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Shelter Guidelines: *Group Housing*

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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)

What we will cover...

- What do the Guidelines say?
- Putting it into practice



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Definition

“In the context of this document...
group housing refers to *playgroups* as
well as *housing two or more animals
in the same primary enclosure.*”



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Purpose

- To provide animals with **healthy social contact** and **companionship** with other animals in order to **enhance their welfare**.



Requirements

- Appropriate facilities
- Careful selection of animals
- Careful monitoring of animals
- Trained staff
- A variety of housing styles
 - This form of social contact is not appropriate for all individuals.



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Benefits

- Opportunities for positive interaction with other animals including:
 - Play
 - Companionship
 - Physical connection
 - Socialization
- More enriched and varied environment



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Risks

- Infectious disease exposure
- Fighting
 - Injury; death
- Stress, fear, and anxiety
- Monitoring of individuals more difficult
- Staff safety
 - It is generally more difficult to manage more than one animal in an enclosure



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Facilities: essential features

- Adequate size of the primary enclosure
 - Maintain social distance
- Multiple feeding stations
- Multiple resting areas
- Adequate space for urination and defecation
- For group housing of cats: a variety of elevated resting perches and hiding places



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How much space?

- A minimum of 18 square feet per cat
- Although no minimum has been recommended for dogs, for all species the size should be large enough to allow animals to express a variety of normal behaviors.



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An environment of plenty

- Sufficient resources (e.g., food, water, bedding, litterboxes, toys) must be provided to prevent competition or resource guarding and ensure access by all animals.



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Selection and monitoring

- Selection considerations
 - Age
 - Behavioral assessment
 - Prevention of infectious disease
 - Screening
 - Vaccination
 - Parasite control
- Monitoring
 - Training to recognize subtle signs of stress and prevent negative interactions (e.g., guarding food or other resources).



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“Random grouping of animals in shelters is an unacceptable practice.”

- Animals must not be housed in the same enclosure because they arrived on the same day.
 - Or because individual kennel space is insufficient.
- Unrelated or unfamiliar animals must not be combined in groups or pairs until after a health and behavior evaluation is performed
- Animals should be appropriately matched for age, sex, health, and behavioral compatibility.



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Spay-Neuter status

- Intact animals of breeding age should not be group housed.
- Sexually mature dogs and cats should be spayed/neutered and allowed sufficient recovery time prior to group housing.
- If group housing is utilized short-term for intact animals, they must be separated by gender.



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“Grouping animals who fight with one another is unacceptable.”

- Animals who are not socialized to other animals as well as those who actively bully other animals must not be grouped with other animals
- **Allowing animals to fight is cruel and animals who have engaged in fighting with one another must not be grouped together.**
- Caution must be used when attempting to include any animal with a history of fighting in a group.



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Group size

- Smaller groups are preferable
 - Allows more effective monitoring
 - Reduces risk of conflict
 - Reduces risk of infectious disease transmission
 - Ideally, a group size of 10–12 should not be exceeded for cats
 - For the safety of dogs as well as caregivers, dogs should be combined in even smaller groups (e.g., no more than 4–6 dogs).



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Turnover within groups should be minimized.

- The addition of new animals always results in a period of stress for the group.
- If there is constant turnover (animals joining and leaving) within the group, animals may remain stressed indefinitely.



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Puppies and Kittens



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Singletons

- Single, unrelated puppies or kittens may be group housed for socialization purposes if they must stay in the shelter long-term or if the risk from lack of social interaction is greater than that for infectious disease.
- When placing single orphaned kittens and puppies with an alternate mother, with or without a litter, risks and benefits to health and behavior for all animals must be weighed.



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When group housing is inappropriate...

- Options for individual housing must be available
- Single enriched housing must be provided for animals who:
 - Are fearful or aggressive towards other animals
 - Are stressed by the presence of other animals
 - Require individual monitoring
 - Are ill and require treatment that cannot be provided in group housing



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Very short stays...

- Because it may take days to weeks to acclimate to a group environment, enriched individual housing is preferable when a shorter stay is anticipated.



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Putting it into practice...



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Co-housing dogs



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What happens in the kennel?

- Confinement
- Attention seeking
- Lack of control
- Lack of exercise

- Frustration

+

Arousal

=

Aggression – directed at run mate



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Supervised play groups

- Make good matches
 - Age
 - Size
 - Play style
- Monitor arousal level
 - Give and take
 - Go crazy together; take breaks together
- Always be prepared to break up a fight



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Wrestling!



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CHASE!



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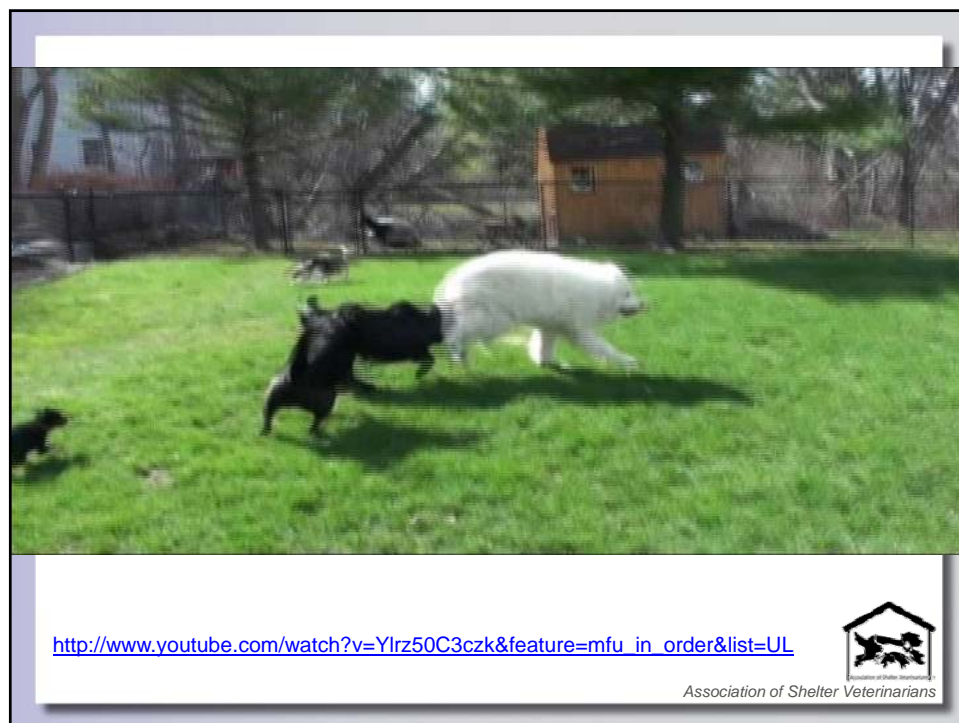


Body slammers!



Face Biters! Growly face!



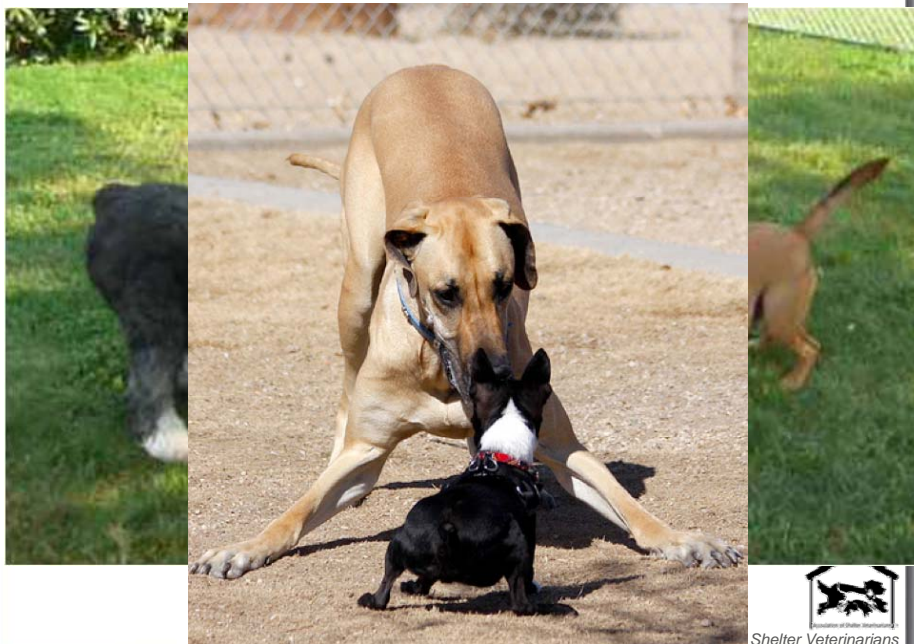


Selection

- Play style
- Personality
- Healthy – vax / parasite control/ S-N
- Age
- Size
- Gender – sometimes opposites attract 😊



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Don't mix litters. Foster care is ideal! Week end puppy fairs!



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Introductions

- On lead
 - Real life
 - Pros – safety
 - Cons – frustration; tension on neck
- Barrier
 - Pros and cons
- Go slow – be savvy, be safe
- Know how to read canine body language
- Signals can change quickly



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Breaking up a dog fight

- Catch it before it really starts
 - Careful observation of body language
- Interrupt
 - Marine horn; loud whistle
 - Spray Shield® (Direct stop®)
 - Blanket
 - Hose
- Physically separate
 - Push boards
 - Break sticks



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Staff training

- Dog savvy staff
- Safe place
- Equipment
- Protocols

=

SUCCESS!



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Feline Social Behavior

- Not asocial and solitary
- Live in groups, complex social hierarchy
- Pecking orders
- Maternal behavior = primary social pattern
- Shared kitten care
- Cooperative defense



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In Groups of Cats

Large groups- very complex social hierarchy

- A few top ranking cats
- A few subordinate cats
- The rest in the middle
- Some form relationships with other cats
 - Social cliques
- Some may remain solitary

Small groups (eg. less than 4-5 cats)- not nearly so complex



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In Groups of Cats: Social Stress

- Spraying/marketing
- Constant hiding
- Stereotypic behaviors
- Occasionally, overt aggression
- Higher ranking cats may control food/resources
- Lower ranking cats may stay sequestered on perches or on the floor



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In Groups of Cats: Social Stress

- Common to display aggression towards new members
- Hierarchy changes when new members enter or when old members exit the group



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How cats manage social conflict

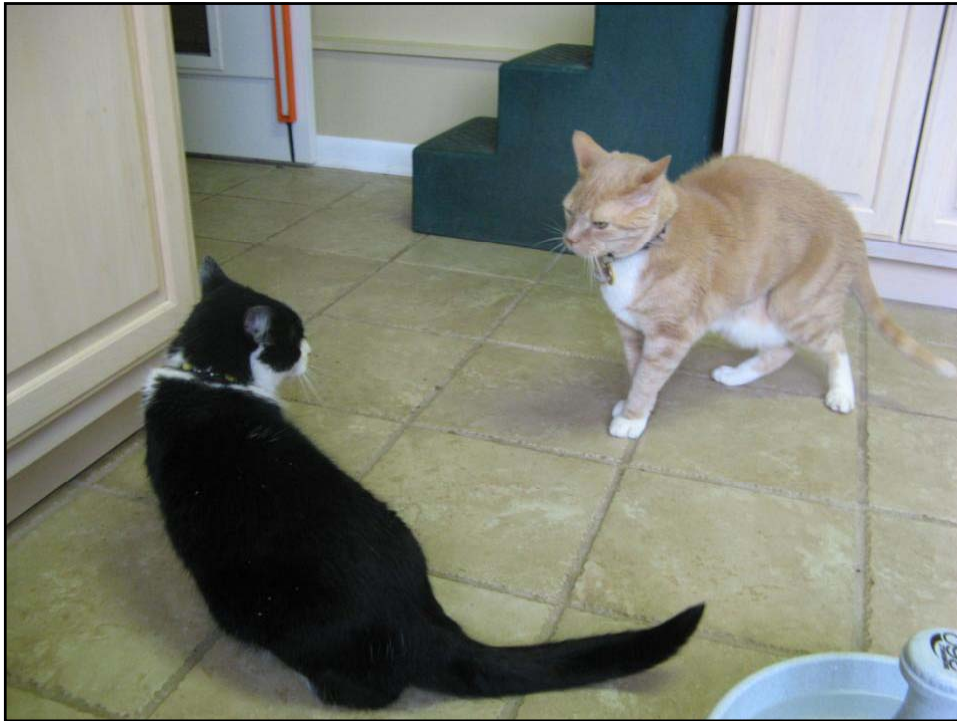
- Avoidance!
- Increase space between themselves
- Deference
- Overt aggressive
- Covert aggression
- Signs can be “subtle” even when stress is severe!



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Groups can peacefully coexist...

- If they have enough space!

Cats may have/develop strong preferences for their “friends”...



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Cat Personalities

- Bold and friendly
- Shy and timid
- Bully cats
(assertive cats)



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Group Housing

- Long term option
 - Preventive medical care
 - Individual identification
-
- Purpose: provide cats with healthy social contact and companionship in order to enhance their welfare



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Preventive Health Care

- Physical exam
- FVRCP vaccine
- Pyrantel pamoate
- Flea treatment
- FeLV/FIV testing
- Spay/neuter



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Safeguard® Plastic ID Bands



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ID Collars



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Group Housing



- Size of groups and proper selection = crucial
- Having enough space/cat = essential
- Carefully monitoring introduction of new cats = must
 - Introductions can be stressful; disrupt the social milieu
 - Takes hours-days-weeks to adapt
 - Avoid frequent intros; all in - all out approach?
- Success depends on the quality of the environment, as well as the size, matching and monitoring



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Group Housing: Cons

- Increased risk of infectious disease transmission
- Induce social stress/risk of fighting
- Makes monitoring more difficult
 - Is everybody eating OK?
 - Is everybody eliminating OK?



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Basic arrangements

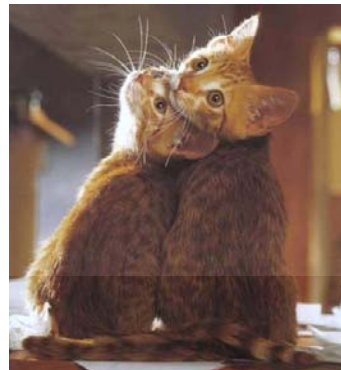
- Multiple runs in a room (like dog runs)
- Small rooms
- Individual enclosures within a group room
- Group size
 - BEST PRACTICE: Compatible pairs and/or small groups of up to 3-5 cats
 - Maximum group size: 10-12 cats



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Pair Housing = Marketing Opportunity! *Names that go together...*

- Thelma and Louise
- Bonnie and Clyde
- Sonnie and Cher
- Spaghetti and Meat Ball
- Chips and Salsa
- Catman and Robin



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Benefits of Small Groups

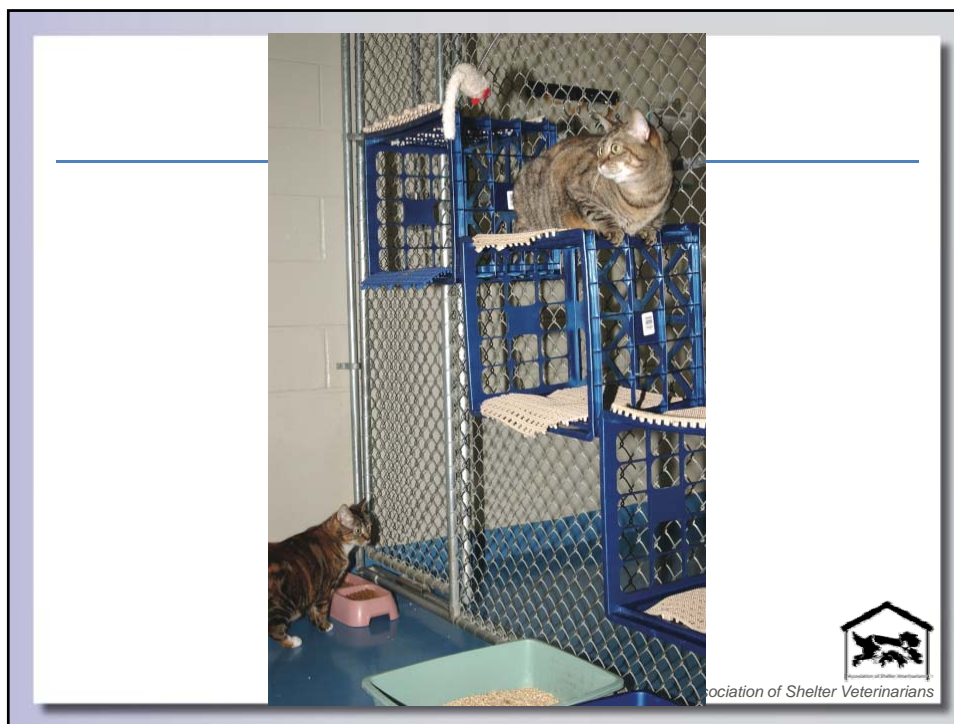
- Small groups make it easier to prevent negative interactions among cats
- Make daily monitoring of individuals much easier
- Helps to reduce turnover in the group, which reduces stress as well as the risk of infectious disease



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Selection criteria for grouping cats?

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Selection criteria for grouping cats

- Familiar cats
 - Families
 - Bonded pairs/groups
- Unfamiliar cats
 - Health status
 - Age
 - Personality type
 - Spay-neuter status



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Health Status

- Physical exam
- FVRCP vaccine
- Parasite treatment
- FeLV/FIV testing
- Ringworm?



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Age

- Kittens (less than 5 months)- may be beneficial to house in condos for biosecurity
- Juveniles: 5-12 months
- Mature adults
- Geriatrics



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Gender

- Separate by gender
- Best to be spayed/neutered
- At minimum, neuter tomcats



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Personality

- No bullies!
- Bold, friendly
 - Tend to adapt more quickly
- Shy cats
 - Try smaller groups or a calm juvenile cat
- Dominant cats
 - Try younger cats; if male, try female cat



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Group Housing- space per cat

- 18 square feet per cat



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What Factors Affect Spatial Requirements for Groups?

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Many Factors Affect Spatial Requirements

- Length of stay
- Overall quality of environment
- Use of vertical space
- Overall quality of behavioral care
- Physical and behavioral characteristics of the cats (eg. age, prior experience, socialization, personality)
- Individual needs of cats
- Individual relationships between cats (eg. family groupings, previously bonded pairs, familiar vs unfamiliar groupings, degree of social compatibility among cats)
- Turnover of cats
- Absolute number of cats in the group



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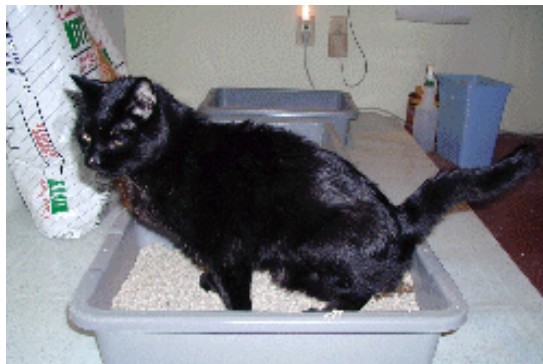
A Nice Apartment with Nice Roommates

- 10-12' X 16-18' room = 6 - 8 adult cats
- 4 X 6' run = 2 unfamiliar adults
 - Juvenile cats - a few more (4)
 - Familiar adults – 3
- Compatible house mates (and not too many)
- Enriched environment
- Not every cat will thrive in it



Basics

- 1 litter box and feeding area per 2-3 cats
- Separate food and water from litter
- Hide
- Scratch
- Play
- Climb
- Rest





Environmental Enrichment

- Mental stimulation emotionally rewarding to animals
- Strong motivation to avoid a stimulus-free environment
- Cats need choice and variety



Animal Care Staff

- Regular play and petting sessions
- Socialization of young kittens
- Timid, shy cats or stressed cats:
 - One consistent caregiver



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Best way to monitor...

- Trained staff or volunteers sit in the room with the cats for 10-15 minutes per day
- Keep notes; communicate!!!
- Take action
- Maintain a variety of housing styles!



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Introductions

- Extremely variable
- Well socialized juveniles usually easier
- Period of adjustment: hours to weeks to months
- If fighting occurs at intro: very likely to continue!
- Try to introduce slowly whenever possible
- Adjacent enclosures



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Feeding and Monitoring

- Free choice
- Multiple feeding stations
- Weight management room
- Supplemental meal feeding
- Weigh on a regular basis



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PERCEPTIONS

- Shelters must create healthy environments for their animals, staff, and potential adopters.
- Shelter pets must be highly desirable, accessible, and presented in a positive manner.




ADOPTION ROOM Before





Food, water, and litter box in close proximity. Crowding.

No personal identification for cats.
No toys or perches.



OVERVIEW OF ENRICHED ENVIRONMENT

- Change of color
- Soft, nature inspired music
- Combo of chain link group housing runs and kitty condos
- Disposable/ disinfectable toys and perches
- ID Collars



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ENRICHED ENVIRONMENT



ENRICHED ENVIRONMENT



**Cage Mates, Perches, Toys,
and Personal I.D. !!!**



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ENTRANCE PROTOCOLS

- Each cat is:
 - Tested for FeLV
 - Vaccinated and dewormed
 - Given Frontline
 - Collared (intake number, gender, name)
 - Spayed/Neutered
 - Carefully matched to a room mate



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Before







<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idgeKk81gk4&feature=plcp&context=C20118UDOEgsToPDskKs5agqzfva1G7GbG7dLvCW>



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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vExm1vAHAak&feature=plcp&context=C26191UDOEgsToPDskKJ0A1a79qsAs8tWBMkcW9>



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And the people...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSgBRlqdgTw>



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Housing or Population Density

- Overcrowding is one of the most potent stressors recognized in animal housing
- “Just one more” animal can threaten the health and welfare of the entire population of animals
- Overcrowding costs lives





Colony Living Environment

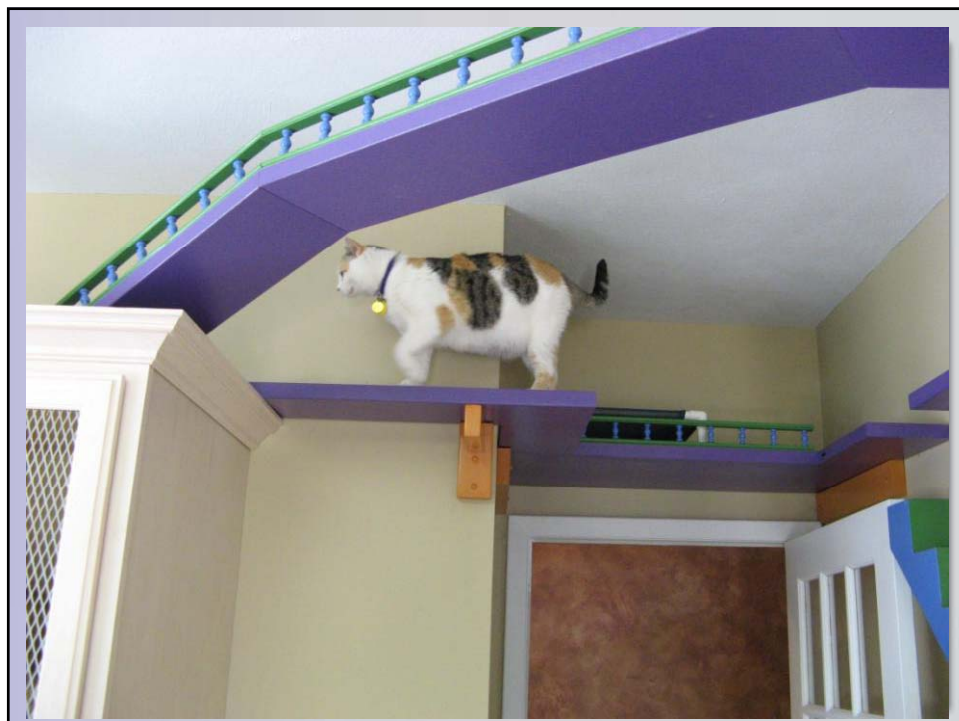
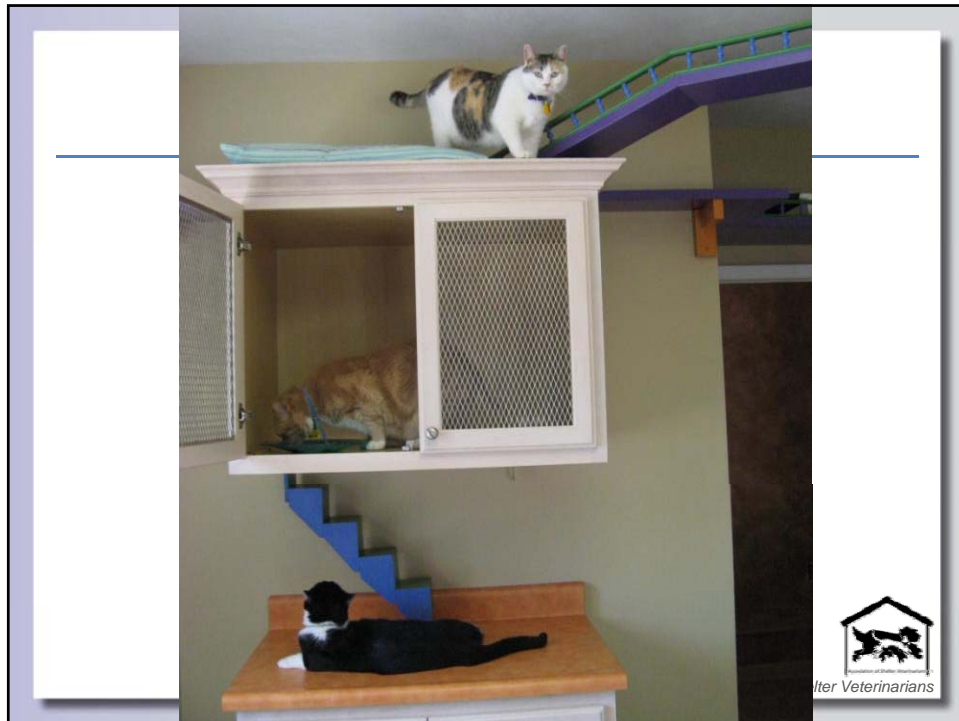
The success of group housing depends not only on the selection of compatible cats and the size of their enclosures, but also on the overall quality of the environment and care.



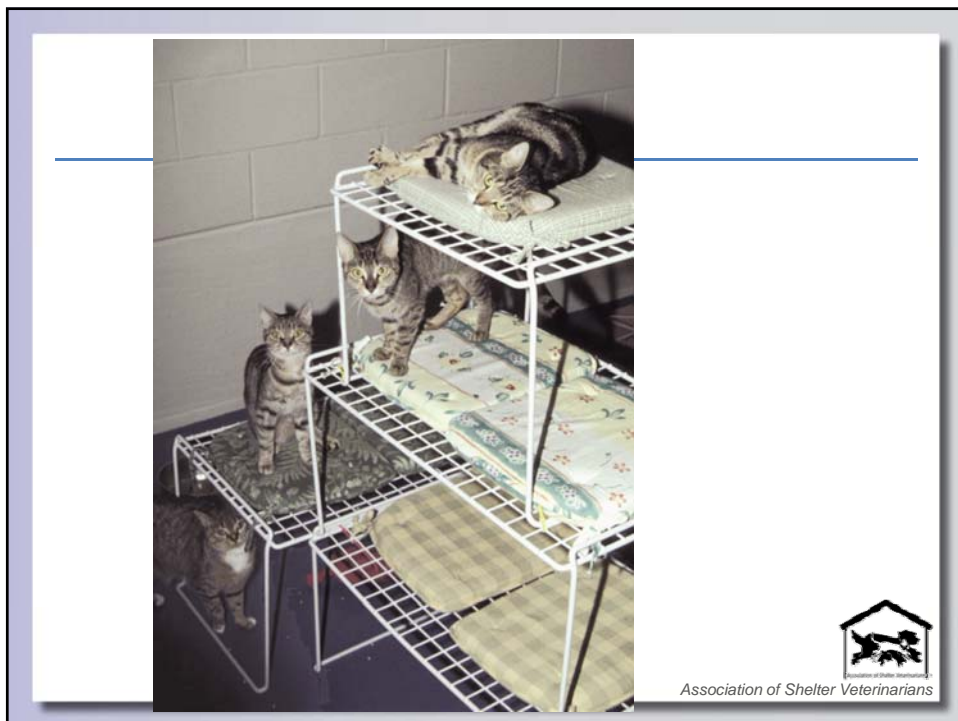
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Increase Vertical Space









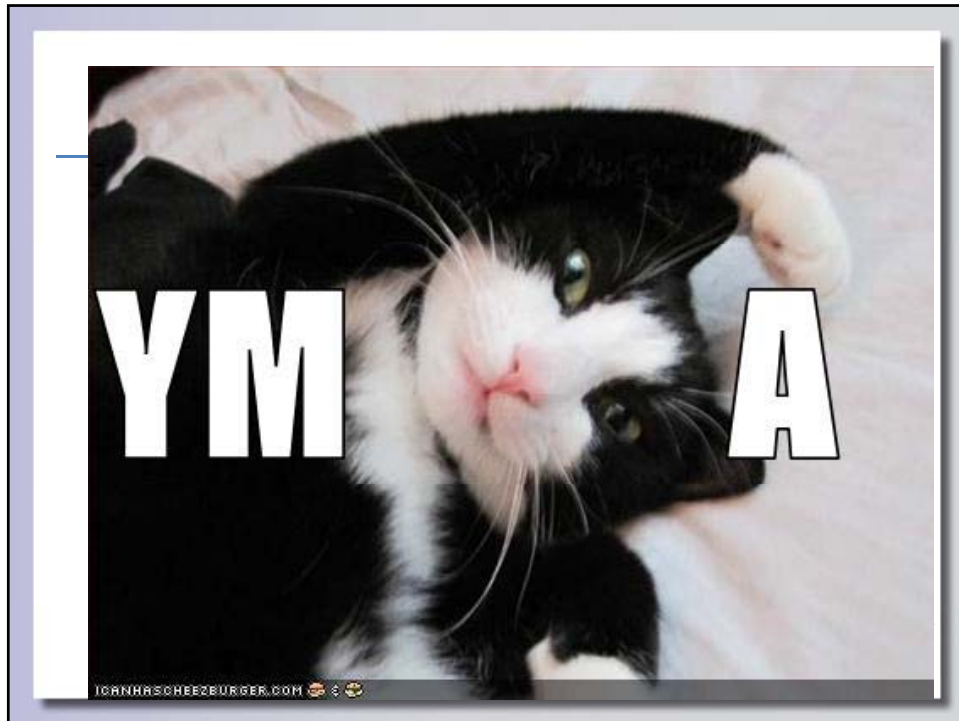
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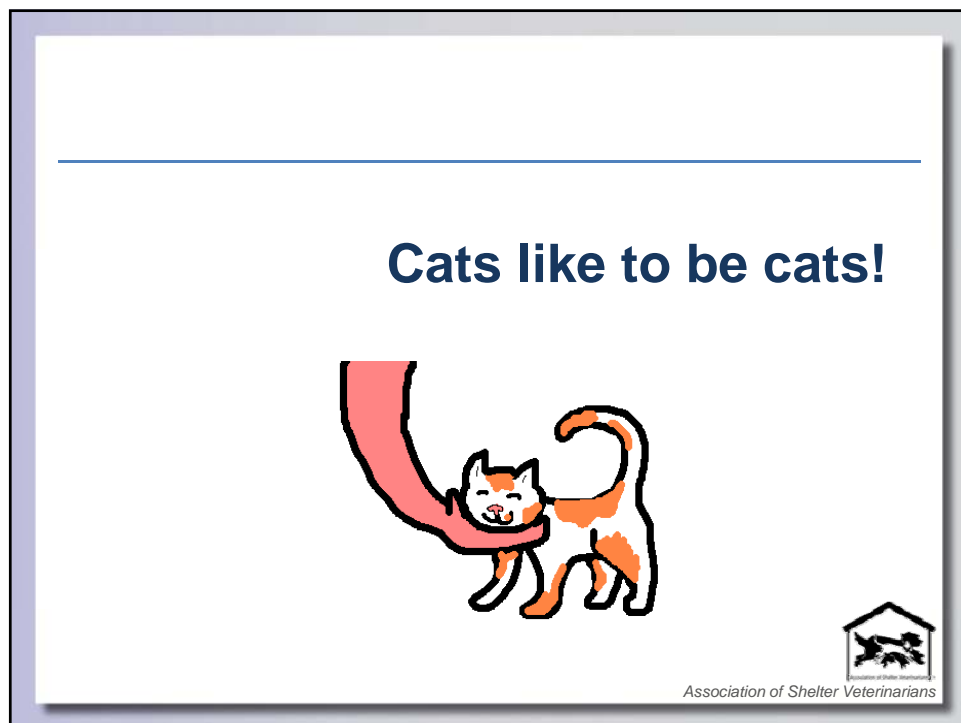


Proper Housing

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



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Kittens

Foster Care



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The Mother-Kitten Relationship

- Key to normal social and emotional development
- Kittens learn from observing their mother
 - Kittens will eat what mom eats, eliminate where mom does, see a task mom does once and then do it
 - Kittens mimic moms behavior and learn faster from it
- Early maternal separation may result in:
 - Fear and/or aggression
 - Random, undirected movements/behaviors
 - Decreased learning ability
- Orphan kittens should be raised by a foster mother



Queens are Wonderful Mothers



- Maternal behavior = primary social pattern
- Cooperative care of young
 - Kittens raised in communal nests develop faster and leave sooner



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Best Advice for Raising Orphans

- Opportunity for adoption
- Opportunity for humane education



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Adopt a Lactating Queen



- Excellent foster mothers
- Much easier than hand-raising
- Better for kittens' social development
- Best candidates- just weaned or same age
- Test for FeLV and FIV



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**Meet "Baby Huey",
a singleton kitten
fostered by a
volunteer**

*This is my foster
friend, Jimmy →
He's fat &
soft & nice
to sleep on.*



The foster home kept Huey...

He became quite the helper!

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Questions?

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Wednesday, February 29, 2012



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