it should be of the least intensity and duration necessary.
- Animals often respond best to gentle restraint and react negatively when “over-restrained”.
- Research indicates that gentle human contact has the additional benefit of mitigating the adverse effects of unpleasant stimuli.



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Never underestimate the power of cookies!



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Less is more



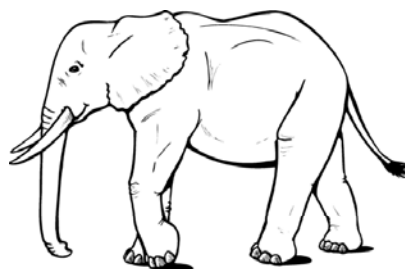
- Stay out of their face
- Let them face away
- Feed a cookie
- Rub the ear
- Scratch their chin
- Tap their head
- Light bouncing



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First Impressions are Powerful

- Emotional Learning
 - Single event learning
 - Fear imprint (primal)
 - Always remember



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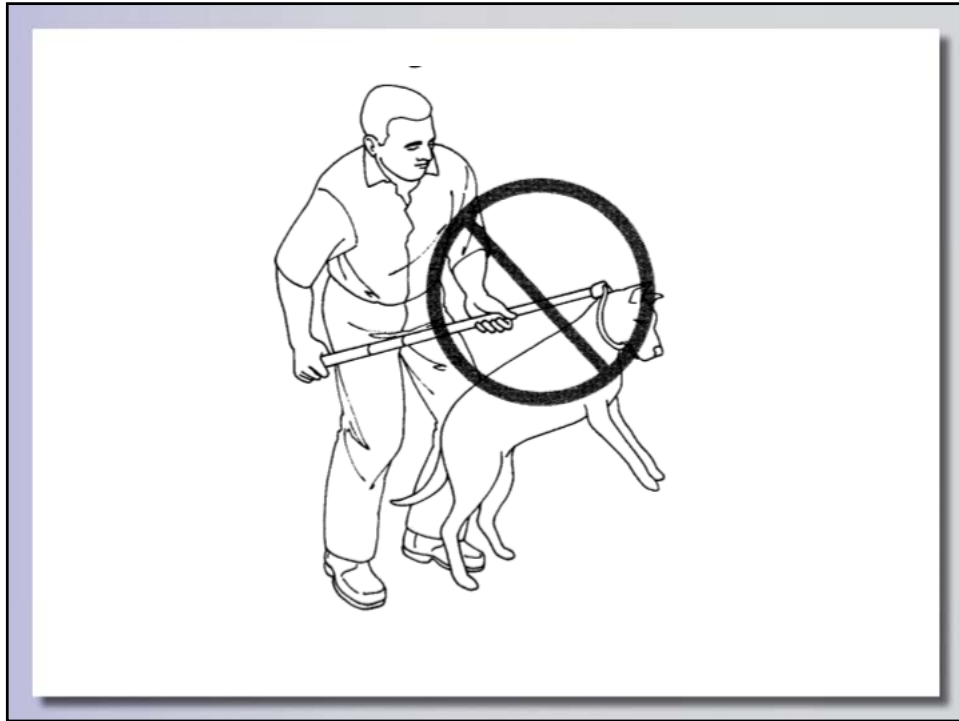


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What about instances in which
an animal must be handled and
restraint is required for human safety?



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Restraint

- Judicious use of tranquilizers can be the most humane option for handling a frightened, fractious, or feral animal.



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Large aggressive dogs



Blow pipe



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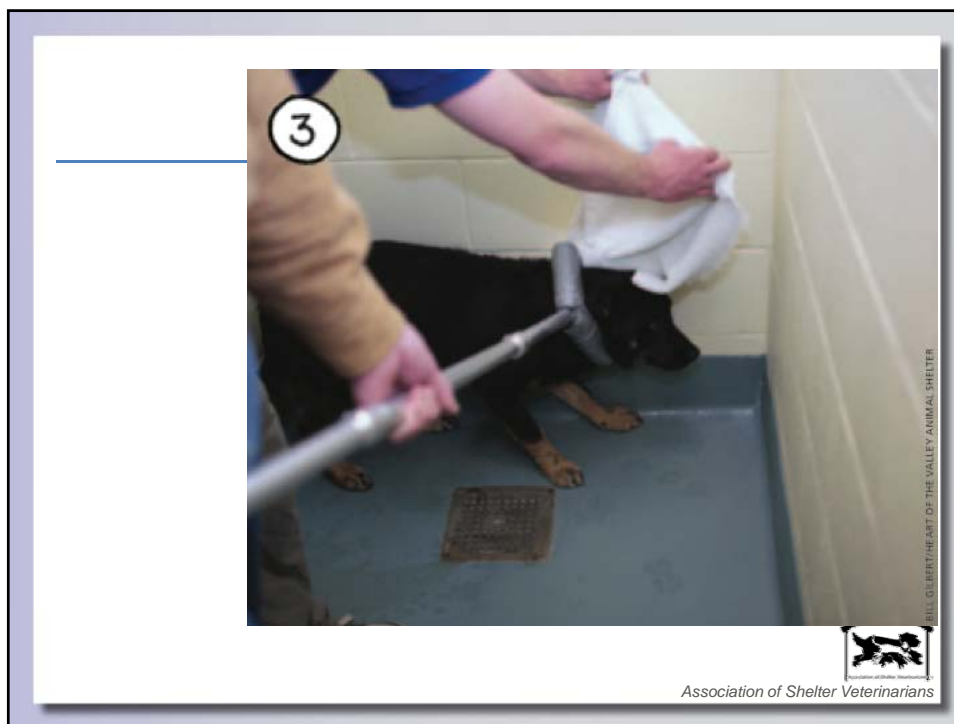
Y Pole



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Restraint

- It is unacceptable to use physical force as punishment or to use force in anger.



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Location and Timing

- Selection of a calm, private, quiet environment, and allowing time for animals to acclimate prior to handling can help minimize stress and may reduce the amount of restraint required.



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Use transport carriers

- Behavior can change fast!
- Top-loading carriers best
- Front door-
“Jack-in-the-box”
technique



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Feline Stress Reduction

- Scientific studies have demonstrated that the single most important method of reducing the feline stress response is to enable the cat to “escape” by hiding



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1st Concept of Tiger Taming

- Allow chill out time
 - Freaked out cats are not necessarily feral or too fractious to handle!
 - Cover
 - Use signs



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Differentiating truly feral cats from reactive tame cats

- It is important to remember that cats that are trapped and feral-behaving are not necessarily feral.
- Once highly stressed or provoked, cats frequently remain reactive for a prolonged time and may become more reactive if they are stimulated again before they have been allowed a period of time to cool down.



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For Fractious/Feral Cats: Utilize a hands off approach to handling



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Behaviors you might see...

- Stiff, frozen, catatonic with dilated pupils
 - Typical for feral queens
 - Don't be fooled into thinking the cat is merely shy
 - "Teetering on the edge"
 - Will react with defensive aggression if pushed
- Quick to strike out defensively
 - Typical for feral toms
 - Danger – razor sharp claws and teeth

Feral or not – you may see these behaviors initially



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24 hour chill out period...

- Designated ward - quiet
- Soft bedding for comfort and scent familiarization
- Consistent caregivers



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The next day...

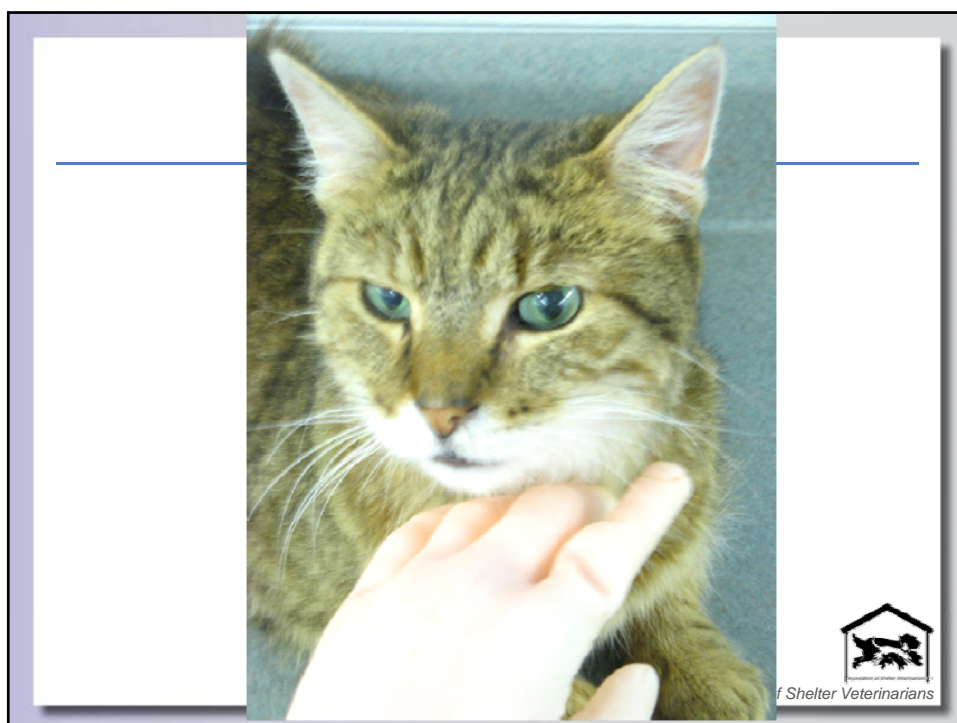
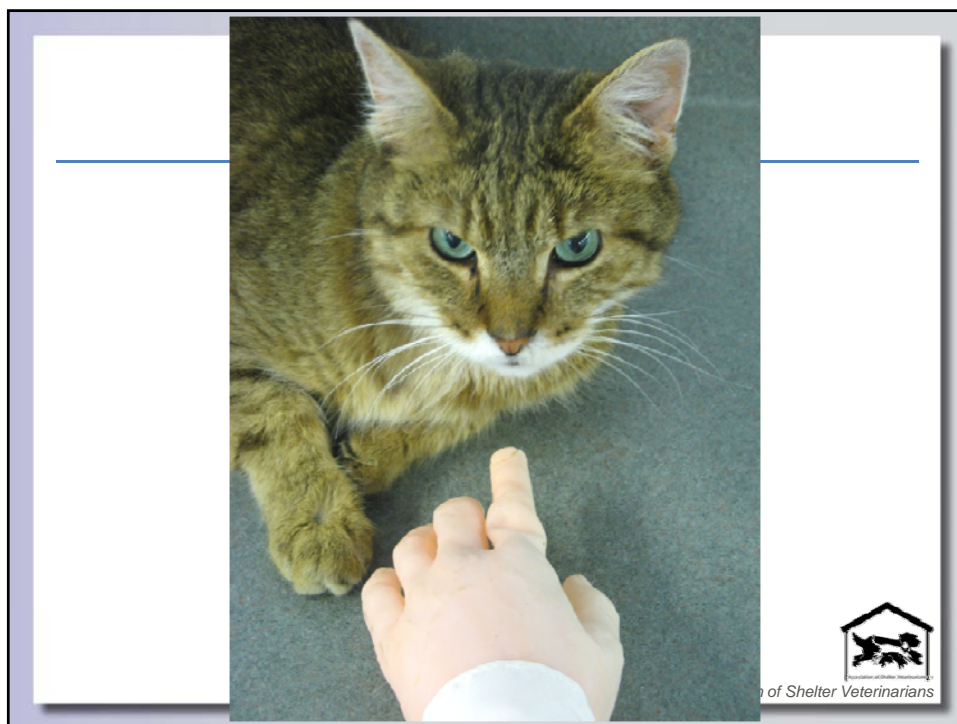
- Caregivers calmly approach enclosures
 - Least reactive first to prevent a “chain reaction”
 - Obvious tame behavior may be present
 - Cat at the front, relaxed, purring, pawing, chirping, rubbing, soliciting attention
 - Safe to open the enclosure
 - Obvious feral behavior may persist
 - Leave the cat alone
 - Mixed response
 - Cat is partially relaxed
 - Offer verbal encouragement
 - Consider use of an assess-a-hand
 - Be careful! Behavior can change rapidly



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Location and Timing

- Handling methods should prevent escape. Even when animals remain confined within a room, recapture is stressful.



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Location and Timing

- When the animal does not need urgent intervention, delaying a procedure to allow that animal time to relax in a quiet environment before handling is the best option.



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Equipment

- Each situation should be evaluated individually and each piece of equipment should be assessed for its potential to cause harm or increase stress.
- Techniques or equipment suitable for one situation may be inappropriate for another.

**Avoid a “one size fits all” approach –
have several tools in your tool box**



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Equipment

- Even appropriate equipment may be inhumane or unsafe if not maintained in good working condition.



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Feral Cats

- Appropriate procedures for handling and minimizing stress in feral cats are required.



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Concepts for safe and sane handling

- Keep the doors closed
 - Avoid escapes and the need to recapture
 - Room selection – ideally small, spartan, secure

**“Feral cats
defy gravity.”**



Equipment for safe and sane handling

- Live traps
- Trap dividers
- Cat dens
- Squeeze cages
- Nets
- Cat tongs
- NOT control poles



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Always minimize transfers

- Transfers should be done without touching the cat!
 - Hands off approach!
 - Transfer via guillotine-type doors from one container to another



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Squeeze cage





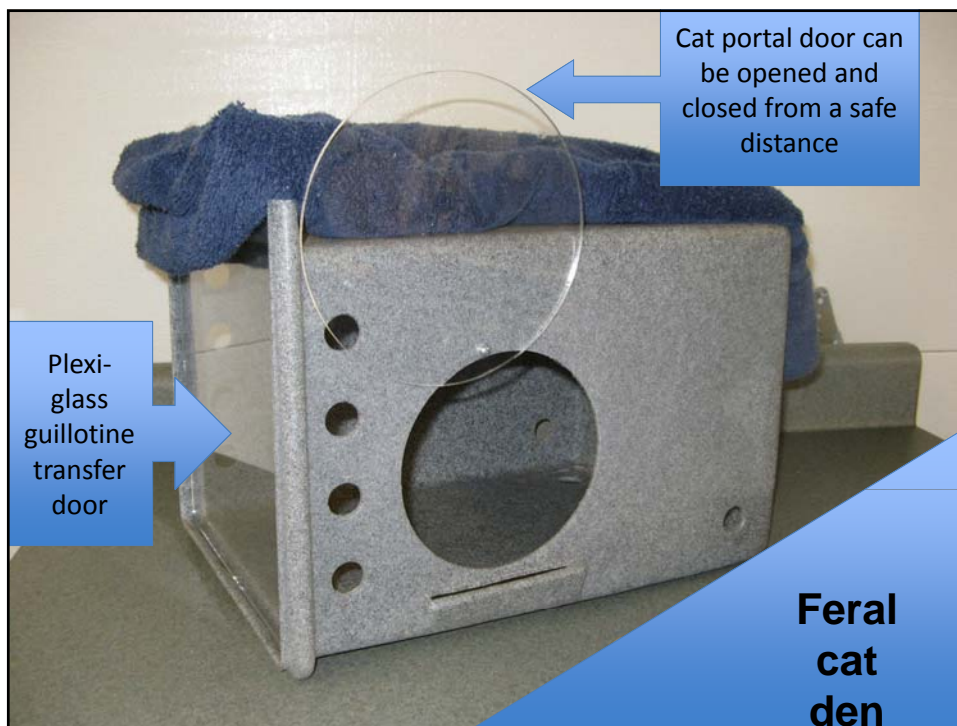
ACES Cat Den Animal Care Equipment Supply



<http://www.animal-care.com>



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Replace guillotine door of den





Keep it covered, elevated and quiet!

- Holding cage with den inside should be placed in a quiet area – spot cleaning only
- Be sure to cover it – drape it with a sheet
- Elevate it off the floor – cats feel less vulnerable when perched at a safe vantage point
- Low/no traffic area – no noise – predictable schedule – consistent enclosure
- Dim lighting – lights on by day; off by night
- Place food and water in back of cage – cat may not be bold enough to go to the front to eat
- Feliway in room is ideal
 - Cheek pheromone – calming effect





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“The use of catch poles for routine restraint of cats, including carrying or lifting, is inhumane and poses significant risk of injury to the animal; therefore they must not be used for such purposes.”



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In case of escapes..

- Be prepared with proper equipment and protocols
- IMMEDIATELY secure all exits
- Clear the area - trained, rabies vaccinated personnel only
- Use hands off approach
 - Gloves may be used for added safety – but don't touch!
- NEVER attempt to grab a feral cat with a towel or gloves
 - There's a BIG difference between fractious and feral!
- No control poles / no slip leads



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At minimum, gloves and a net should be available



Equipment should look like new –
because if you do things right, you
should virtually NEVER have to use it!



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Types of nets

- Floor net
 - Flexible rim (rim will flatten against floor if pressed firmly)
 - Rigid rim (like a fishing net)
- Cage net
 - Net on a frame
 - Closure from handle
 - Not meant for capture in a room – only for use in confined space
 - Generally have to be closer to the cat to operate
 - May pose a danger to handler with feral cats

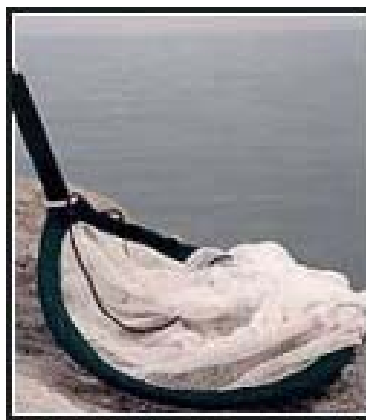


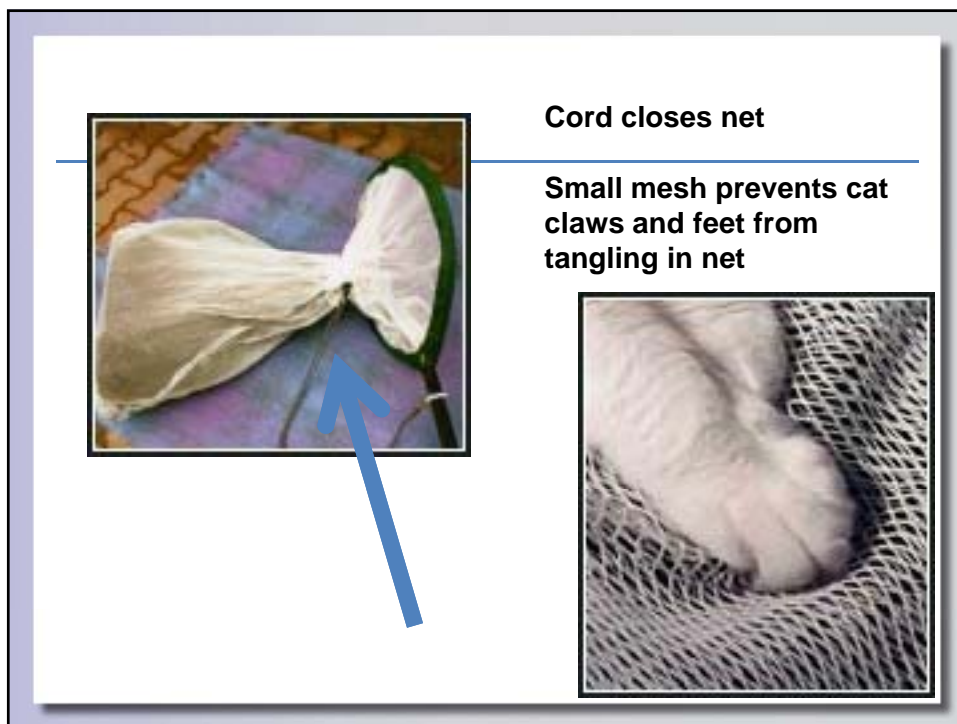
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Flexible rim net

Flattens against floor









How to use a rigid rim net

- From a safe distance, calmly try to place net over cat's body
- Move towards cat slowly to stimulate him to back up over the rim of the net
- When he backs up, lift up
 - This will secure him in the net
- No scooping!



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Cat is in the net – then what?

- Cover with thick blanket to calm the cat and protect the handler
 - Administer chemical restraint through the net if desired
- Otherwise, lift to carry him quickly to a secure/small room for transfer
- Transfer to container with caution and finesse
- Cat is often motivated to return to a container after being netted



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What if cat is in a space where the net won't fit?

- Try using cat tongs
- Grasp the cat as the situation will allow
- Transfer quickly to a container
 - Have container ready
 - Stand it on the end
 - Rapidly insert cat
 - Have additional personnel ready to secure door



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If necessary, set a live trap indoors

- May be the safest option for cat and handlers
- Place trap in a dark “safe” area
- Create a tunnel that directs the cat toward the trap
- Leave
- Use signage to prevent escapes
- May take a few days!



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Holding procedures for TNR

- Cats should be held in their traps before and after surgery.
- Opening the traps or transferring cats to other enclosures poses a safety risk and must be strictly avoided.



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Holding procedures

- Place the traps in the prepared area and keep them covered.
 - Whatever you do,
DON'T open the traps!



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Provide food and water and monitor the cats as needed without opening the trap!

Animal Handling Summary: Keys to Success

- Understanding their behavior and their signals
- Patience, skill + finesse
- Proper equipment
- Having help available if needed



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Goals for Handling and Restraint

- Keep animal under control
- Minimize stress
- Keep animal and handler(s) safe



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Realize that animals in shelters...

- Are under stress
- Cats → Are hardwired for escape or defense
 - Can change their behavior rapidly
- All animals have their own idiosyncrasies
 - A tailored approach will be necessary



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Truths About Animal Handling

- Most respond best to gentle restraint
 - They detest being over-restrained!

Never underestimate the power of cookies!



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Concepts of Tiger Taming

- Keep it covered!
 - Remember the importance of escape
 - Escapable stress vs inescapable



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Keep it together, Keep it together, Keep it together!!!

- Do not push animals beyond their ability to cope
- For those that are there to begin with, minimize physical restraint
 - Be quick – be as hands off as possible
 - Utilize chemical restraint



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Questions?

