

## Keeping Pets Behaviorally Healthy in the Shelter

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### Shelter Guidelines Project

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## Shelter Guidelines - Content

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**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)

## Health and Well-being

Merriam-Webster's dictionary:

**Health:**

“The condition of being sound in body, mind, or spirit”

**Well-being:**

“The state of being happy, healthy”



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## Health and Well-being



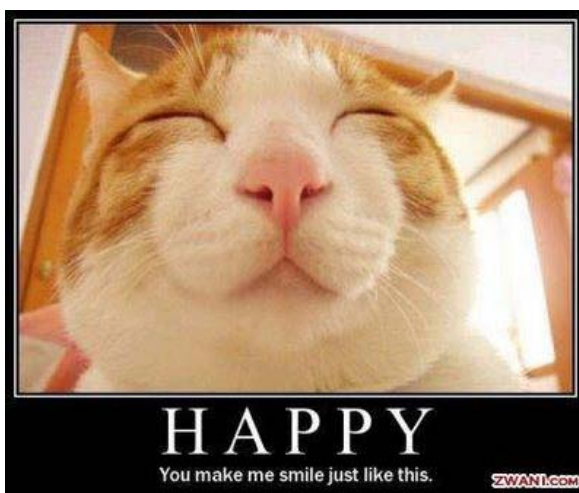
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## Control



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## Individual



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## Shelters are not normal or natural places to house animals!

- Animals are HIGHLY stressed at intake.
- Coping with stress day to day is difficult.
- Simply engaging in “normal behaviors” may be difficult.



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## Shelters are not normal or natural places to house animals...

- Stress impacts both behavioral (emotional) health as well as physical health...
- Will stress lead to physical illness?
- Will the animal develop abnormal behavior in the shelter? Or will he/she experience fear imprinting and develop “permanent emotional scars”?



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## Guide for Care of Lab Animals

- An appropriate behavioral management program addresses three factors:
  - The structural environment in which the animal is kept
  - The social environment of the animal
  - The provision of opportunities for physical and cognitive activity



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## Proper Housing

Housing design and operation can literally “make or break” the health of a population



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## Proper Housing

- Regardless of the species in question, it must:
  - Include a comfortable resting place
  - Ensure freedom from fear/distress
  - Allow animals to engage in species typical behaviors
  - Provide for both physical & emotional (behavioral) needs



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Engage in  
species typical  
behaviors



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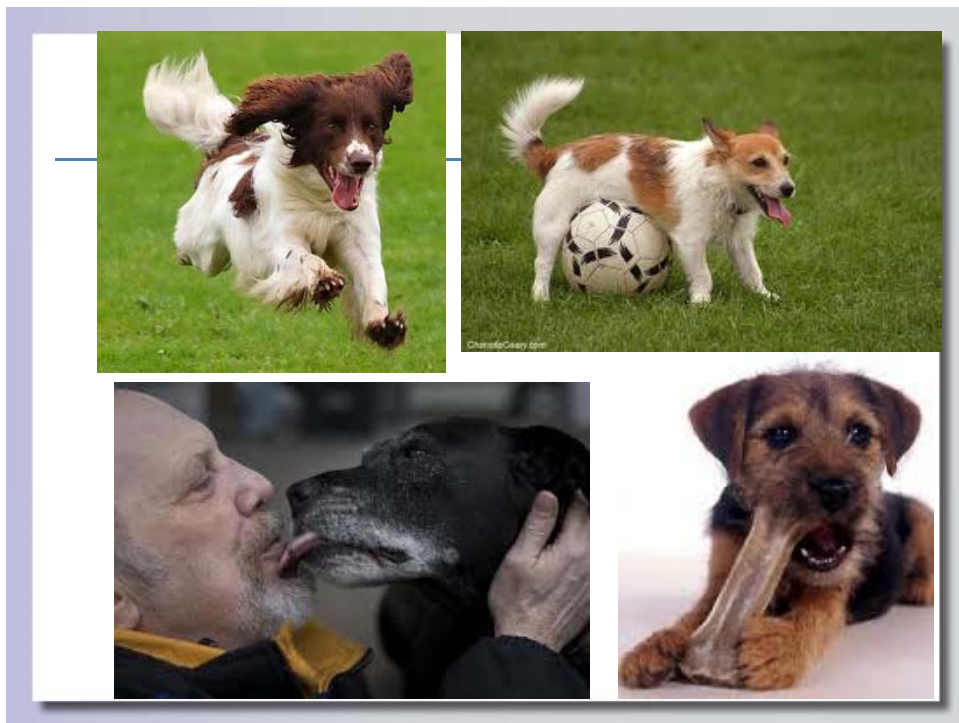
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**Cats do more than sleep...**



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## Behavioral healthcare in the shelter

- Proper behavioral healthcare is essential to promote normal, species typical behaviors
  - Provide control, variety, choice
  - Crucial for stress reduction



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## Behavioral healthcare in the shelter

- Proper behavioral healthcare is also essential to detect problem behaviors that may pose a safety risk to humans or other animals.



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## Shelter Guidelines

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- Considerations on Intake
  - Behavioral History
  - Minimizing Stress
- Behavior Evaluation
- In-Shelter Care
  - Environment
  - Daily Routine
  - Enrichment and Socialization
  - Behavioral Modification



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## Considerations on intake

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- A thorough behavioral history should be obtained at the time of intake
- The history should be used to alert staff to potential problems and individual needs



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## Intake Questionnaires

- Conduct a personal interview whenever possible
  - Best for trained staff to take in owner surrenders



- Be compassionate and non-judgmental
  - Remember not everyone is a 'crazy animal person' like us!! The average pet owner may not be able to deal with their pet's problem behavior and often feel they have no other choice but to surrender them.
- Think about the animal
  - Get the best information from the person that knows them the best...



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## Intake Questionnaires

- Use a standardized questionnaire
- Ideally, go over it with them
- Ask open-ended questions
  - Helps get more information—the owner must verbalize what the animal does—not just say yes/no



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## Questions for Dogs...

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- Personality/likes/dislikes/favorites/fears
- Routine- where does he stay/what does he do
- Tolerance of humans- what does he do when...
- Tolerance of other animals
- Degree of training
- Behavioral response to certain situations
- Reason(s) for surrender



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## Questions for Cats...

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- Personality Traits
- Routine
- Tolerance of humans
- Tolerance of other animals
- Litter box habits
- Reason(s) for surrender



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## The answers...

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- Help staff decide:
  - If the animal is adoptable
  - What type of home is most suitable
  - How to best care for the animal in the shelter



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## Considerations on intake – Minimizing Stress

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Stress must be minimized during this crucial time to minimize problems that may delay or even prevent acclimation to the shelter



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## 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

**They arrive  
under stressful  
circumstances!**



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## Shelters ARE Stressful

- Imagine YOUR pet in a shelter
- Responses ARE very individual
- Regardless, first few days are VERY stressful
- Coping may occur (normal behaviors appear)
- Long term stays- chronic stress
  - Depression, activity withdrawal, aggression (to humans, to other animals), “kennel crazy”, learned helplessness, desocialization



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## Keep in mind their keen senses

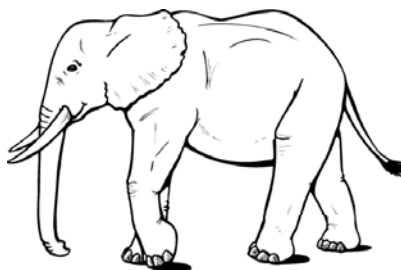
- What do they smell
- What do they see
- What do they hear
- What do they feel



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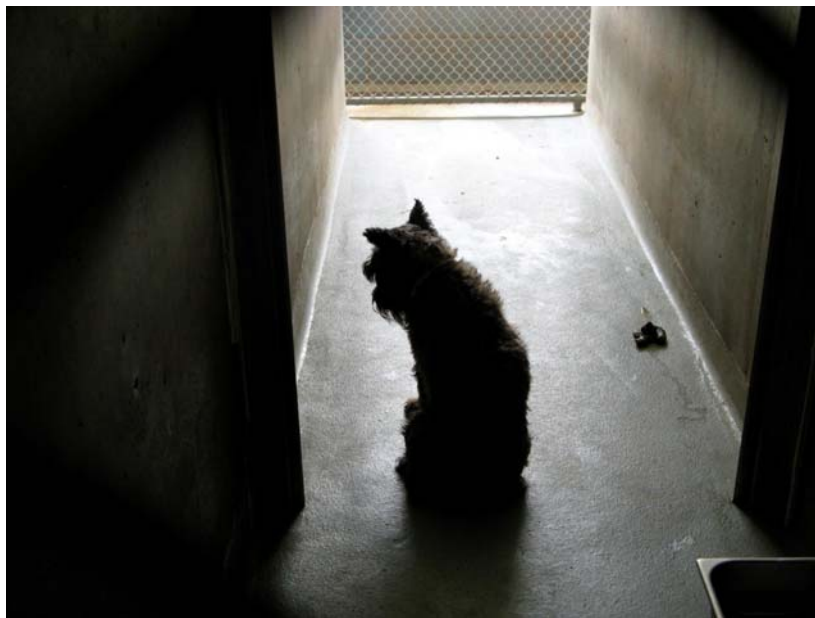
## First Impressions are Powerful

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



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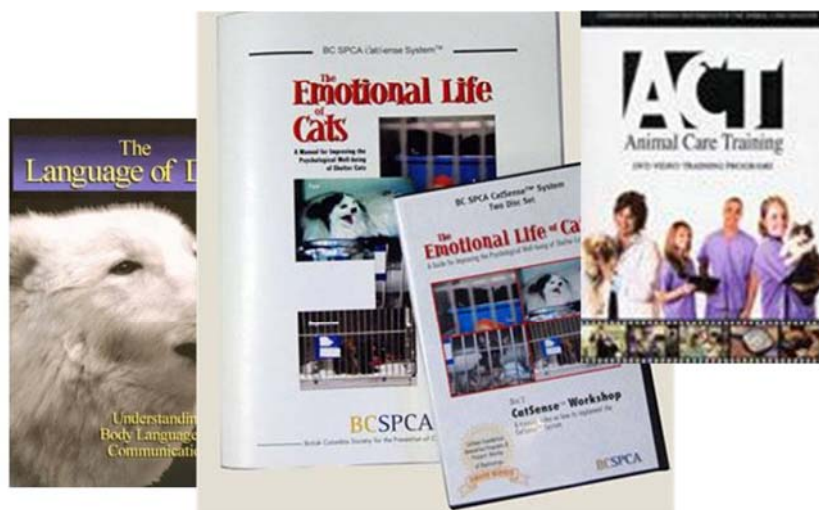




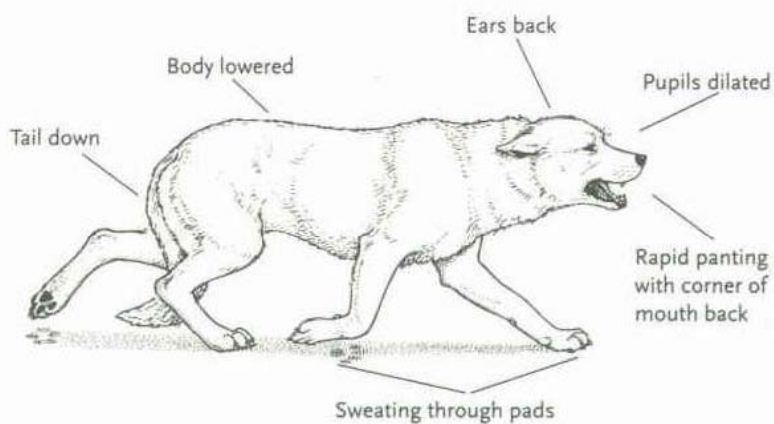




## Staff training – Body Language



## Stress and Anxiety







## Behavior evaluation

- Assessment of an animal's behavior must begin at intake; ongoing assessment should continue throughout the animal's stay
- Actions should be taken to respond promptly to behavioral needs
- Staff must be trained to monitor behavioral health and record their findings daily



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## Monitoring

**Normal,  
species typical  
behaviors**

**Cats like to be cats**

**and**

**dogs like to be dogs!**



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## When problems are recognized, they must be promptly addressed...

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Not only must physical health problems that affect animal well-being be recognized and addressed, so must behavioral health problems.

Suffering or distress can be related to physical or emotional health – In either case, it is imperative that prompt, appropriate steps be taken to alleviate it.



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## Mental suffering

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- Some individual shelter animals may experience severe stress that is difficult to alleviate even with optimal practices.
  - However, if many animals are displaying signs of unrelieved stress, steps must be taken to improve the shelter's stress reduction protocols.
- For humane reasons, long-term confinement must be avoided for feral animals and for those who remain markedly stressed/fearful and are not responding to treatment/behavioral care.



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## Formal Behavior Evaluations

- Ideally, a systematic behavioral evaluation should be performed on all animals prior to re-homing or other placement
- Typically follow a structured format that includes things the pet will encounter in the home
- Proper training is essential
- Proper records / standard forms



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## Formal Behavior Evaluation - Purposes

- Some predictive value
- ID aggressive (unsafe) animals
  - Keep them from being placed back in the community
- Gain info to facilitate matching
  - Personality
- Gain info useful for counseling adopters
- Problem detection to guide in shelter care



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## In shelter care: Environment

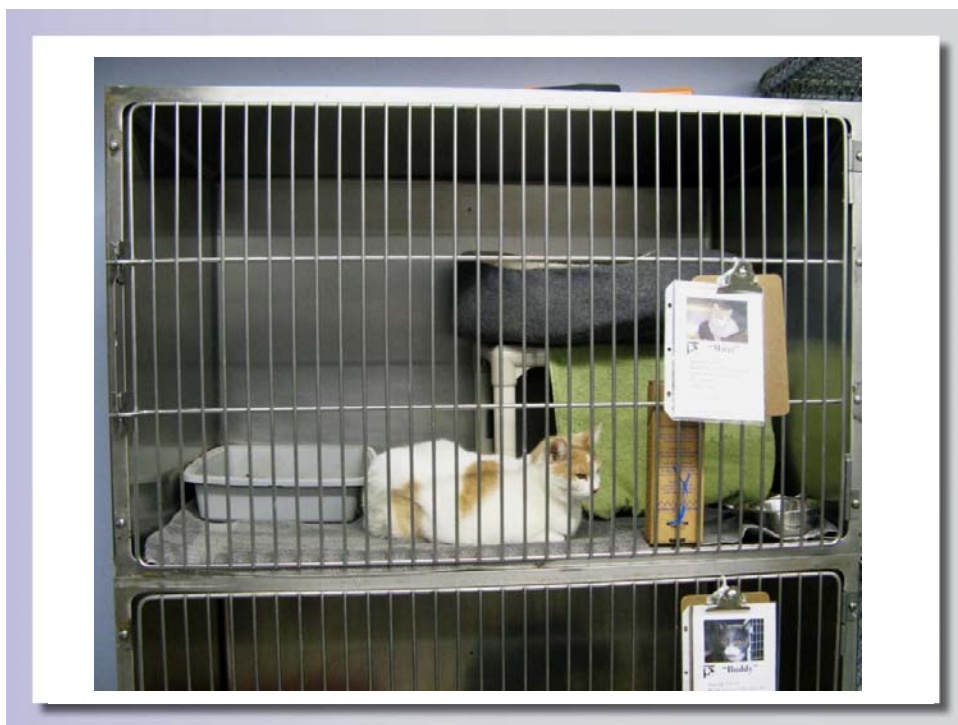


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## Separation



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## Separation

- Novel environments tend to be especially stressful for shy, poorly socialized, feral and geriatric cats and dogs.
  - Ideally, these animals, or any animal that is showing signs of stress, should be housed in separate, calm, quiet areas beginning at intake.
- Even moving an animal to a quieter location within the same ward may prove beneficial.



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## Daily Routine

- Predictable events
  - Cleaning at 7:30 AM
    - Glad that's over!
  - Tuna at 3 PM
    - Is it 3 o'clock yet?
- Light – Dark
  - Lights on by day
  - Off by night



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## Enrichment

- Enrichment refers to a process for improving the environment and behavioral care of confined animals within the context of their behavioral needs.



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## Enrichment

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The purpose of enrichment is to reduce stress and improve well-being by providing physical and mental stimulation, encouraging species-typical behaviors, and allowing animals more control over their environment.

Successful enrichment programs prevent the development and display of abnormal behavior and provide for the psychological well-being of the animals.



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## Enrichment

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- Core components:
  - Regular social contact
  - Mental stimulation
  - Physical activity
- Enrichment should be given the same significance as other components of animal care



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*I want it,  
I need it,  
I gotta have  
it!  
Give me my  
Vienna  
sausage!*





## Cat Training



Trick training for  
mental stimulation  
and adoptability



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## Ideas

- Hide-a-Boxes
  - Cozy, hide, perch, climb, escape, explore, scratch
- Hammocks
  - Perch and relax
- Favorites:
  - Balls
  - Toys that dangle
  - SCRATCHING!
- Paper toys
- Dollar store



*Keep them fresh*



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Hide-a-Boxes are a Must!

## Hide, Perch and Go Box™



"Travel  
made easy"

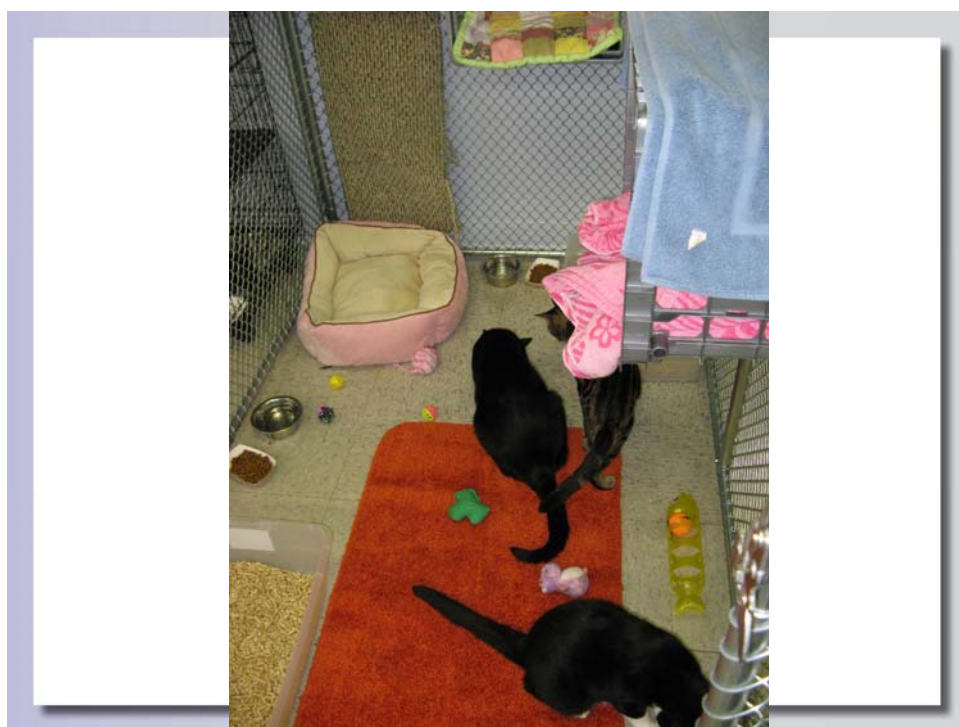


"while your pet  
stays at home"



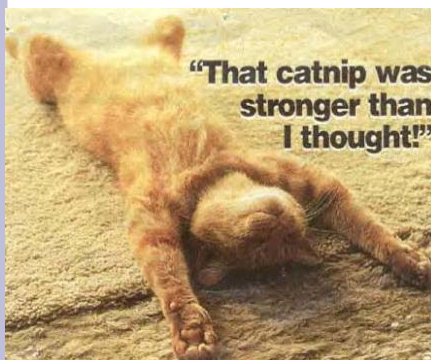


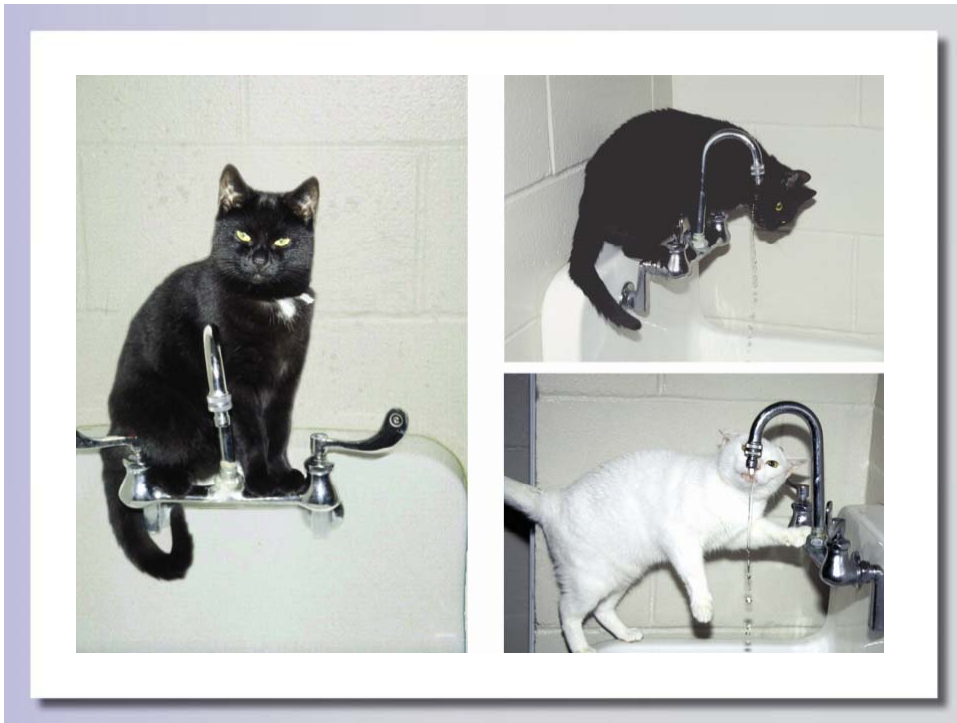






- Cat nip, cat grass
- Water fountains





















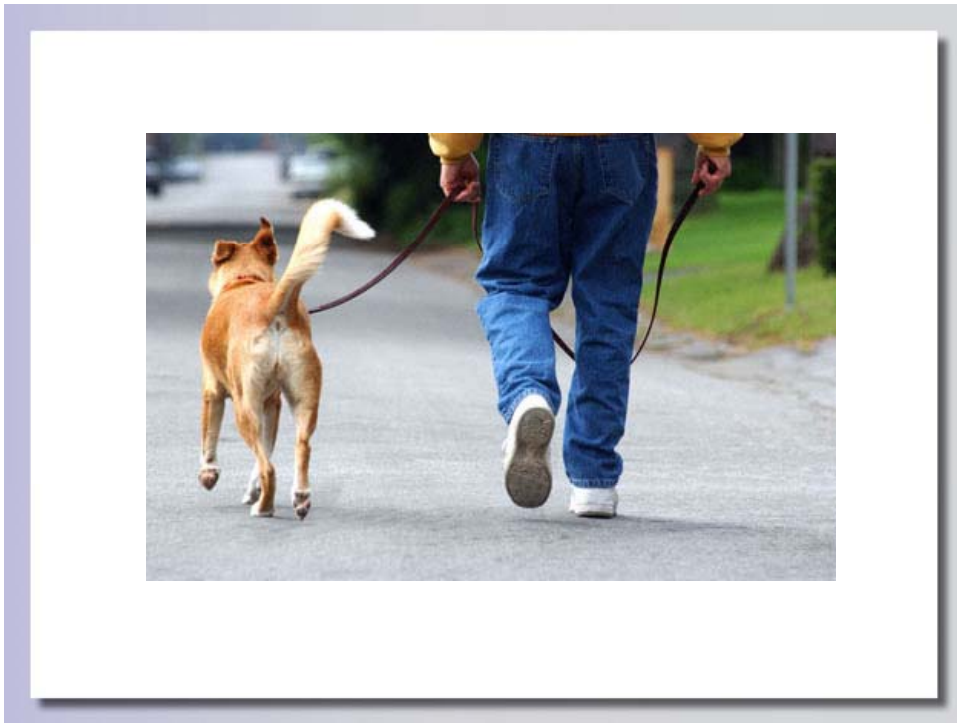


Every dog needs a bed and a bone!

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## Off Lead Exercise

- Fetch
- Kiddie pools
- Agility
- Supervised play groups
  - Make good matches
  - Monitor arousal level



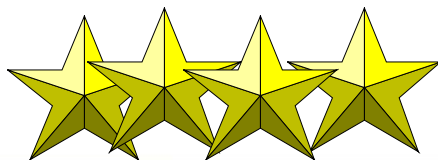
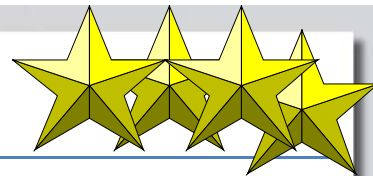
## Play is essential!



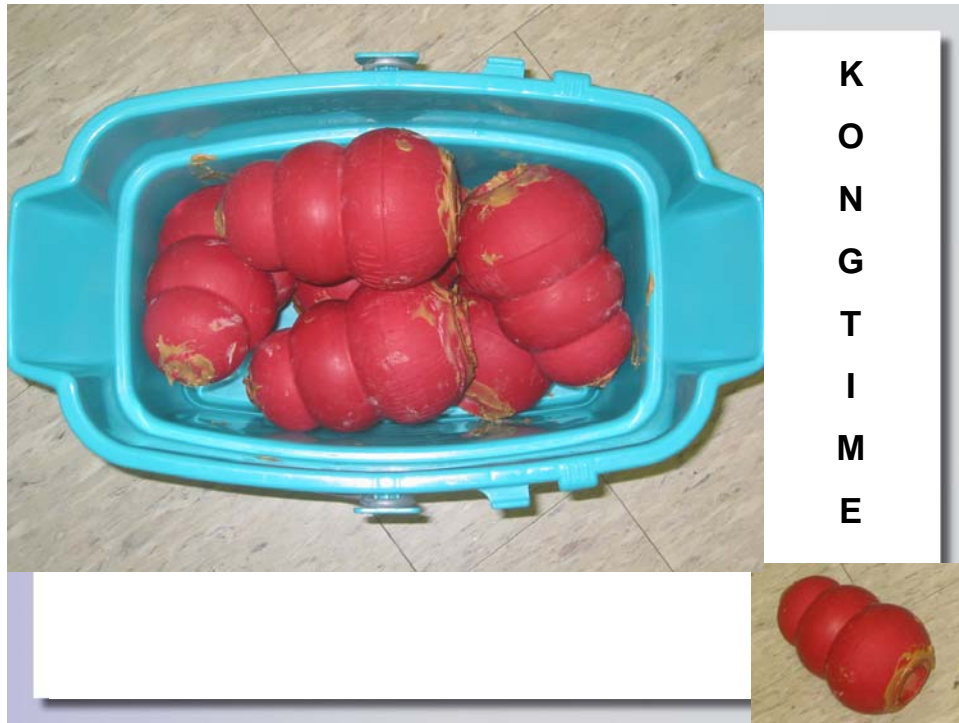
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**Dog training – the ultimate enrichment – social, physical, mental – and improves adoptability**







## Ideas

- Feeder toys
  - Use to feed meals
  - Plastic bottles
  - Paper tubes
- Ice blocks
  - Freeze dog biscuits in plastic tubs
- Chew toys
- Crate train at front desk



## Olfactory Stimulation

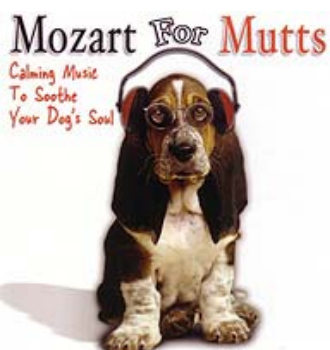
- Lavender
  - Calming
- Others
  - Food scents



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## Auditory Stimulation

- Canine Lullabies
- Mozart for Mutts



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## Socialization

- For puppies and kittens less than 4 months old, proper socialization is essential for normal behavioral development.
  - Without daily handling and positive exposure to a variety of novel stimuli, animals may develop chronic fear and anxiety or suffer from the inability to adjust normally to their environments.
- For puppies and kittens housed in a shelter, socialization must be balanced with infectious disease control.



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## Socialization Period

- 3 weeks to 12+ weeks
  - Period may not end until 14-16 weeks
  - Depends on breed, environment, individual
- **Most critical period of development**



2-7 weeks for  
kittens



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## Inadequate Socialization

- Shy, fearful dogs/cats
- Inability to deal with frustration, restraint
- Hand-reared or singletons: inappropriate interactions (fear or aggression)
- Kennel-raised: fear of novel situations
  - Inability to settle

... chronic anxiety... feral



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## Behavioral Considerations for Long-term Shelter Stays

- For long-term shelter stays, appropriate levels of additional enrichment must be provided daily
  - Alternatives to traditional cage housing (e.g., large enriched cages, home or office foster care, room housing) must be provided for any animal staying in a shelter long term.
  - Cats must be allowed an opportunity to exercise and explore in a secure, enriched setting.
  - Similarly, dogs must be provided with daily opportunities for activity outside of their runs for aerobic exercise..



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## Behavioral Considerations for Long-term Shelter Stays

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Long-term confinement of any animal, including feral or aggressive animals, who cannot be provided with basic care, daily enrichment and exercise without inducing stress, is unacceptable.

**Long-term = >2 weeks**



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## Behavioral Modification

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- Practices must adhere to the well-described scientific principles of animal behavior and learning including positive reinforcement, operant conditioning, systematic desensitization and counter- conditioning.
- The use of physical force as punishment or use of force in anger is an unacceptable means of behavior modification



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## Behavioral Modification

- Sufficient resources must be available to provide appropriate care if behavioral modification is attempted.
  - The techniques required are generally labor-intensive and time-consuming and must be applied consistently over a period of time in order to be successful.
- Attempting behavior modification with aggressive animals poses concerns due to safety and liability risks; animals believed to be dangerous should not be re-homed.



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## Questions?



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