VOKRA

VANCOUVER ORPHAN KITTEN RESCUE ASSOCIATION

Socialization

To Start

Slow down all of your movements. Always move slowly. Think of the pace of movement when doing Tai Chi.

Walk in an arc towards them, not straight towards them.

Soften and curve (slump) your body.

Soften and relax your face.

Look downwards and to the side, not directly at them.

Give ‘cat kisses’ (slow blinks) with your eyes. Soften and very slowly close your eyes while thinking ‘I love you’. Then slowly open them. When they slow blink back, celebrate.

Yawn. Yawning is a sign of anxiety in animals but can also be a calming signal if given to them. An animal who’s about to attack you doesn’t yawn!

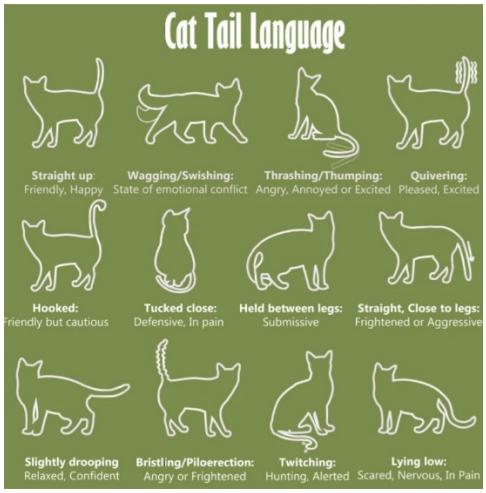
Slow your breath.

When you come to a rest, be very still.

If they come to you, be calm and slow. Make very slow, gentle movements if you touch them. ‘’Make your pats like cold honey’. They will relax quicker.

Never stare at them.

This is threatening and rude to a cat. It’s cat language for ‘I’d like to beat you to a pulp’. Use a ‘cat kiss’ instead. Look at them with your eyes partially closed. Very slowly, while thinking or saying ‘I love you’, close your eyes, then very slowly open them and keep them soft.



Fold down Crate

Use a collapsible fold down or comfortable, small room. If possible place on a table.

Have radio, TV or background noise.

Help them get used to human voices by leaving a radio on talkback, or a TV playing, at low volume. Try pet calming music on Spotify.. it can really help.

Use food as an incentive

Use treat food for taming.

Use the food that they most love for the taming sessions. They can eat their normal meal afterwards.

Calm yourself before starting taming.

Put food on small plate.

Announce food every time, with the same word eg ‘Breakfast!’ ‘Meal time’.

Turn your body ¾ to them.

Present a small cross section so you don’t look as much like a predator. Keep your eyes relaxed. Be quiet and slow. Gently tell them what you’re going to do.

Push plate into crate.

Keep hand below their chin level so you’re not like a predator. Keep fingers relaxed, not out straight (straight fingers look like a paw about to attack). If they spit or lunge at you, try not to jerk, just remove your hand And close the door.

If they’ll eat in front of you, stay, so that they associate you with food. If necessary, turn your back to them and sit low on the floor, so they feel less vulnerable. If they won’t eat after about 10 minutes, leave.

Spend time in their room, ignoring them.

Do computing, reading, watching TV, listening to music, sleeping – whatever your day to day activities are. They’ll slowly learn that you’re not a threat.

As they get more used to you, stretch their comfort zone:

Put plate in, don’t leave

Put plate in, near front of crate

Put plate in near front of crate, stay there so they must approach you to get food

Open crate door, announce food, they must approach you first, then you put plate in

Food on spoon, keep hand below their chin level

Food on finger AND you must firmly touch them with other hand, on side. Use the back of your hand if necessary.

When touching them, be calm, deliberate, not scared (meditate, visualize). Stroke them with the authority of being a Mum Cat

If in doubt, use a taming wand

If you're not sure how they'll go being touched, use a 'taming wand' – a soft stretchy wool glove filled with tissue of polar fleece or something soft held onto a long thin stick – or feather. This is less threatening than hands and means you can touch them without being as close to them, or getting bitten or scratched.

Do not be tentative.

Tentative means, about to attack, testing out the enemy.

Always move hand/arm below their chin level. This is quite important.

Use relaxed, curled hand/fingers at all times

End on a high note

End each session on a positive note

The length of each session isn't as important as finishing a session when your cat is comfortable. If they've just hissed at you, stay a little longer. Offer another special treat. They'll remember their last interaction with you more than their first.

Next stages:

Food on finger AND you must firmly touch them, now with both hands (then you offer the food)

To get food, they must let you touch on both sides and LIFT a micron

Same – lift more, food

Same – lift several inches, food

Same – lift towards you, set back, food

Same – lift to your chest, don't look at cat — too threatening, return, food

Same – lift to chest, turn, turn back, return, food

Same – take a few steps, return, food

Same – walk around, return, food.

If at any point they fuss, return to the the step that worked.

Once they're comfortable being handled, transition them from their crate to their 'graduation room'- maybe your bedroom, or a spare room. Most cats prefer staying in, or near, their crate for a while until they get used to the room, so put that in there as well.

Over time, they'll stop using it as their 'safe place'.

In addition to the crate, you'll need one or more good hiding places and their other necessities – here's a list.

Continue to work with them in the room, using food as a reward for interacting with you.

You could try using 'snuggle sessions' to fast track them. Here, you'll encourage them to move from their hiding spot onto a blanket on your lap. Wrap them in the blanket, including their face (make sure they can breathe). Then stroke them over the blanket, then under the blanket, to get them used to human touch

Things to celebrate

If your cat does any of these things, congratulations! You're making progress.

Eyes blinking at you Celebrate! They're saying that they feel safe enough with you to not constantly watch you.

Ears forward They don't feel the need to protect them from possible attack

Arms folded upside down under their body They don't feel the need to be ready to run

Lying on their side Very relaxed

Purring Contentment (unless they're in pain). This means wonderful progress. Give yourself a big pat on the back (and give your cat extra treats!).

Socialization will plateau up and down. One day, they'll suddenly NOT let you pick them up. Go back to what they WILL allow. This up and down is quite normal.

They will almost certainly go backwards when they graduate from a fold down to a room, and again when they move from their room to the rest of the house. Give them time, and continue with hand feeding and ending each session on a positive note, and they should get back to the levels they achieved in the fold down.

Carrier Confidence

It is very important for the crate to be a safe/sanctuary space; a source of comfort during anxious travel times and not a source of stress in itself. The crate/ travel carrier should be kept in the cat's area, with soft bedding and treats inside.

Video: https://youtu.be/572rI76-p2c

Some tips:

- Normalize the crate: interact with it, pet it, talk to it. Show no fear!
- When the cat is confident, start putting treats inside to encourage them to go in.
- Move to feeding inside the crate and close the door. Start by just rattling the latch and work up to closing and latching the door.
- Build on this: close the door and briefly pick up the crate with the cat inside.
- Build on this again: leave the cat inside for increasing amounts of time starting with a few seconds and building up to half an hour.

Work on this over a period of weeks. The cat should be dictating the pace, gradually growing more comfortable with the crate and not crying or showing aversion.

Picking the Cat Up

Touching and petting everywhere should be normalized before trying to pick the cat up.

Follow these steps, letting the cat dictate the speed of progress and rewarding with praise, petting, and treats:

1. Begin by just putting both hands around the cat's shoulders and holding for a few seconds.

2. When the cat is comfortable with step 1, start lifting them a little by the shoulders, so that front feet just come off the floor. Work up to lifting from under the armpits/chest/ribcage.

3. Once the cat is comfortable with lifting under the chest, start lifting the whole body for a few seconds with one hand under the armpits/chest/ribcage and the other hand supporting the rear end. Return the cat to the ground immediately afterward - holding only briefly is less stressful, and gives them less time to start kicking.

a. If the cat starts kicking and struggling DO NOT drop them. Lower them gently to the ground and hold on until they have stopped kicking. If you lose hold of the cat, they will feel less safe next time you pick them up, and they will learn that they can get away from you by struggling.

1. Once the cat is comfortable, increase the height lifted to and length of time held.

2. Pick the cat up and put them on a window sill, on a couch or chair, or on top of a crate with treats or food as a reward.

If the cat is comfortable snuggling or sitting in your lap but not being held, try hugging them gently. Gradually increase time held and then stand up while holding the cat.

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