

# Animal Help Desk Caseworker Handbook

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**... Bringing animals and people together!**

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# Chapter 1

## Understanding the Problem And How You Can Help

**N**o one knows for sure how many homeless pets there are at any one time. In the past several years, estimates have run as high as 60 million homeless cats, dogs, puppies and kittens in the United States. Because many homeless animals are not neutered, there are more being born each hour. Nationally, an average of 12 million cats and dogs enter animal shelters each year, and many of them (roughly five million) are destroyed. In the summer, many shelters -- including here in Washoe County -- receive large numbers of animals each day, every day.

The Nevada Humane Society has set the goal of creating a no-kill community in Washoe County, where homeless animals are no longer routinely killed for population control. Getting there is going to take considerable work and it's going to require the help of many people. Through the Animal Help Desk, you'll be an important part of making this dream a reality.

### **What is the goal of the Help Desk?**

Whenever possible, we need to encourage more people to get involved helping the animals. By inspiring action, compassion and involvement, by sharing information and inviting new people to get involved, we can help many more animals.

As an Animal Help Desk Caseworker, a significant part of your job will be trying to bring out the best in people. Inspiring people to help the animal themselves, to act, to become involved, to accept responsibility, is the only way that many of the animals will be helped. As you can clearly see from the numbers, we cannot do it all ourselves. Also, there is a side benefit to encouraging people to get involved and handle the problem themselves; they will discover that they can do it. They will have put compassion into practice in their own lives. Who knows, you may inspire someone to become a loyal crusader for the animals!

### **About The Animal Help Desk Team**

The Animal Help Desk Team is a group of NHS Staff & volunteers dedicated to helping find lifesaving solutions for pets and pet owners in need.

#### **What Do People Expect?**

Many people who call us will expect that we have the capacity to resolve all animal problems quickly and easily. As an Animal Help Desk Caseworker, it will be your task to guide people through the situation, explore options, get them involved in the solution, and share additional resources.

- You'll ask questions to find out about their situation. Just talking can help to sort out some problems.
- You'll share information, and talk them through how they may take action and ways we can help.
- Together you'll explore options and help to find a solution for the animals. (Be a possibility thinker!)
- Depending upon the situation you may want to explain how they can resolve a behavior issue or find a new home for the animal.
- If it's a feral cat, you'll talk them through the benefits and basics of trap/neuter/return.
- In other cases you'll provide referrals to other resources, including affordable spay/neuter services.
- Occasionally you will receive a case that you need to refer to others in the organization for specialized assistance.

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## Chapter 2

# The Basics: Doing the Job

### General Guidelines for Managing Cases

“A case” starts as a call or e-mail from a member of the public. We will assign a case number to it and keep track of the interactions with the individual(s) involved.

**Set a professional tone.** Start each call with “Hello, this is [your first name] from The Nevada Humane Society’s Animal Help Desk returning your call.”

**Return all calls/e-mails within the designated time frame.** All calls and e-mails should receive a response dependent on their urgency. Priority on response will be given by the Animal Help Desk Coordinator. The most critical situation should be addressed first. For example, injured animals or situations with a time limitation are a priority. Our current optimal response time is:

| Urgency | Response          |
|---------|-------------------|
| Low     | 5 days            |
| Medium  | 2 -3 days         |
| High    | 24 hours          |
| Urgent  | less than 2 hours |

**Take notes while talking.** Start a new **Case Record Sheet**, either online or on paper, for each new situation. Use this sheet to record all correspondence and action taken regarding this case. Please submit the sheet to the Animal Help Desk Coordinator, once you have initiated contact and the case is either closed or waiting for response back. Close all cases in one week if no response has been received. The Coordinator will ensure that all case information is logged in the Animal Help Desk Case Log.

**Can’t reach the caller?** If you are unable to reach the person, leave a message, including your first name, and letting them know when you will call back. If they will not be available at that time, ask them to call the main number (leave the number for them) and leave a message for you about the best times to call. You can also leave your e-mail address or personal phone number, if you are comfortable doing that.

**Know when to make calls.** As a general rule, we do not recommend calling before 8 a.m. or after 8 p.m., except in the event of an emergency, or a specific request.

#### **Keep the caller on track.**

If the person is rambling, taking up too much time, or not answering your questions, interrupt politely and say, “What can I do for you?” or “Tell me why you called” or “How can I help?” or “Excuse me, [repeat your question].” An upbeat, friendly tone of voice makes all the difference!

If they persistently interrupt or fail to answer the question, you may need to say something firmer: “I’m sorry, I want to be able to help you with this situation but I have many other calls to make, so I need to get this information from you in order to try to help. I need to know. . .[repeat your question].”

To terminate the call if they are rambling, you may need to break into the conversation in a firm but friendly tone: “Excuse me, I have to go now, but I’ll be getting that information together for you. Thanks again.” Listen for a moment to see if they have another important point to make. If not, and if they are not saying good-bye, you may need to repeat: “I’m so very sorry, but I have to go now. We’ll send that info right out to you. Goodbye for now.” Then disconnect.

**Jargon.** Avoid using humane movement slang. For example, ask “Is the cat friendly?” rather than “Is the cat adoptable?”, OR “Can you pet him?” rather than “Is the cat feral?”

**Proper terminology.** Always use correct medical terminology; for example, the correct term is “FIV,” not “kitty AIDS.”

**Avoid graphic descriptions.** We avoid graphically disturbing descriptions.

**Avoid critical comment about other groups.** We do not forward messages or pass on information that is critical of other organizations. Similarly, we do not forward e-mail petitions. If anyone asks about NHS endorsing petitions or other legislative efforts, they can be referred to the Community Services Director.

**Specific information on what to do.** ALWAYS tell people EXACTLY what they can do to help.

**It’s okay not to know.** If you are not sure of the answer, it’s always best to say, “That’s a good question. I’m not sure, but I’ll check into it and get back to you.”

Please feel free to contact the Animal Help Desk Coordinator for advice on how to best handle a situation that is unusual, new to you, or potentially complicated. There’s no such thing as a silly question.

**Deal appropriately with medical questions.** If you are asked about medical conditions, explain that you are not a veterinarian. You may offer general advice. For example: “Diarrhea can be caused by parasites, but it could also indicate more serious problems. I suggest that you contact a veterinarian.” Sometimes, the general advice needs to be customized to the situation. For example: “Diarrhea can rapidly cause dehydration in very young animals and this can be fatal. You should consult a vet at once.”

**Be aware of the disclaimer on lists of shelters or resources.** The following statement needs to accompany any referral or resource listing that we send out: “The inclusion of a service, organization or program in this listing is NOT an endorsement or recommendation. We are not able to guarantee the quality of services. We strongly suggest that you check them out yourself before using a specific service.”

**Animal situations only.** The Animal Help Desk Team only provides assistance for animal situations. We cannot promote any business, for-profit venture, OR help any personal problems that do not directly involve animals.

**Customize your message.** Your reply needs to be suitable for the experience level of the caller or writer. An experienced rescuer or a shelter employee needs a different response than an individual who is facing this challenge for the first time. This can be as simple as adding a sentence that recognizes the experience of the individual. For example: “I realize you may have tried many of these things, but here is our standard advice. Let me know if you have already exhausted these options.” Or you could preface your response with this: “Forgive me if you are already familiar with this, but we have found that. . .”

**Contact information.** Be sure to include your contact information and/or the contact information (the e-mail address and/or phone number) for the individual who needs the assistance or is coordinating the project.

**Help the organization to cultivate members.** Always be on the look out for individuals to add to our mailing list. A kind person who rescues a stray may be a future event participant or a valuable volunteer! But if we don’t get their name on the mailing list we’ll loose touch with them! Names, addresses and phone numbers for the mailing list should be sent to the Animal Help Desk Coordinator.

**Feral colony location.** If a feral cat colony is mentioned, do not give the exact location. That specific information can lead to animals being dumped there or, in the wrong hands, it can put the cats and feeders at risk.

**Follow up for success.** If time allows, two weeks after a case has been closed, recontact the case originator to make sure everything worked out and also find out how we are doing.

**Become a truly effective counselor for the animals.** As an Animal Help Desk Caseworker, the public will view you as an expert on all issues related to animals. You are, in effect, a counselor for animal issues. Read, study, and learn everything you can. Please run any new or revolutionary ideas by the Animal Help Desk Coordinator before presenting them to the public.

### **Ways to Provide Resources, Advice, and Referrals**

**Resources:** Provide information, literature or Internet resources, including:

- Send *How to Find Homes* manual
- Send *Feral Cat Trap-Neuter-Return* and related information
- Suggest other literature and information from Standard Resources

**Advice:** Make suggestions or offer advice, including as appropriate:

- Find a new home
  - Advertising in newspaper or newsletters
  - Posting on adoption web sites
  - Word of mouth
  - Distributing flyers/posters
- Vet check-up
- Behavior modification:
  - Suggest behavior websites
  - Suggest training/trainer, behaviorist, board-certified veterinary behaviorist
- Trap/neuter/return for feral cats
  - Suggest relocation as a last resort for feral cats

**Referrals:** Make referrals as needed, including:

- Rescue organizations
- Pet-friendly Apartments

## **Email Communication**

Many cases will require that you gather a lot of information before you can decide on the best course of action. This usually involves several messages being sent back and forth between the person seeking help and the representative handling the case.

In order to document the case, so that another representative could follow up if necessary, or in the event that questions arise in the future about the case, it's important that you record the entire exchange in the Case Record Sheet.

At first glance, some of the steps below may seem unimportant and cumbersome, but following the instructions will actually save time by eliminating the need to search for previous messages relating to the case you are working on. Here are the steps to follow:

1. When a case originating from an e-mail message is assigned to you, the message will be forwarded to you from the Animal Help Desk Coordinator. The subject line will specify the case number that has been assigned in the Case Log.
2. Read the message carefully to determine what type of help or information the person is seeking.

If the person is requesting that we accept the pet, determine the appropriate reply based on the

following:

Whether or not there are options for the animal, such as being placed directly into an adoptive home.

What have they already done to help the animal?

Whether the animal has any behavioral or physical conditions.

3. After you have decided how you are going to respond, click on “Forward” rather than starting a new message. Copy the person’s e-mail address from the text of the message and paste it into the “To” box. Your e-mail program can be set up to leave the previous messages in the body of the e-mail, creating a history that will hopefully be maintained throughout the case.

4. First, thank the person for contacting the Nevada Humane Society Animal Help Desk concerning the situation.

5. You may need additional information in order to help them effectively.

6. Copy the appropriate standard reply, if there is one, into the message above your signature line. Read through the standard reply, and edit the information so it applies to the person’s situation.

7. Be sure to ask them to include the e-mail history when they reply.

8. Spell check your message, copy and paste it into the Case Record, then send the message to the writer, and change the status of the case from “Open” to “Waiting” or “Closed” as appropriate.

9 If, after one week, the person has not gotten back to you, change the case status to “Closed.”

NOTE: If your computer is not set to automatically spell check before sending a message, and to save the initial e-mail message in the text of replies and forwarded messages, let us know and we can help you adjust the settings.

### **Phone Requests, Communication, and Resources Sent or Faxed**

Telephone communication needs to be similarly documented on the Case Record Sheets. While you are on the phone, you can handwrite the notes onto the Case Record Sheet or enter it online. Use a new Case Record Sheet for each case.

You’ll also need to make notations on the Case Record Sheet when you have literature sent or faxed out in relation to the case.

### **Be on the Lookout for Information that will Help the Animal Help Desk Team**

Please also be on the lookout for:

**Newsletter-worthy success stories.** If you come across situations that you feel may make a good newsletter story that might inspire other people to help animals, please run it by the Animal Help Desk Coordinator.

**New Resources.** If you hear about a person or group who is trying to help animals in a nearby location please inform the Animal Help Desk Coordinator.

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## Chapter 3

# How to Handle the Most Common Request

### COMMON TYPES OF REQUESTS

We receive a wide variety of phone calls and e-mails each day. These are some of the most common categories of requests for assistance:

#### New home needed for pet because of:

- Behavior problems

##### Cats

- Litter box problems
- Aggression
- Damaging furniture
- Fearfulness

##### Dogs

- Aggression toward some people
- Aggression toward other dogs
- Biting
- Pit Bulls
- Housebreaking lapse
- Separation anxiety
- Jumping up
- Nuisance barking

- Health Problems

##### Cats

- FIV (feline immunodeficiency virus)
- FeLV (feline leukemia)
- FIP (feline infectious peritonitis)
- Neurological impairment, physical disability, deformity
- Other: incontinence, kidney disease/renal failure, Chronic Cystitis, Diabetes, IBD (inflammatory bowel disease), blindness, deafness, special dietary needs

##### Dogs

- Diabetes
- Deafness, blindness
- Epilepsy/seizures
- Physical disability
- Medications/special dietary needs

- Lifestyle changes

- Moving
- Allergies
- New baby

- Special Circumstances:

- Senior pet
- Multiple-pet placement
- Hoarding

- Stray, homeless, or abandoned animals:
  - Cats and dogs
  - Feral cats

**Other situations:**

- Report of abuse or neglect of an animal
- Orphaned kittens found
- Spay/neuter assistance needed
- Legal help needed
- Lifetime care or pet retirement home needed
- Injured or orphaned wildlife found
- Financial assistance needed
- Medical Emergencies
- Lost pet
- Request for information on volunteering
- Request for information on adoptions
- Callers threatening to harm animals

## FINDING A NEW HOME

**“I need to find a new home for my pet.”**

**“I need to get rid of this animal.”**

When a caller makes one of the above statements, it’s usually advisable to start off by asking questions. Questions help to engage the caller, and the responses provide additional information for you to work with.

### Beginning Questions to Ask

**How old is the animal?**

**How long have you had the animal?**

Unfortunately, the animal’s age is a factor in finding a new home (small dogs have it a bit easier). It is especially hard on older animals when they loose their home. Adjusting to life in a shelter is so stressful for some older pets that they become ill. Sometimes explaining the stress can help callers understand the need to find a solution to the problem to save their friend’s life.

**Why do you need to place the animal?**

Based upon their answers, see the various specific categories in this chapter for additional advice and information you can provide.

### General Advice

Shelters should be places of last resort for animals, so we should encourage people, whenever possible to seek other solutions.

We accept animals from outside of Washoe County only on an exception basis – if we feel that the animal is in danger or if there are other special circumstances. Speak to the Operations Director about such circumstances.

The best outcome is if you can discover the underlying problem and help the person find a workable solution – thereby keeping the pet in the home. The second best would be to encourage them to try to place the animal directly into a new home themselves.

## Placement Tips

Some specific placement tips to share with callers:

**Prepare the animal for adoption.** To increase the chances of finding a home and the success of the new placement, it is important that the pet is:

- Spayed or neutered
- In good health
- Clean and groomed
- Reasonably well behaved, especially housebroken

**Advertise widely.** Get the word out, in as many places as possible, to increase the chances of success in finding a new home.

- Photos and descriptions really help people make a connection to an animal. In the ads, describe the pet's personality, habits, and some of the little things that make this animal special. Do not hold back when it comes to telling about any disabilities, health issues, or behavior quirks. Sometimes these are the things that particularly speak to an individual who may want to adopt this pet.

- Flyers are inexpensive and often highly effective, especially when they include a good photo and good description of the animal. They work especially well for older animals or animals with special needs. Posting the flyers throughout the community, wherever a good prospective adoptive person may see it, is the key to success with flyers. Health food stores, supermarkets, libraries, churches, health clubs, and sporting goods stores are just a few examples of good places to post flyers.

- Posting information about pets on adoption web sites is another effective way to find a new home. There are specific sites for certain types of animals (FIV+ cats, disabled pets, senior dogs, etc.) as well as general adoption websites. General adoption web sites (all listed in the standard reply for finding homes) include:

[www.petfinder.com](http://www.petfinder.com)

[www.petbynet.com](http://www.petbynet.com)

- To find a home for a dog of a particular breed or breed mix, suggest they use the listings of breed rescues on the National AKC site: [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org).

- Word of mouth should not be underestimated! Advise the caller to tell anyone and everyone about the pet that needs a home and to ask others to help with spreading the word. It could be that a co-worker's father's neighbor's daughter is looking for a new pet

- Use community contacts. Tell people to mention the animal in their church's newsletter, send an e-mail about the pet through their office memo system, or share some flyers with the members of their book club.

- Get the pet out there! (This works especially well with dogs.) The more their pet interacts with people, the more likely he'll charm the right person. They can take their pet on walks, to pet supply stores, to the local park. Suggest they put a bandana or sign on her that says, "Looking for a home."

- Specialized advertising reaches out to a particular community that is most likely to offer an appropriate home for a pet. For instance, an active animal will need an active home, so flyers could be placed in outdoor sporting goods stores, gyms, etc. An older animal may prefer a quieter home with a mature owner, so an ad posted in the local senior newsletter might yield good results.

- Other shelters and rescue groups may be an option. Although any no-kill shelter is likely to be full and a traditional shelter may euthanize the animal, these organizations may be able to offer other assistance. Some have low-cost spay/neuter clinics or offer obedience- training classes. Some will list the pet on their

bulletin board or web site. Or they may let the individual bring the animal along for their off-site adoption days.

- Local rescues – list in back
- Suggest that they ask local veterinarians for any assistance they can offer and for rescue contacts they may be able to share.

**Be creative and persistent.** Creativity and persistence are usually rewarded. Encourage the caller to think about the best kind of environment for the pet and to explore all options. There are many animals needing homes at any one time, so finding a home can take some work. The key thing this pet has going for them is the caller. It may help to remind callers that they can make a life or death difference for the animal.

**Stay positive.** If they express doubt that a good home can be found, it may be helpful to share these thoughts:

- There are good homes out there. People who don't believe that are generalizing the behavior of the minority of people who are irresponsible pet owners.
- The caller is the pet's best option for finding a new home. Some people think shelters or rescue groups would be best for placing the pet because we have experience, facilities, screening guidelines, etc. But an individual, particularly one who knows the animal, can focus all their efforts on that pet, provide the most information to prospective adopters and best determine the appropriateness of a new home. Also, any shelter or sanctuary is stressful for an animal. The shelter setting, no matter how nice, can bring on stress-related problems.

Anxiety, aggression, and even illness are common and these natural reactions may make adoption difficult or impossible. Close the call by wishing them success with finding a home for the animal and invite them to call back if they have any questions or would like to discuss the matter further.

If the person is open to exploring other options (besides finding a new home), there are details in “Section 2: Behavior Problems” and “Section 3: Medical Issues.”

## **SECTION 2: BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS**

### **General Advice**

If callers say they have to give up a pet because of behavior problems, they might be willing to listen to advice about how to solve the behavior problem so they can keep their friend.

First, recommend a trip to the vet to rule out a health problem. This is always the first step with any behavior problem, since many behaviors can have their roots in a medical condition. Last year's general checkup, when the person may not have mentioned the problem to the vet, is not adequate to rule out a medical basis to the problem.

You could also suggest that the person consult a behavior specialist or trainer. Not all veterinarians receive training in animal behavior problems.

There are many recent developments in veterinary medicine that involve the use of drugs to control behavioral problems. These pharmacological solutions can be highly effective, minimally risky and reasonably priced. Many veterinarians, however, are not yet comfortable enough with the newer drugs to prescribe them readily, so it's worth finding a board-certified veterinary behaviorist, after medical causes have been ruled out, to prescribe drugs for behavior problems.

While we are not behavior experts, and should be referring people to experts for further advice, it's helpful if you can offer some preliminary information over the phone. It's important that the caller get a sense that

there are things to try which can, in some cases, be quite simple yet effective. Your advice and patience can save a life!

## **Cat Behavior Problems**

### **Inappropriate Urination/Defecation: Litter Box Problems**

Inappropriate elimination is a common problem that results in the deaths of countless cats when people abandon or give up their pets because they can't cope with it.

Some people are still unaware of the scope of the overpopulation problem and think that it will be easy to find a new home for their pet. So you may need to clear up this misconception before they are open to hearing any alternatives.

Sometimes you can explain to people that unless they address the behavior issue, the chance of finding a permanent new home is very small. After all, if they cannot tolerate the behavior of the animal that they have had for years, why would they assume that someone else will tolerate this behavior? Pointing this out can help them to realize the need for action, on their part, to solve the problem.

Sometimes friends or family are willing to help. There is some evidence that changing the cat's environment will sometimes correct the problem. Spraying may be associated with some unhappiness in the home. However, caution must be taken when attempting to find a home for a cat with this behavior problem, because these cats are likely targets for abuse, neglect, and abandonment.

If the caller finds someone willing to take a cat that urinates inappropriately, recommend that an arrangement be made to have the cat returned if the problem persists. This way, the caller can determine the cat's future in a humane manner.

Generally, it is necessary to deal with the problem within the household. If callers insist on finding a new home for the cat, encourage them to work on the problem so that the animal will be more adoptable. (They may even decide to keep their pet!)

### **Questions You Can Ask**

Here are some questions you can ask and things you can suggest to begin solving the problem:

#### **When did the problem start?**

It's easier to break a new habit, so encourage them to get on it right away!

#### **Have you taken the cat to the vet to have this problem checked out recently?**

More on this in the "Specific Steps for Solving the Problem." (Often, a urinary tract infection, which can cause cats to go outside the box, can easily be treated with antibiotics.)

#### **Has anything changed in the animal's environment or living situation?**

This may include new people in the house, new pets, frequent visitors, the departure of a favorite person, construction, other animals in the yard, a change in diet, and a change in medications. Eliminating or minimizing the causes of stress can sometimes solve the problem.

#### **How many cats are in the house? How many litter boxes do you have?**

Try having at least one litter box per cat. Only one cat? Try two boxes.

#### **Is he an indoor-outdoor cat? Is there a litter box in the house?**

This may be hard to believe, but occasionally a person will expect the cat to hold it indefinitely until the cat can be let out. If this is the case, explain in a nonjudgmental tone that cats need to eliminate several times a day.

**How old is the cat?**

Some elimination problems can be age-related so reiterate the importance of a vet checkup to discuss the problem.

**Are the litter boxes kept scrupulously clean?**

Some cats avoid an unclean litter box. Try completely cleaning it daily, not just sifting out the solids. Change the whole pan, using less litter; and changing it more often).

**Where is the litter box?**

It should be in a quiet, easy-to-access area. It must always be available, not behind a closed door (in the bathroom, for instance) or in the same room with the Great Dane that the cat is nervous about, or near the washing machine that makes scary noises sometimes, or in any busy location. Both older animals and young ones may not be able to climb into a high, walled box and may need more litter boxes scattered around the house so that they can “make it in time.”

**Is the litter box covered?**

Try uncovering it – some cats do not like covered boxes.

**Is the box too small?**

Try a larger one.

**What type of litter do you use?**

Try different types of filler; experiment with different brands and types of litter in different boxes. Try unscented litter, since some cats hate the scented type. After all, they have more sensitive noses than we do. Many cats like the fine texture of the clumping litter. Try clean potting soil, regular clay litter, sand, sawdust or wood shavings in different litter boxes to see what the cat prefers. Use a good quality, low-dust litter.

**Do you use plastic liners?**

Some cats hate them, because their claws catch in the plastic.

**What cleaner do you use in the litter box?**

Do not use strong-smelling cleaners on the litter box and, whatever you use, rinse it very well. Cats have sensitive noses and can smell things you cannot. The scent of the cleaner may be putting your cat off! Some cleaners, such as Lysol or chlorine bleach, can be toxic to cats. Do not use air fresheners near the litter box, since they too may repel the cat.

**Specific Steps for Solving the Problem**

Here are some steps you can suggest to solve the problem:

**1. Rule out medical causes.** First, suggest that they take the animal to the vet to rule out any health problems. Advise them to tell the vet about the specific problem. Several physical problems may cause even the best-behaved cat to not use the litter box consistently (these include urinary tract infection, parasites, and hormonal problems). Physical problems must be ruled out before moving on to working on the behavioral aspect of the problem. The good news is that the physical problems that cause lapses in litter box training can often be easily and inexpensively treated and will often resolve the behavior problem completely. Even young animals can suffer from some of these medical conditions

**2. Try a few simple behavior modification techniques.**

(This step is not a replacement for a veterinary check-up, which is always the first order of business.) Here are some suggestions from behavior experts that you can share:

- Eliminate the smell of the accidents. If the cat can smell that he has gone there before, it may seem like a good idea to go there again. A mild bleach solution can be very effective in removing urine odors; however, it must be cleaned up thoroughly after use since bleach is toxic. A product called “Simple Solution” from Outright (available at pet supply stores) is also very effective and safer to use than bleach on some surfaces. Never use ammonia to clean up accidents, because it smells like urine to the animals. Once the smell is gone, try placing an extra food or water bowl on the preferred spot. Most animals have an aversion to eliminating near their food or water.

- Make the litter box as accessible and appealing to the cat as possible.
- Add a litter box or two. It may be necessary to have one box for every cat in the house.
- Make sure the litter box is easy to get in and out of. An older cat or young kitten may need a box with a lower entry area.
- Keep the boxes scrupulously clean.
- Avoid strong-smelling cleaners.
- Try different brands of litter. Some cats do not like scented litter, and many prefer scoopable litter.
- Try uncovering the litter box. Some cats do not like to enter into a hooded/covered box.
- Get larger litter boxes. A large cat may have trouble fitting into a small box.
- Make sure the location is quiet and private. The litter box needs to be in a location that is not too busy and where the cat can enter the box without fear of people or other animals who may be in the area.
- Discontinue the use of plastic liners, since some cats do not like digging in a plastic-lined box.
- Putting a cat in a large dog crate or appropriate cat cage for a period of time in the home, with a litter box available in the cage, can help to retrain most cats to use the box.

**3. Consult an expert.** If a health problem has been ruled out and the techniques described above don't work, there are still several options available to get the cat back to using the litter box. Callers will need to determine which is appropriate for their cat and particular situation:

- • Discuss the problem with a veterinarian. Some vets have experience with behavioral issues, so they may want to check with their vet first to see if he/she may be able to offer some assistance in that area.
- • Consult with a board-certified veterinary behaviorist or ask their own veterinarian to consult with Tufts University or one of the other universities that have animal behavior clinics. There are several medications that can be very effective, along with behavior modification. Board-certified veterinary behaviorists are more familiar with these medications and their effective use than most general practice veterinarians.
- • Consult an animal behaviorist. An animal behaviorist attempts to understand the reason for the behavior, considering the cat's history, temperament, environment, experience, etc. After making a diagnosis, a behaviorist would help them understand how animals learn and how to work specifically on this problem to control and/or correct it. They can ask their vet or local humane organization for a referral. For help in finding an animal behaviorist, visit the Animal Behavior Society web site at [www.animalbehavior.org](http://www.animalbehavior.org).
- • Consult a holistic veterinarian. A holistic vet uses alternative means for diagnosing and treating health and, sometimes, behavioral problems. As with traditional vets, experience will vary, so you will need to talk to them openly about what they may be able to offer.
- • Read one of the following books on cat behavior:
  - *The Cat Who Cried for Help* by Nicholas Dodman
  - *Think Like a Cat* by Pam Johnson-Bennett

**4. Change the cat's living situation.** If none of these options is successful, or if trying them is not feasible for the people, they might consider trying to change the cat's current living situation so that the inconsistent litter box use is not a problem.

An outdoor cat enclosure or cattery might be an option. A cattery is an outdoor protected area placed near a door or window (so the cat has some inside access) or it can stand independently (similar to the idea of a dog run, but built for a cat). We have information on cat fencing and catteries that you can send along, if callers are interested.

## **Aggression (Cats)**

Biting is a challenging problem in cats. Finding a new home is rarely an option, so encouraging the caller to address the problem within the household is generally the best option. Here are some additional suggestions to share:

- **Get a medical checkup.** Advise taking the animal to the vet to rule out any health problems. A painful injury or physical ailment can cause the sweetest animal to become ill-tempered. Since animals cannot tell us directly that they are hurting, their misbehaving may be their only way to communicate their pain to us.
- **Get the cat neutered/spayed.** Is the cat neutered/ spayed? Neutering helps to calm animals down. While it's best performed early in life to prevent the development of bad habits, it can be done at any age to help reduce aggressive behavior.
- **Watch for signs of over-stimulation.** Cats can become over-stimulated when being petted and may bite or scratch. Watch for subtle signs: Tail twitching or a shift in the tone of the cat's purr or facial expression can be cues. Learn to stop touching the cat before the cat has had enough. After an incident, withdraw all attention from the cat for several minutes. Briefly expressing your hurt verbally is okay, but reassuring and petting the cat are positive reinforcements and should not be done immediately following unacceptable behavior.
- **Be aware of your cat's sensitivities.** Some cats simply do not like to have their feet, stomach, or other parts of the body touched, and avoiding these areas can be the best solution. However, such sensitivity can be a sign that the cat is in pain, especially if the behavior is new. This is where the vet visit becomes so important!
- **Consult a board-certified veterinary behaviorist.** Tell callers to consult with a board-certified veterinary behaviorist or ask their own veterinarian to consult with Tufts University or one of the other universities that have animal behavior clinics. There are several medications that can be very effective, along with behavior modification. Board certified veterinary behaviorists are more familiar with these medications and their effective use than most general practice veterinarians.
- **Consult an animal behaviorist.** An animal behaviorist attempts to understand the reason for the behavior, considering the cat's history, temperament, environment, experience, etc. After making a diagnosis, a behaviorist would help them understand how animals learn and how to work specifically on this problem to control and/or correct it. They can ask their vet for a referral.
- **Consult a holistic veterinarian.** A holistic vet uses alternative means for diagnosing and treating health and sometimes behavioral problems. As with traditional vets, experience will vary, so you will need to talk to them openly about what they may be able to offer.
- **Read a book on the subject.** You may also want to recommend that they read one of the following books on cat behavior:
  - *The Cat Who Cried for Help* by Nicholas Dodman
  - *Think Like a Cat* by Pam Johnson-Bennett

## **Damaging the Furniture (Cats)**

Scratching is natural for a cat, and rather than trying to stop it, it's best to redirect the scratching to an acceptable place. Declawing is not a humane solution. Many declawed cats develop behavior problems

ranging from fearfulness to severe biting. Suggest to callers that they use a two-fold approach to solve the problem:

### **1. Deter the cat from the currently selected spot(s).**

Things to try:

- Put double-sided sticky tape on the spot where the cat is scratching.
- Cover the surface with a loose-fitting drape or fabric cover that will move when scratched.
- Tape aluminum foil in place over the surface.
- Spraying perfume or citrus scents can be a deterrent. There are also some indoor cat repellents sold at most pet stores
- Spray the cat with water from a squirt gun or a plant mister when you catch him in the act.

**2. Provide a desirable scratching post for the cat to use.** It should be sturdy and not prone to tipping over. Most cats prefer rope, sisal-covered or natural wood scratching posts. Some cats prefer carpeted posts. The post needs to be tall enough for the cat to stretch out (taller than the full length of the cat when stretched out). Fluffy carpeting material is not good for cats to scratch on and so is rejected by some cats in favor of the tighter-weave fabric that may be on the sofa. You can cover an existing scratching post with carpeting material put on reverse side out or you can wrap the post tightly with sisal rope. Even a large natural wood log, secured so that it will not roll or tip, can be an inexpensive - and effective scratching post. Catnip can be rubbed onto the post to encourage use. You can dangle a toy enticingly on the post. You can scratch your fingers on the rough surface in front of the cat so that he'll get the idea, but do not hold him and force his paws against the post, since this will only cause him to avoid the post. Give positive reinforcement when he uses the post, i.e., petting and verbal praise. The scratching post should be located in a prominent place, not hidden away. One reason a cat scratches is to mark his territory.

Trimming the cat's nails regularly can minimize damage to furnishings. Declawing is NOT recommended because of the detrimental effect it has on the cat, both physically and psychologically. In some cases, people report success with Soft Paws, a product that can be used to prevent damage to furniture while retaining the cat's claws. Soft Paws are plastic claw-shaped caps that are glued onto the cat's claws.

### **Fearful/Hiding (Cats)**

Fight, Flee, or Freeze are the three "F's" that dictate a cat's actions when it is scared. When cats perceive a threat from an object, person, or situation, a cat will try one of these at first and, if that doesn't work, the cat may be forced to try a different tactic. For instance, a cat fearful of dogs, may puff out her fur to make herself look big, then hiss and spit when a dog is present. If the dog doesn't retreat, she may flee the situation, find a hiding spot, and freeze until she deems the situation safe. Although some fearful behaviors are acceptable, overly anxious or fearful cats may need a little help in the form of training, patience, and love.

Behaviors cats may exhibit when frightened:

- Fleeing
- Hiding
- Aggression (which includes spitting, hissing, growling, swatting, biting, scratching, puffing fur and tail, arching back, swishing tail, and flattening ears)
- Loss of control over bladder and/or bowels
- Freezing in place

It's normal for the caller to want to help and comfort her when she's frightened. However, that isn't necessarily the best thing to do from a cat's point of view. It's normal for a cat to feel insecure or

frightened in a new environment and often will hide a few days. More traumatic events like going to the vet, or taking a ride in the car may send a cat hiding for many days.

List of possible causes:

- A particular person
- A stranger
- Another animal
- A child
- Loud noises

Here is some advice you can give:

**Get a medical checkup.** Be sure to take the cat to the vet to rule out any medical issues. Any sudden change in her behavior could mean that your cat is ill.

**Behavior Modification.** If nothing is found during a health checkup, you may suggest to the caller to leave the cat alone for a while. Forcing a cat to come out of their hiding spot will only aggravate the problem. Suggest to the caller to make sure the cat has easy access to food, water, and a litter box. Cleaning the litter box and changing the food and water every day is the best way to tell whether the cat is eating and drinking.

Keep any contact with the fear stimulus to minimum.

Keep the cat's routine as consistent as possible. Cats feel more confident if they know when to expect daily feeding, playing, cuddling, and grooming.

Steps to desensitizing:

1. Determine what distance the cat can be from the fear stimulus without responding fearfully.
2. Introduce the fear stimulus at this distance while feeding the cat tasty treats and praising her.
3. Slowly move the fear stimulus closer as you continue to praise your cat and offer her treats.

If at any time during this process the cat shows fearful behavior, they've proceeded too quickly and will need to start over from the beginning. This is the most common mistake people make when desensitizing an animal, and it can be avoided by working in short sessions, paying careful attention to the animal so that they don't progress too rapidly for the cat.

The caller may need help with the desensitization process from a professional animal behavior specialist.

**What not to do.** Do not punish the cat for her fearful behavior. Animals associate punishment with what they're doing at the time they're punished, so the cat is likely to associate any punishment they give her with them. This will only cause her to become fearful of you and she still won't understand why she's being punished.

Do not force our cat to experience the object or situation that is causing her fear. For example, if she is afraid of a certain person, don't let that person try to pick her up and hold her; this will only make her more fearful of that person.

Be cautious in handling your cat when she is frightened. She may accidentally direct her aggression to you.

## **Dog Behavior Problems**

### **Aggression (Dogs)**

Aggressive behavior in any dog is a serious issue and should be handled as soon as possible by a professional animal behaviorist or trainer. If a seemingly uncontrollable, aggressive dog injures a person, then dogs are usually ordered to be euthanized. This need not be the case. Inform the caller that most aggression is caused by fear and there are many things they will need to consider. When a dog is acting aggressively, it is often very upsetting for the dog's family, so it's not unusual for the caller to be very stressed and impatient for a reply. Most dogs that suffer from aggression are sweet, affectionate, caring dogs, at least most of the time. They are very rarely the snarling, snapping, frothing monsters that most people picture when they hear "aggressive". However, any form of aggression is a serious concern and must be addressed. Aggressive conditions will, almost without fail, become worse if not treated quickly. Curing the problem at an early stage is best for the dog as well as the dog's family. Early warning signs of aggression such as barking at strangers should be addressed promptly.

Generally, the only real option is to work out the problem within the household. Placing the dog in another home or shelter doesn't correct the problem – it just relocates it. There are several different routes that may be taken to correct and/or control a dog's aggression. Callers will need to determine which, if any, will be appropriate in their situation.

Here are some suggestions to share:

- **Get a medical checkup.** Advise taking the dog to the vet to rule out any health problems. A painful injury or physical ailment can cause the sweetest animal to become ill-tempered. Since animals cannot tell us directly that they are hurting, their misbehaving may be their only way to communicate their pain to us.
- **Ask a veterinarian for help.** Some vets have experience with behavioral issues, so callers may want to check with their vet first to see if he/she may be able to offer some assistance in that area. Their vet could also consult with a board-certified veterinary behaviorist through Tufts University or one of the other university animal behavior clinics.
- **Consult an animal behaviorist.** An animal behaviorist attempts to understand the reason for the behavior, considering the animal's history, temperament, environment, experience, etc. After making a diagnosis, a behaviorist would help the person understand how animals learn and how they can work specifically on the aggression problem to control and/or correct it. Callers can ask their vet for a local referral.
- **Consult a trainer.** A trainer works differently than an animal behaviorist. In most cases, a behaviorist is more appropriate for helping with an aggression problem. But, if an animal behaviorist is not available locally, and the person wants to work with someone, the caller should check out the programs of local trainers. Trainers vary in their experience, services, and training techniques. Advise callers to seek out a trainer with which they are comfortable working.
- **Read a book on the subject.** We recommend the following books:
  - *Final Hope* by Stephen Joubert. This book has a helpful section on finding a professional to work with.
  - *The Dog Who Loved Too Much* by Dr. Nicholas Dodman. This book outlines many of the drug therapies that are available to treat aggressive behavior.
- **When working on the behavior is not an option.** Unfortunately, when working on the behavior is not an option, or it has been tried without success, there are not many alternatives. Finding another home is rarely a choice (usually only when there is a friend or family member who is willing to take the dog). Most rescue groups are not able to manage

aggressive dogs or to place them. These dogs pose a threat to visitors, volunteers, and employees, and create a huge liability risk for any organization. End the call by wishing them success and advise them to call back if they have any questions or would like to discuss the matter further.

### **Is the Dog Aggressive?**

Sometimes the caller will try to paint the best possible picture for you. If you ask the question, “Is he aggressive?” you are likely to hear “Oh, no. He’s not a bad dog. In fact, he’s very sweet and loving.” These questions will help you to get a clearer picture:

- What would happen if I walked into your yard with the dog there? Or into your house?
- Does your dog’s face look relaxed or tense?
- What would happen if you brought your dog into my dog’s yard?
- What would happen if you put your dog into a pen with other dogs?
- How is your dog with treats and food when people or other animals are around?
- What does your dog do when children come around?
- Would you let a child hug your dog?
- What would your dog do if a small child hit him or pulled his tail?
- What would the dog do if a stranger came up and petted him?
- Is the dog immediately engaging?

Tell callers that a wagging tail does not necessarily mean a friendly dog. Look in the dog’s eyes: Does he appear to be happy and relaxed, or frightened, or shifty? Because dogs wag their tails in anticipation, fighting dogs will wag their tails before a fight.

### **Biting (Dogs)**

Over one million dog bites are reported annually, so it’s a common problem. Sadly, there are very few options for dogs who have bitten someone. The owner/caretaker often will not see the dog as “aggressive.” But, even a dog who is usually extremely sweet, obedient and healthy may bite. Dogs with aggression problems generally get worse if the problem is not addressed. It is important to stress to the owner that some course of action needs to be taken. Tips for talking with people about a dog who has bitten someone:

- **Empathize with them.** People who contact us about a dog that has bitten someone are usually very upset, and may have had differing responses from friends, family, etc. It is important to empathize with their situation and acknowledge the seriousness of their position, and the difficult decisions they face. At this point, they desperately need to talk to someone who cares about animals and has some experience with this issue, and that is why they have turned to us.
- **Talk to them about keeping the dog.** Explain that a dog who has bitten can rarely be placed in a new home (generally only if someone they know takes the dog), and that most shelters and sanctuaries are unable to manage dogs with a history of aggression. Even if the dog is generally very sweet, he/she will always have to be handled with the utmost care because of the dog’s history – liability and responsibility require this. Additionally, the quality of life for the dog in a shelter or sanctuary could be quite poor, since handling would be limited. Generally, the only alternative to euthanasia is for the owner to keep the animal and work on the problem.

- **Suggest behavior modification.** They will need to work with an experienced animal behaviorist or trainer to improve the dog's behavior.
- **Recommend a book on the subject.**
- These books can be helpful:
  - *Final Hope* by Stephen Joubert. This book has a great section about finding a behaviorist to work with.
  - *The Dog Who Loved Too Much* by Dr. Nicholas Dodman. This book outlines many of the drug therapies that are available to treat aggressive behavior.
- **Suggest that they manage the dog more carefully.**
- The dog will need to be properly controlled and kept from high-risk situations. This may include kenneling when guests come, building a new fence or separate pen, using a muzzle on walks, etc.
- **Let them know they'll be accepting some liability risk.** Once a dog has bitten someone, keeping him involves some increased risk of liability. If the dog bites again, repercussions will be more serious than for a first bite. If keeping the dog is not an option, euthanasia may be the only remaining alternative. If they are thinking about taking the dog to a shelter, you can gently recommend that they consider taking the dog to their personal vet instead. Some vets will even come to the home. At least in this way, the dog will be with loved ones when he is euthanized

### Aggression Toward Other Dogs

Dogs may show aggression toward other dogs for a variety of reasons. Depending on the specific problem, it is possible that working with a behaviorist could improve or correct the behavior. Placement with an animal rescue group or no-kill shelter is not likely to be a solution. Many rescue groups house their dogs together, or at least depend on them sharing space at times. Many others take their dogs to adoption fairs or events to find them homes, which means many dogs in close quarters. The best solution is usually for owners to work on the behavior themselves, and/or to seek a new home themselves. If the person would like to try to work on the aggression, here are some suggestions to make:

- **Ask your veterinarian for help.** Vets have varying levels of experience with behavioral issues. The vet could also consult with a board-certified veterinary behaviorist through Tufts University or one of the other university behavior clinics. (See the box above.)
- **Consult an animal behaviorist or trainer.** They could try working with an experienced animal behaviorist or trainer to improve the dog's behavior. They can ask local vets for a referral.
- **Change the dog's living situation.** Though juggling dogs around to prevent fighting can seem daunting and is simply unmanageable in some households, it's worth looking into, considering the alternatives. The yard could be separated by additional fencing, or a dog run could be added. Kiddie gates and extra doors (screen doors can be a good option) can separate the household so that the dogs can have their own territory.
- **Find an only-dog home.** The new owner must be made aware of the problem, however, since most people enjoy exercising their pet in areas where there are other animals or they may have animals that visit their house. If they decide to look for a new home, encourage callers to read through the guidelines described in our *How to Find Homes for Homeless Pets* manual. You can also provide additional tips from the "Finding a New Home" section of this handbook.

- **Do some reading.** These books can be helpful: *Final Hope* by Stephen Joubert. This book has a great section on finding a behaviorist to work with. *The Dog Who Loved Too Much* by Dr. Nicholas Dodman. This book addresses many problematic dog behaviors. End the call by wishing them success and invite them to call back if they have any additional questions or would like to discuss the matter further.

### **Pit Bulls**

Pit bulls, and even pit mixes, can be very difficult to place. We have several pit bulls and pit mixes who live at the Humane Society. Most of them are wonderful, friendly, intelligent, attractive dogs, but because they are so difficult to place, we will have many of them forever. The best bet is for the caller to try to place the dog directly into a home by doing some advertising. Direct callers to Best Friends' guide, *How to Find Homes for Homeless Pets*. Screening is particularly important when placing pit bulls, because, sadly, many people are attracted to them for the wrong reasons. There's a wonderful web site called Pit Bull Rescue Central ([www.pbrc.net](http://www.pbrc.net)) which includes a wealth of valuable information and also allows people to list a pit bull or pit mix in need of a home.

### **Inappropriate Urination/Defecation (Dogs)**

Here are some questions to ask:

#### **How long is the dog alone in the house?**

There are physical limitations beyond which the animal cannot be expected to control himself.

#### **How old is the dog?**

Some problems can be age-related. An older dog may need to go more often than he did in his youth. Older female dogs may have urine leakage problems because of the loss of estrogen. There are drugs that can help with age-related urine-leakage problems. Puppies may have never been housed trained. Here are some suggestions to make:

**A trip to the veterinarian.** Ruling out a health problem is always the first step with any behavior problem, since many behaviors can have their roots in a medical condition.

**Crate training.** This is a highly effective method of housebreaking a dog. Contrary to being cruel, it can be a lifesaver if properly used. You may also want to share some of the advice for dealing with common behavior problems.

#### **Tips for Puppies.**

Toilet training for puppies should start as soon as the puppy is home. Let the caller know that they must be prepared to be patient and observant.

There are six occasions a puppy should be left outside to relieve himself spanning about 20 – 30 minutes each time.

- Before going to bed at night
- As soon as he wakes up.
- After napping during the day
- After eating
- After exuberant play
- After you return home from an outing

Many people take their puppies out for a walk only to see the puppies relieve themselves as soon as they get back indoors. To avoid this, walk the puppy to his toilet area. Stand still with him, allowing the puppy to lose interest in you. Do not sit down as this will only encourage the pup to jump on you and forget

what he is out there for. Praise him if he performs. NEVER rub his nose in any mistakes! Positive reinforcement when he does the right thing in the right place is the best and quickest training method.

When training the puppy to go outside to relieve himself, LEAD him to where you want him to go, stay with him, praise him when he performs. Note that a male puppy sometimes takes longer to perform than a female. Remember that just like a child, when a puppy has to go, he really has to go! Your puppy cannot travel long distances to relieve himself, so keep his toilet area nearby.

### **Separation Anxiety**

If your dog howls or barks when you leave or is destructive when you are gone, he may be suffering from separation anxiety.

Your dog may be stressed and he will stay that way – each day – until you come home. He needs to learn that is okay for you to go. He will be sage and you will come home.

Crate training and positive reinforcement upon your return home are the first steps to take when dealing with separation anxiety. This is a very delicate behavior problem that may need professional help from a trainer. You can offer much of the standard advice for behavior problems to people who have dogs with separation anxiety.

The book *Choosing a Shelter Dog* by Bob Christiansen has some simple tips for working on separation anxiety.

**Jumping up.** Jumping up is all about dog psychology. Dogs communicate with body language. To them, height is dominance, and dogs will naturally jump up on us to test their dominance. You have probably noticed that they do this to each other, too. Correcting this behavior will not only keep your clothes and furniture clean, but it will improve your dog's respect for you.

The best thing to do is to get down to their level. This will even the playing field, and allow your dog to meet you rather than jump up.

**Nuisance barking.** People who call in because their dog is constantly barking may be very fed up, wanting to get rid of the dog immediately. Simply explain to the caller that this behavior is something that may be corrected with love and patience. A dog that barks at birds, noises, the neighbors, passing pedestrians or other dogs is not a good watchdog. A dog like this is similar to a car alarm that keeps going off for no reason. People will eventually take no notice, even when he barks for a legitimate reason. Nuisance barkers will only annoy the entire neighborhood.

- **Good Barking.** A good watchdog is one that barks only when someone attempts to enter your property or when there is imminent danger (house fire, snake in the yard).

Good barking habits can be trained into dogs easily, providing they are clear about exactly when you want your dog to bark. Thus, people will know to respond to a dog's bark because the bark will be a warning and not just an everyday noise.

**When left alone.** Because dogs are pack animals, they may become stressed when the pack leaves without them (when family leaves them at home alone). Some of the reasons may be:

- **Separation Anxiety.** Usually identifiable by barking as soon as you leave. You will need to sneak back, catch the dog barking and correct him.
- **Apprehensive/Fearful.** Usually found in the nervous, unconfident dog that barks out of fear of the unknown. He continues to bark because he is not corrected for his barking as no one is home

to do so. This dog needs to be socialized. Inform the caller that they may need to seek professional help to deal with any serious fears he may have.

- **Territorial.** The territorial dog is usually the dominant, confident type, yet as a rule is not the worst culprit of nuisance barking. However, if callers have a problem with this type of dog, they will need to seek professional help.
- **Tips on curing nuisance barking.** When at home and the dog is outside barking, go out and correct him by growling “BAD.” We also growl “BAD” loudly so that you can be heard above the barking.

If you use “BAD” every time your dog does something wrong, he will soon catch. Be sure to praise your dog as soon as he stops what he is doing wrong. Monitor the barking and only correct your dog for those things that do not constitute a good watchdog, such as bird noises, neighbors, passing pedestrians and other dogs

### **Barking prevention at the puppy stage**

A young puppy that barks at people or noises is a good indication of a budding nuisance barker. This is a nervous pup that worries about everything. A well adjusted pup will not usually start barking until somewhere between 8 to 12 months of age.

If the caller has a pup that is starting to bark at everything that moves, discipline him by growling “BAD” at the precise moment he starts. Praise him as soon as he responds.

Clapping your hands or throwing an object onto the ground near the pup, such as a can of pebbles, (careful not to hit the pup) and at the same time growling a correction word (BAD) should help stop any premature barking. A puppy that persists even after correction could need some socializing.

## **SECTION 3: MEDICAL ISSUES**

### **Feline Medical Conditions**

#### **FIV – Feline Immunodeficiency Virus**

People are often very upset when they hear the news that a cat they may have rescued has tested positive for FIV. By sharing some of the facts about this feline virus and discussing options, you can sometimes save a cat’s life. We have a lot of information on FIV, and we really encourage people to review what we can send them and do their own research. Many vets are inexperienced with FIV and may give inaccurate information. FIV positive cats that are presently non-symptomatic (and some with mild problems that can be successfully treated) can often lead happy, healthy lives for many years. Homes can often be found for these cats, though it generally is harder than for a cat that does not have the virus. Here’s some information you can share:

- **FIV is not easily spread.** It is transmitted almost exclusively through serious (penetrating) bite wounds. High-risk cats are intact males who have been living outside, since these are the cats that are most likely to fight. This means that, when introduced properly into a household with cat-friendly cats, FIV+ kitties may live safely with FIV-negative kitties.
- **The majority of FIV+ cats never become ill from the virus.** From what we have seen, FIV+ cats are more likely to lose their lives because they have tested positive (and no one is willing or able to take them) than because they actually become ill.
- **We can send out additional information on FIV.**

(Read these materials over yourself so you can discuss additional points with callers. Sending printed articles in the mail can be helpful as people bond with the cat while waiting for the materials to arrive.)

- Other info on FIV is on Cornell University’s web site at <http://web.vet.cornell.edu/FHC>

Here’s some advice you can share:

**Confirm the test result.** Make sure the positive test result has been confirmed with a Western Blot blood test. The Western Blot test is much more dependable than the ELISA test, which is used most often in veterinary clinics. Blood must be sent off to a lab for the Western Blot test. A cat can test positive for FIV on the ELISA test (because he/she is carrying antibodies to the virus), but not actually be carrying the virus. The only way to know for sure is to have the Western Blot test performed. The American Association of Feline Practitioners’ Academy of Feline Medicine and IDEXX (a test-kit manufacturer) both recommend that the second, more conclusive Western Blot test be done to confirm any diagnosis for FIV that will result in euthanasia of an apparently healthy cat. It’s the most complete and up-to-date document on testing and retesting for both FIV and FeLV. Also, test results in kittens under 16 weeks of age are not dependable, since the kitten may be carrying the antibodies from the mother. These cats should be held and retested if at all possible.

**Finding another home for the cat.** If callers want to find another home for the cat, suggest they try contacting local vets to see if they have any clients with FIV+ cats, or with experience with FIV, who might be interested in adopting another cat. Refer the caller to our guide, *How to Find Homes for Homeless Pets* and provide other suggestions from the “Finding a New Home” section of this handbook. You can also recommend posting information about the cat on special-needs adoption web sites. Close the call by wishing them success and invite them to call back if they have any questions or would like to discuss the matter further.

### **FeLV – Feline Leukemia Virus**

(Note: There is an extremely low incidence of this illness in our area.) People are often very upset when they hear the news that their cat has tested positive for FeLV. By sharing some of the facts about this feline virus and discussing options, you can sometimes save a cat’s life. These cats are rarely adopted. Life expectancy is around three years. Here’s some information you can share:

- **FeLV is most often spread through bite wounds.** However, it can also be contracted through shared food and water dishes or litter boxes, especially if a cat is exposed over a long period of time. Mother cats can also pass the virus along to kittens. Kittens with FeLV generally do not live more than a year.
- **We can send out additional information on FeLV.** (Read these materials over yourself so you can discuss additional points with callers.) Other info on FeLV is on Cornell University’s web site: <http://web.vet.cornell.edu/FHC>.

Here’s some advice you can share

**Confirm the test result.** Make sure the positive test result has been confirmed with an IFA blood test. Confirming the initial test result with an IFA test is extremely important. The IFA test is much more dependable than the ELISA test, which is used most often in-house in veterinary clinics. Blood must be sent off to a lab for the IFA test. A cat can test positive for FeLV on the ELISA test (because he/she is carrying antibodies to the virus), but not actually be carrying the virus. The only way to know for sure is to have the IFA test performed. The American Association of Feline Practitioners’ Academy of Feline

Medicine and IDEXX (a test-kit manufacturer) recommend that the second, more conclusive IFA test be done to confirm any diagnosis for FeLV that will result in euthanasia of an apparently healthy cat. It's the most complete and up-to-date document on testing and retesting for both FIV and FeLV. Also, test results in kittens under 16 weeks of age are not dependable, since the kitten may be carrying the antibodies from the mother. These cats should be held and retested if at all possible.

**Finding another home for the cat.** Finding homes for these cats is tough, but they are out there. The most likely option for placement is to try to find a home with another FeLV-positive kitty. Call local vets and ask if they have any clients with FeLV+ cats who might be interested in a companion. The other option is to try to find a home with no other cats. Refer callers to our guide, *How to Find Homes for Homeless Pets*, and provide other suggestions from the "Finding a New Home" section of this handbook (page 14). You can also recommend posting information about the cat on special-needs adoption web sites. (Available in the Standard Resources.) Close the call by wishing them success and invite them to call back if they have any questions or would like to discuss the matter further

### **FIP – Feline Infectious Peritonitis**

FIP is a fatal illness caused by the mutation of a corona virus. Because most cats who have lived outdoors have been exposed to a corona virus and tests for FIP screen for this exposure, test results are not at all dependable. In fact, the only sure way to diagnose FIP is through a necropsy (autopsy). Cats who have begun showing symptoms of FIP generally do not live longer than a few weeks. We are occasionally contacted about rescued cats who have been diagnosed with FIP through the test, or who may have FIP because of exposure to a FIP-infected cat. These methods of diagnosis are not dependable. Recommend that the caretaker do some more research before making the decision to euthanize the cat, or to classify the cat as FIP+, which makes adoption extremely unlikely and is basically a death sentence itself. A vaccine exists for FIP, but it is highly controversial and actually banned in most European countries because of suspicion that it may cause vaccinated cats to become ill with FIP. Cats who have been vaccinated for FIP will definitely have a positive corona virus test. Other info on FIP is on Cornell University's web site: <http://web.vet.cornell.edu/Public/FHC/fip.html>. We have additional information on FIP that we can send along if the caller is interested.

### **Incontinence**

Incontinence should not be confused with spray-marking or other litter box problems. Cats are generally incontinent for one of three reasons:

- **Manx syndrome.** Manx cats have the "spina bifida" gene, which prevents their spine from developing normally and causes them to have a very short tail or no tail. This condition sometimes results in the cat having a loss of sensation or control past their lower back. While Manx syndrome rarely affects mobility, it often causes bowel and/or bladder incontinence. Generally, these cats do not improve.
- **Accident or injury.** Cats with incontinence may have been struck by a car or attacked by another animal. Sometimes the cause of the injury is unknown. In some cases, loss of sensation after an accident is temporary, caused by the swelling of tissues against the spinal cord. Various therapies may bring about improvement. In other cases, incontinence is permanent. These cats may also be partially or completely paralyzed in their hind legs and tail.
- **Advanced age.** Though this is rare, incontinence can come with advanced age. Older cats should always be checked medically because they may have a treatable illness or benefit from hormone or other therapies.

### **Kidney Disease, Renal Failure**

Chronic renal failure is a relatively common problem in mature cats. Depending on the severity of the condition, these cats can live happily for many years. Treatment may include a special diet, subcutaneous hydration or steroid shots. People are turning increasingly to natural medicine to treat renal failure. At some point during the course of the illness, cats may urinate excessively and/or inappropriately. If inappropriate elimination begins, a vet visit is necessary, even if a cat has been diagnosed years prior. Because these cats are usually older, staying in a home is always preferable to shelter or sanctuary placement. There is also a web site ([www.felinecrf.com](http://www.felinecrf.com)) that provides information on caring for cats with chronic renal failure.

### **Chronic Cystitis**

Cats with chronic cystitis (crystals in the urine) may require a special diet and some require frequent treatment with antibiotics. When we are contacted about these cats, it is often because of accompanying inappropriate elimination. It is essential to find out whether the owner has made every effort to manage the health problem within the home. Once it is under control, litter box habits usually return to normal. Because cystitis is often stress-induced or stress-related, finding a new home for the cat is not at all ideal. It is important to note that the stress of shelter life is likely to worsen the condition

### **Diabetes**

Diabetes is most common in older cats. Diabetes is a tricky illness and requires regular monitoring. Diabetic cats may require a special diet, and either oral or injectable insulin. It can take several months to stabilize a diabetic cat and get the medication right. Once the condition has been successfully controlled, however, a diabetic cat can be relatively easy to maintain. Diabetic cats can, and should be, managed in the home whenever possible. If inappropriate elimination is a problem, it will likely vanish once the cat has been stabilized. Emphasize the importance of monitoring and managing the illness. Diabetic cats will require more frequent vet visits and may need changes in treatment as time goes on. However, they can live happy, healthy lives for many years if the disease is managed properly. Kittens with diabetes, unfortunately, have a short life expectancy (usually under a year). Stress is a factor in properly stabilizing a diabetic animal. Close monitoring of food and water intake, stool and urine, and energy levels is very difficult in a colony setting.

When someone calls about a diabetic cat, you may want to offer the following advice:

- Recommend that the caller visit these web sites, which include valuable information on caring for and placing diabetic cats: [www.petdiabetes.org/adoption.htm](http://www.petdiabetes.org/adoption.htm)
- Try listing the kitty on the web sites for placing animals with special needs or disabilities.

### **IBD – Inflammatory Bowel Disease**

Cats with IBD generally experience bouts of severe diarrhea and weight loss. IBD is a chronic condition that can be managed with diet change, stress reduction, and medication. Since IBD is nearly always stress-related, it is not advisable for cats with IBD to be placed in shelters. They need to be in their home or another special home. In a suitable environment, they can live happily for many years.

### **Blindness**

A blind cat can live happily for as long as a sighted cat. Fortunately, a home for a blind cat can often be found with a special person or family. A home environment is truly best for a blind cat.

### **Deafness**

Deaf cats cannot live outside, but other than that, they do perfectly well in a suitable home. Most cats that are genetically deaf are white. However, illness, injury or old age can also cause deafness.

## Neurological Impairment

Neurological impairment generally occurs in one of two cases:

- **Cerebellar hypoplasia.** This condition is usually caused by exposure to distemper in utero. It may cause a cat to wobble, weave, twitch or have a head tilt. These cats can live happily in a suitable home. In severe cases, the cat may have difficulty eating, drinking or using a litter box. The cat may require help to eat and drink, and a litter box with lower sides in an easy-access area. Some will not be able to use a box (these we are not usually able to place).
- **Injury, hydrocephalis, encephalitis, etc.** These cats may show the same symptoms as cats with cerebellar hypoplasia, but they also often suffer from seizures. These cats vary widely as far as how they do in any given setting. It's best to get as much information as possible from the vet and caretaker regarding the cat's mobility, improvement over time (or lack thereof), and suspected source of the problem.

## Physical Disability or Deformity

A missing limb, eye, ear, etc., generally does not significantly affect an animal's quality of life. Homes can usually be found for these cats.

## Canine Medical Conditions.

### Diabetes

Diabetes is more common in older dogs. Diabetes is a tricky illness and requires regular monitoring. Diabetic dogs may require a special diet, and either oral or injectable insulin. It can take several months to stabilize a diabetic dog and get the medication right. Once the condition has been successfully controlled, however, a diabetic dog can be relatively easy to maintain. Diabetic dogs can, and should be, managed in the home whenever possible. Emphasize the importance of monitoring and managing the illness. Diabetic dogs will require more frequent vet visits, and may need changes in treatment as time goes on. However, they can live happy, healthy lives for many years if the disease is managed properly.

### Deafness

Deafness is most common in older dogs, particularly Australian shepherds and Dalmatians. Generally, it does not significantly affect a dog's quality of life. Deaf dogs can learn basic commands and tricks by hand signs, but they must be kept on a leash when out of the yard or house. A home is always preferable. There are books and web sites with a great deal of information on caring for deaf dogs. You can refer people to the Deaf Dog

Education Action Fund: [www.deafdogs.org](http://www.deafdogs.org).

### Blindness

Blindness is common in older dogs and certain breeds. Dogs may be born blind or may develop blindness later on. A blind dog can live happily in a home. There are books and web sites devoted to blind dogs and their care and placement. You can refer people to [www.blinddogs.com](http://www.blinddogs.com).

### Epilepsy/Seizures

Every effort should be made to find a home for a dog who has seizures. There are sources of information and support on the Internet for caretakers of epileptic dogs. Refer people to [www.canine-epilepsy.com](http://www.canine-epilepsy.com).

## Physical Disability or Deformity

A missing limb, burn scars, etc., are not generally a significant problem for a dog or his/her caretaker. Caring for a dog with significant paralysis can be greatly facilitated through the use of carts on smooth surface floors or patios.

## SECTION 4: LIFESTYLE CHANGE ISSUES

### Moving and Cannot Take Pet

One of the most common reasons that people give up a pet is because they are moving and cannot take the animal. You'll need to size up each caller to see if he or she is open to discussing alternatives. While there is no use wasting a lot of time, it is possible to change some people's minds. You'll also need to determine how much time they have to resolve the situation. Encourage people to find a way to bring their pet with them if they are moving or to find a new home for their pet themselves. Give them the two compelling reasons why they should make the extra effort to do this:

- Tell them about the reality of pet overpopulation. Millions of animals in the U.S. are destroyed in shelters each year. Many of them are cute, lovable, young, healthy and special, just like Fluffy. There are too many animals and not enough good homes. Strangely, some people are simply unaware that it will be difficult to find a new home, or they think that Fluffy may prefer the shelter, or a new home, to the stress of moving.
- Remind them that the animal, who has been their friend over the years, is truly depending upon them now. If they can invest the time and effort to find a good new home, they will have made a life-saving difference for their pet.

When addressing this issue refer to the *Finding a New Home* section of this handbook, ask a lot of questions and offer a lot of suggestions. (Cultivate your own creative problem-solving skills!) Here are a few things you could suggest:

- Keep looking for an apartment that will allow pets.
- Ask friends or parents if they could lend a spare room (or the basement) for their pet to stay in temporarily while they look for a new home. • Ask for permission to keep the pet temporarily until a new home can be found. (Putting up a deposit can help.)
- Board their pet until a new home can be found.
- Ask a friend or relative to take care of their pet until a new home can be found.
- Put up posters (with a photo of their pet) at work, places where they shop, their church, the local elderly housing development (if pets are allowed), health clubs, the public library, pet supply stores, and vet clinics. In the case of an animal that is very ill or extremely frail and elderly, it is often advisable to suggest that going to any shelter, no matter how nice, may be very stressful for the animal. In some cases it may be worthwhile to suggest that they talk with their vet about the situation and consider taking the animal to their vet's clinic for euthanasia. While this may not be your personal first choice, sometimes it is the most humane thing that can be done, given the situation. At least the animal will have the familiar comfort of a loved one at life's end, rather than dying alone, in confusion and fear, in the hectic environment of a shelter. Additionally, the veterinarian is sometimes able to succeed where we could not, by treating an underlying medical problem or solving a behavior issue.

### Allergies

Many people feel forced to give up their pet when they develop allergies. As discussed above, it's always worth encouraging people to work the problem out. We have helpful information on coping with allergies that can be sent to them. Basic advice for coping with allergies:

- Have an allergy test done to see if you are actually allergic to the animal. (This is a very important thing to impress upon them – the animal may not be the cause of the allergy.)

- Keep the animal out of the bedroom.
- Try Allergen (there are different formulas for cats and dogs). This product can be purchased in pet supply stores and simply rubbed onto the pet's coat. It is quite effective and, as far as we have heard, harmless to the animal.
  - Use an air filtration system or air purifier.
  - Keep the animal in the basement or a single room until a new home or space in a shelter becomes available.
  - Vacuum the house and furniture completely and often. A special vacuum filter to remove dander and other allergens may be needed.
  - Use washable scatter rugs in your home, rather than wall-to-wall carpet.
  - Wash the pet weekly and groom the pet often.
  - Wash your hands immediately after petting the animal.
  - Wash bedspreads, sheets, throw rugs, and slip covers frequently.
  - Add a coat conditioner to your pet's food to prevent skin dryness, which can increase shedding.
  - • Consult your doctor about allergy shots or medication to control the allergy symptoms.

### **“Pets Allowed” Housing Resources**

*Best Friends for Life: Humane Housing for Animals and People* is a booklet that covers the following:

- How disabled individuals may be eligible to keep pets even in “no-pets” housing
- A new federal law that allows pets in federally assisted housing
- Arguments that may allow animals in “no pet” privately owned housing
- Responsible pet guardianship
- How to convince your landlord to adopt a “pets welcome” policy
- Model rental guidelines that protect the rights of renters and animals

The booklet is available through Doris Day Animal League by calling (202) 546-1761, e-mailing [info@ddal.org](mailto:info@ddal.org), or accessing [www.ddal.org](http://www.ddal.org).

### **New Baby**

Many people decide to give up their pet when a new baby enters the family. First, ask the callers why they feel they need to place the animal in a new home. Some people believe that animals pose a terrible risk to their newborn child. Dispel this myth. Tell them that animals and small children should not be left alone together without adult supervision, but with reasonable care, they can deeply enrich each other's lives. If you grew up with animals or raised a family with pets, you can share your own experiences! Tell them about how you happily and safely included four-footed friends in your family and how it has been a source of satisfaction to all of the family members. If the callers are still concerned, we can send them information on this subject. There are several simple techniques that can be employed to help a dog or cat adjust to the presence of a new baby.

Other people simply do not feel that they can make time for the animal along with the baby. In these cases, the “Finding a New Home” section of this handbook will provide the best advice.

## **SECTION 5: SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

### **Senior Pet Placement**

Older animals can be difficult to place. It's too bad – many people don't realize the peace and pleasant company a mature pet provides. Unfortunately, there are not a lot of options for older pets, beyond placement with friends and family. An important concern, particularly with older pets, is finding a situation that will provide the pet with a good quality of life. Often, for older cats or dogs, a change in lifestyle is very stressful. For example, we have found that senior pets that have come to us from loving homes are sometimes never able to adjust to the sanctuary living environment. This is an important consideration when placing an older pet in any new environment, particularly any facility.

### **Multiple-Pet Placement**

We receive many calls and e-mails from rescuers or owners with multiple animals to place in new homes. Most facilities, whether no-kill or traditional, will not be able to take in more than a couple of animals at the same facility, at the same time. The best chance of success involves multiple strategies: reaching out to several shelters and rescue groups in a broad area for help, as well as looking for homes for the animals with individuals. After all, if the caller can place one or two in one shelter and one or two with another and find individuals who will adopt the rest, the problem will be solved. If possible, the caller may want to request the assistance of volunteers (from area shelters, rescue groups, friends and family) to gather some of the vital information on the animals who need placement. The first step toward placing the animals is writing a cover letter in which callers introduce themselves, explaining the situation and their relationship to the animals. The letter should then provide some basic information on all the animals involved. They'll need to list the details on each animal, including the name, species, breed/description, age, gender, general health, special medical or behavioral needs, and temperament. The information on temperament should describe how they get along with others of their own species, strangers, adults and children. Most rescue groups or no-kill shelters are going to need this detailed information to give serious consideration to taking in an animal. If any pictures of the animals, their living situation, or small group photos are available, they will also be helpful to let facilities know more about the animals they are considering. The next step is for callers to obtain a listing of shelters in their region. They should also work on placing animals directly into new homes using the guidelines described in our *How to Find Homes for Homeless Pets* manual. You can also offer them advice from the "Finding a New Home" section of this handbook.

### **Hoarding**

Formerly called "collectors," psychologists now prefer the term "hoarder" to describe an individual with an emotional illness characterized by keeping a large number of animals, who are usually in poor condition. Often these animals are not fixed and have not received regular veterinary care. Sometimes they are kept in small cages, or in otherwise dirty, overcrowded conditions. Hoarders are generally unwilling to give up their animals – they believe the animals could never be happy or well cared for by anyone else. There is a clear difference between a hoarder and a rescuer who may have gotten in over his or her head. A rescuer who may have a large number of animals, but who provides good quality care to the animals and is trying to place them into new homes, is not a hoarder. Hoarding cases are tough for many reasons. First, there are usually quite a few animals involved (sometimes as many as several hundred). Second, when the animals have been confiscated by animal control, they often have to be held until there is a trial. Third, the animals are often in bad shape physically, emotionally, and behaviorally, and many are not suited for adoption into homes. Additionally, the individual has legal custody of the animals until it has been determined by a local authority with law enforcement powers (usually animal control, the local humane society, or board of health) that they are truly being neglected. If the caller is willing to provide a comprehensive listing of the animals needing placement, however, we can see if we may be able to help with any of them. If the animals are still under the control of the hoarder, and the hoarder is not cooperative in terms of getting care and finding homes for the animals, the caller will need to involve local authorities (animal control, the local humane society or SPCA, or the board of health) in order to get the animals away from the individual. If the animals have been removed from the hoarder and taken to animal control, we recommend offering to help with finding adoptive homes. Here are some things to suggest:

- Get local media coverage – it helps to encourage adopters to come forward.
- Rally additional support from the community – contact local shelters, rescue groups, breed rescues, vets, groomers, etc., for assistance.
- Faith Maloney’s article on hoarding from *Best Friends* magazine: [www.bestfriends.org](http://www.bestfriends.org)
- Tufts University’s resources: [www.tufts.edu/vet/cfa](http://www.tufts.edu/vet/cfa)

## SECTION 6: HOMELESS AND STRAY ANIMALS

“I found a stray.” “There’s a homeless animal outside.”

### Basic Questions to Ask

When a caller makes one of the statements above, start by asking questions:

- Where did you find this animal?
- Where is the animal now?
- Are there others? How many are there?
- Ask for visual clues, things that a novice will be able to observe. If they do not know, ask them to try to make these observations:
- Is the animal friendly or shy? Does he come right up to you? Does he rub up against you or allow you to pet him? Will he allow you to pick him up? (These are good questions to determine if you are dealing with feral cats. If you just ask if they are feral cats, the caller may not know what you mean.)
- Does the animal appear to be healthy? Is his coat (fur) in good shape? Are his eyes clear? Is he sneezing, coughing, limping? Are there any apparent wounds?
- Does she appear to be pregnant?

### Legal Considerations

If the animal is a dog, you’ll want to ask if they have contacted animal control. The law requires that animal control be notified, so that the owner, if there is one, can find the dog. Doing this does not mean that callers must relinquish all concern for the dog – they may keep in touch with animal control to follow up on the status of the dog and assist with placement once the dog is available for adoption. Washoe County Animal Services partners with NHS. They scan all incoming dogs to locate a possible owner. They are required to hold the dog for five days, but do allow an individual to put a possible hold on dogs that are in their care.

### Getting Them Involved

Encouraging compassion and involvement is a key aspect of our goals. Explaining to callers that there are many animals in need and telling them that we receive hundreds of calls each week can help them to understand the scope of the problem, and the need for their involvement. There are many more animals than all the shelters can ever hope to accommodate. The caller may still ask, “Should I take him to the shelter?” Unless they are legally bound to do so, reinforce the fact that if they are willing to help the animal by providing temporary care, actively seeking a good home, and calling other no-kill shelters, then they can help save the animal’s life. If they express concern, but do not offer to help, ask if they can consider providing care to the animal until a new home or space in a shelter becomes available. In some cases, it’s helpful to suggest how they may be able to help the animal. Do they have a spare room, basement, garage, or enclosed porch where they can keep the animal? Advise people that they shouldn’t allow a strange animal to mix with their own pets until the animal has received a veterinary checkup (for example, an infected cat could pass the feline leukemia virus to other cats). Advise the caller that in many communities, reduced cost (and, in some cases, free) spay/neuter and veterinary care are available for homeless animals, but usually the person must be willing to care for the animal in his or her own home. Once the caller has

agreed to care for the animal, you can provide all the standard information from the “Finding a New Home” section of this handbook.

### **Handling Homeless Animals**

Advise the person to exercise caution with an unfamiliar animal. Even a tame cat or friendly dog can become aggressive and bite when they are frightened or injured. Nevada state law requires that a dog that has bitten a person must be quarantined for ten days – in an official shelter if unvaccinated. Since all homeless and feral animals have uncertain vaccination histories, it’s especially important that the rescuer exercise caution in handling unknown animals. To minimize the risk of being scratched or bitten, we recommend the use of humane box traps for feral cats. Even for friendly strays, we suggest that the rescuer put tuna fish (intended for human consumption) in the back of the carrier. A little hunger makes the cat more likely to enter the carrier. After the cat has completely entered, close the door with a gloved hand (an oven mitt will work, too). If the cat will not go in or if the person does not have a carrier, he/she can call the local animal control or shelter to borrow a humane trap. Traps can also be rented from some local rental companies.

## **SECTION 7: OUTDOOR AND FERAL CATS**

Usually the caller starts by saying: **“I found a stray.”** OR **“There are cats outside** behind my home (or where I work, where I had dinner last night.)”

### **Basic Questions to Ask**

- When a caller makes one of the statements above, start by asking questions:
- Where did you see/find this animal?
- Where is the animal now? (while this may be unnecessary to ask in some calls, you cannot always assume that it will not reveal helpful information that people sometimes neglect to mention on their own.)
- Are there others? How many are there?
- Ask for visual clues, things that a novice will be able to observe. If they do not know, ask them to try to make these observations:
- Is the animal friendly or shy? Does he come right up to you? Does he rub up against you or allow you to pet him? (These are good questions to determine if you are dealing with feral cats. If you just ask if they are feral cats, the caller may not know what you mean.)
- Does the animal appear to be healthy? Is his coat (fur) in good shape? Are his eyes clear? Is he sneezing, coughing, limping? Are there any apparent wounds?
- Does she appear to be pregnant?

### **Encouraging Involvement**

Encouraging compassion and involvement is a key aspect of our work. Explaining to callers that there are many animals in need and telling them that we receive hundreds of calls each week can help them to understand the scope of the problem, and the need for their involvement. There are many more animals than all the shelters can ever hope to accommodate.

### **If the Animal is a Friendly Homeless Cat: Getting Them Involved**

The caller may ask, “Should I take him to the shelter?” Unless they are legally bound to do so, as is the case with dogs in some communities, explain that most animals who end up in shelters or animal control facilities are put down for lack of space. Very, very few find homes, especially during the spring, summer, and early fall

when many cats and kittens enter the shelters.

Reinforce the fact that if they are willing to help the animal by providing temporary care, actively seeking a good home, and contacting no-kill shelters, then they can help save the animal's life.

If they express concern, but do not offer to help, ask if they can consider providing care to the animal until a new home or space in a shelter becomes available. In some cases it's helpful to suggest how they may be able to help the animal. Do they have a spare room, basement, garage, or enclosed porch where they can keep the animal? Advise people that they shouldn't allow a strange animal to mix with their own pets until the animal has received a veterinary checkup (for example, an infected cat could pass the feline leukemia virus to other cats).

Advise the caller that you can help them find reduced-cost (and, in some cases, free) spay/neuter and veterinary care for the cat, but usually the person must be willing to care for the animal in his or her own home.

Once the caller has agreed to care for the animal, you can provide all the standard information from the "Finding a New Home" section of this handbook. Directing them to the Best Friends website OR offering to send them the Finding a New Home information packet can help reinforce your advice.

## **Handling Strays**

Advise the person not to try to just pick up an unfamiliar cat and not to try putting the cat into a carrier. Even a tame cat can become frightened and bite or scratch when being put into a carrier.

Some state laws require that an unvaccinated animal that has bitten (or, in some cases, even scratched) a person must be put to death so the brain may be examined for evidence of rabies infection OR quarantined for as long as six months. Since all homeless and feral animals have uncertain vaccination histories, it's especially important that the rescuer exercise caution in handling unknown animals.

To minimize the risk of being scratched or bitten, we recommend the use of humane box traps for feral cats. For friendly strays, we suggest that the rescuer put cat food or tuna fish (intended for human consumption) in the back of a cat carrier. A little hunger makes the cat more likely to enter the carrier. After the cat has completely entered, close the door with a gloved hand (an oven mitt will work, too). If the cat will not go in or if the person does not have a carrier, they may be able to borrow a humane trap from a local rescue group or rent one from a local rental company.

We do not loan humane traps to people who want to have healthy animals removed and destroyed.

## **If the Animal is a Feral Cat (or Cats)**

We recommend Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) as the most humane and effective way to manage feral cat populations. If the person cannot be interested in TNR we will be unable to help them and the cats. So our challenge is to share information with the caller about the benefits of TNR and the ineffectiveness of other approaches.

Explaining the scope of the problem can be helpful. In each of our local communities there are hundreds, and in some towns thousands, of feral cats. Large numbers of cats are still brought into animal control shelters and the majority of friendly cats and all of the feral cats are killed at taxpayer expense. Further, this is not even an effective solution to the problem, as most neighborhoods that remove feral cats just end up with more cats in a short period of time. This is known as the "vacuum effect." TNR effectively and humanely reduces the number of cats in the area while improving their quality of life.

## **Feral Cats: Basic Questions to Ask**

If you suspect that someone is calling about a feral cat colony, ask these questions:

- Where are the cats?
- How many are there?
- Are there kittens? Are there pregnant cats?
- Are you, or is anyone else, feeding the cats?

- Do the cats appear to be healthy? (Is their coat (fur) in good shape (dirty? matted?)? emaciated (skinny)? are their eyes clear? nose clean? sneezing? coughing? limping? any apparent wounds?) Ask for visual clues, things that a novice will be able to observe.

If callers do not know the answer to the last question, encourage them to find out. The caller should look for signs of feeding (empty cans, bowls) and leave a note to the feeder at the feeding site. If the person does not want to get involved, you may want to contact . . .someone? for advice, information on volunteers in the area or known feral cat colonies in the area.

To determine if the cats are feral, ask:

- Are any of the cats friendly or are they all very shy?
- Do any of the cats like to be petted?
- Do any of them approach people?

Many people don't know what "feral" means, so it's best to ask these specific questions. If any of the cats are friendly, refer to the previous section on homeless animals.

## **Explaining the Best Way to Help Feral Cats**

People often think that the best thing for feral cats is to be adopted into a home. So you may need to explain Trap-Neuter-Return to them. (See separate section below on TNR.)

If necessary and appropriate it can help to repeat the facts;

- We do not remove feral cats, we implement a humane management program called Trap-Neuter-Return.
- Feral cats do not belong in an animal shelter because they are too fearful to become household pets.
- Caging them for prolonged periods would be cruel and stressful for them. We recommend the Trap-Neuter-Return method of controlling feral cat populations because it is the only thing that really works.
- We do not have places to relocate cats, and even if we did, the problem with removing them is that in short order new cats move into the area, starting the cycle all over again.

If the person is interested in TNR you can point them to the trapping notes and other feral information sheets, put them in touch with the Casework Coordinator for trap loans, refer spay/neuter services or seek specialists help if the person is infirm or elderly and unable to trap on their own.

## **The Basics of Trap/Neuter/Return**

Since feral cats are fearful of people and are not usually happy living in a household situation, we recommend Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) as the best, most humane solution for ferals. TNR allows the cats to keep their freedom, while dramatically improving their quality of life, preventing further breeding, and increasing their long-term survival. At the same time it minimizes some of the concerns people may have about the cats, preventing the spread of disease, eliminating feline mating behaviors which can be annoying to people, and reducing the cat population in the area humanely and cost effectively.

### **Understanding the Nature of Feral Cats**

An important consideration with feral cats is their quality of life. Not unlike a wild animal, the outdoors is home to feral cats, and we rob them of that if we place them somewhere where they will be contained. Unfortunately, allowing them their freedom means sacrificing a certain degree of safety. However, we must consider that a feral cat may prefer life on its own turf. After all, the feral cat may be safe if he is contained, but if he is miserable, what's the point?

It can be helpful to emphasize that a feral cat does not want a home. He has his own life, with his own territory, favorite places to hang out, friends and family. He lives much like a wild animal would, and like a wild animal, would not appreciate being held captive!

There is a common misconception that a feral cat will warm up to being a house cat if someone “works with him.” The caller may say something like, “I’m sure if someone took him in, he’d come around.” Well, it is possible, but not likely (unless the cat has recently been abandoned and is just scared – not truly feral). A feral cat may get used to one caretaker and approach that person or accept petting from that person. However, if the cat only lets the one person near, it is most likely still feral and should be left with its colony.

### **The Most Important Thing**

If someone is feeding the cats, they must be sterilized! Feeding without sterilization only increases the population and leads to more problems.

If the person can do nothing else for the cats, encourage him/her to have them fixed. Their chances for survival are much better if they are sterilized, even if the person will not be able to provide food, water, shelter and ongoing care. Be sure to provide low-cost spay/neuter referrals.

**If caller is interested but need help with implementing TNR for the cats**, you’ll need the caller’s permission to give out their e-mail address and/or phone number to the volunteer Network members.

**If any of the cats are tame and friendly**, or if the individual will be taming and adopting out feral kittens, you’ll want to provide all the standard information in the “Finding a New Home” section of this handbook. It is usually possible to tame feral kittens if they are under 16 weeks of age, and if they are under eight weeks of age, it’s generally fairly easy. But if the kittens are over 16 weeks old, they have passed a threshold in their development that makes it very difficult to tame them sufficiently for them to become friendly house cats, and so trap/neuter/return is generally the best bet for older kittens.

**If the caller is not interested in TNR**, there may not be much help available for them. It can be helpful to explain the benefits of TNR (see below) and to inform the caller that trap and removal programs are not effective, since new cats will simply move into the vacated area and start breeding. Ignoring feral cats is not a workable solution either. If left unchecked, they breed quickly, and contribute to the already tragic overpopulation problem.

With a little patience, it is sometimes possible to open an individual’s mind to considering this kinder and gentler approach to solving the problem.

### **Some Feral Cat Facts**

- Nationally, it is estimated that there are over 40 million feral cats. Some estimates range as high as 60 million. Feral cats can be found throughout the world.
- In most communities, there are hundreds and, in some areas, thousands of feral cats.
- No-kill shelters are not able to take in all of the friendly homeless cats that are reported to them each day, so there is even less chance of them taking feral cats.
- True feral cats, like other wild animals, do not make good pets. The experience of living in a house with people is foreign and frightening to them. It’s unfair to try to force them to conform to our human standards. Many feral cats have family groups and friends in their colony. Their home is truly the outdoors, as it is for wildlife.

**The**

### **Benefits of Trap/Neuter/Return**

- TNR has several advantages over other ways of dealing with the cats (destroying them or ignoring the problem):
- TNR puts an end to the breeding. It stabilizes, and over time reduces the size of the colony.
- It prevents the spread of rabies, because the cats are vaccinated.
- It ends annoying feline mating behaviors, such as fighting, howling and spraying.

- It keeps the rodent populations under control naturally (rodents would otherwise be killed with traps or poison).
- It eliminates the risk of accidentally trapping and killing someone's pet cat.
- It minimizes the cats' wandering.
- It is a practical and cost-effective solution. Cats will gather wherever a food source exists, so when cats are removed, new ones often come into the area, necessitating an endless cycle of trap-and-kill. The neutered and returned cats defend their turf from newcomers, which prevents the need for repeat trap-and-kill efforts.
- It is humane, demonstrating a proper respect for life.
- It has the endorsement of many humane organizations in the U.S. and England.
- It's a proven effective program, used successfully around the world and in local communities.
- It saves taxpayer dollars.

## **The How-To's of Trap/Neuter/Return**

Here are the steps for implementing the program:

1. Each cat is trapped in a humane trap and taken to a veterinarian.
2. The cats are tranquilized, examined (for general good health), vaccinated for rabies and neutered or spayed. It is best to get a photograph of the cat while they are in the trap or to ask the vet clinic to photograph the cat while he is under anesthesia. Ideally the photo will show facial and body markings for future identification.
3. After a brief recuperation period (usually 24 hours, if there were no surgical complications and the weather is not too severe), they are returned to their home site, where they are fed and monitored daily by volunteers or local residents.
4. Kittens and tame cats should be placed in adoptive homes. (Feral kittens under eight weeks of age can easily be tamed. Most kittens can be successfully tamed up until the age of 16 weeks. Kittens older than 16 weeks do not usually become adoptable.)
5. Ideally someone will commit to ongoing daily care for the cats and shelter should be provided. But the most important thing we can do for outdoor cats is ensure that they are neutered.

Careful observation of the colony and advance planning are important to the success of the program. Here are tips for successfully implementing the TNR program:

**Trapping.** Local shelters and animal control agencies often loan out humane traps. Some organizations offer training in their use, low-cost spay/neuter assistance, and, sometimes, help with trapping. Advise the caller not to handle an unfamiliar animal and not to try putting the cat into a carrier (use food to lure the cat in). Even a tame cat can become aggressive and bite when being put into a carrier.

We have detailed notes on trapping in our standard resources, which you may want to share with the caller. The notes include information on trapping difficult-to-catch cats.

**Feeding the cats.** Keep the cats' feeding area free of leftover food and debris. Do not over-feed them, since leftover food draws insects and other animals, which can trigger complaints.

Putting food out during the daylight hours and removing any remaining food before dusk can minimize interaction with wildlife.

It is advisable to move the feeding area and any shelters provided for the cats away from public view. This prevents human/cat interactions, which may be disturbing to some people who do not like cats. It is rarely in the best interest of feral cats for them to become too familiar with people. Their natural instinct to be fearful of people helps them to survive. Keeping the cats out of sight prevents injury to them by cruel individuals and it prevents "drop-offs."

If the cats are presently being fed in a public area, their site can easily be changed by gradually moving their feeding site, a bit each day, toward the newly selected, more secluded spot. Note: This method is only effective

for moving the cats several hundred yards (for example, around the corner of a building, into a nearby wooded area, or over a property line).

**Adopting out friendly cats and kittens.** Generally, whenever possible, friendly cats should be adopted into a suitable home. A *How to Find Homes* manual can be sent to the individual to assist with the placement of adoptable cats. Feral kittens under eight weeks of age can easily be tamed. Most kittens can be successfully tamed up until the age of 16 weeks. Kittens older than 16 weeks do not usually become adoptable.

### **What we can do to help:**

We can loan humane traps, offer training in their use and provide veterinary care and spay neuter assistance for ferals and may be able to enlist volunteer trappers to help.

## **Resolving Neighbor Disputes**

The caller usually says something along the lines of; **“Help! Someone complained about the cats!”**

**Try to calm them down and get them thinking about solutions.** It can help to say something like: “It’s upsetting to think that someone is complaining and that this might result in harm coming to the cats you are caring for. But don’t panic, there are solutions.”

Then walk them through the basic steps and direct them to the related information sheets.

The goal is to find a mutually agreeable solution that addresses the concerns so that the person who complained can accept the cats in the neighborhood. The first step in resolving any issue is to determine exactly what the root of the complaint is. Perhaps the cats are going someplace they are not wanted, digging in a garden, walking on cars, or making a lot of noise at night.

### **Helping the cats to be good neighbors**

The old adage about an ounce of prevention is true. Even if a complaint has already been lodged, as part of trying to negotiate a solution there are a few things that can often be done right away to help alleviate any stress in the neighborhood around the cats:

- **Be sure all the cats are spayed or neutered.** Neutering the cats is the best way to reduce feline mating behaviors that can be annoying to people. If all the cats are not neutered, provide information on low-cost spay/neuter services and trap loans in their area.

It’s a good practice for caregiver to keep a copy of each cat’s medical record and rabies certificate, along with a photo of each cat, in a file folder.

- **Move the feeding area and shelters away from public view.** If they are currently feeding the cats in plain view, suggest that they move the feeding place to a more discrete location nearby, Cats adapt quickly to such a change.
- **Keep the feeding area neat and clean.** There should not be any trash or excess food lying about. Advise against over-feeding the cats and/or feeding them directly on the ground. Always use a bowl or tray.

### **Successful Negotiation Steps-by-Step:**

These steps will help you walk the person through the negotiation process with the person who complained.

**Step 1: Make contact with the person who has complained and really listen to them.** Listening is the first step to successful negotiation. When they are done talking, ask questions to gather more information about what is happening and about their concerns. The time put into listening and asking questions is a worthwhile investment, it gives you the information you need to successfully address the issue and it allows them to become more open to you.

When you ask someone about their concerns and just listen – without trying to immediately jump in with explanations and solutions – it puts the other person in the mood to listen to you. Let them get it all off their chest. Once they have had their say, most people are in a better frame of mind to listen to you.

**Step 2: Understand their perspective and look for any common ground.** Try to see things from their perspective. Perhaps all you can agree with them about initially is that they feel upset about something they are experiencing. In that case perhaps you can honestly say something like "I can see how this has created a problem for you." From their perspective it has, so you can be genuine in saying this. We all feel better and more open when we feel understood.

Perhaps you can also agree that you want to find a solution that works for all involved.

If you can find some point of agreement, some common ground, then you are on their side and are looking for a solution with them, rather than being in opposition.

**Step 3: Use active listening.** Explain that you want to be sure that you understand their concerns so that you can develop effective solutions. Then try recounting the concerns back to them, so that they can further clarify them for you.

Take care to be sincere and not to sound judgmental. Even if you do not think their concerns are very serious or legitimate, by trivializing them you will lose credibility and the opportunity to effectively advocate for the cats.

**Step 4: Explain why there are cats out there:** Feral (wild) cats, like raccoons and possums, have become part of the landscape of our communities. They are found in virtually all communities across the country and around the world.

These cats and their offspring are the victims of abandonment, accidental loss, and human failure to get their pets spayed or neutered.

It might appear that if you just stopped feeding that the cats would go away, but in practice this is not what happens. Instead it usually leads to an increase in nuisance behavior, such as scavenging through trash, as the cats search for food.

**Step 5: Explain why removal is not a good option:** Removing the cats is not really the solution it might appear to be. In reality when cats are removed, new cats and other animals migrate into the area to fill the void. This is known as the vacuum effect.

With Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) the cat population is controlled and the resident cats maintain the turf, preventing other animals from migrating into the area. (If the neighborhood has removed cats in the past that would be evidence that removal doesn't work).

Providing examples of other local TNR successes (or trap and remove failures) may be helpful for some people.

**Step 6: Explain that if they are removed the cats will be killed.** Many people are not aware that the fate of most animals that end up in shelters is that they are killed. Feral cats are not adoptable, so most are killed right away.

While some people will not care about their fate, many others will be more open to exploring other solutions – they may not really want the cats around but they do not want them to be killed.

**Step 7: Propose some solutions to their specific concerns:** Once you know what the specific complaint is you can go about solving it, be it moving the feeding station, providing litter boxes and deterrents to digging in the garden, or building new shelters to keep cats off of cars.

You will need to let your neighbor know exactly what you plan to do, and why this ought to help solve the problem. While you do not want to let this drag out, it may be helpful to tell your neighbor that you are going to do some research and will get back to them in a day or two with a proposed plan to address their concerns. This gives you time to consult the Addressing Common Concerns about Outdoor Cats information sheet, to think through possible solutions, and to devise a plan to run by your neighbor. Also taking time to work out a solid plan helps demonstrate to your neighbor that you are taking their concerns seriously and are not just giving them a canned response.

As part of the plan, include when each action will be taken and a date for checking back with them to see if there has been an improvement.

**Step 8: Follow up:** Be sure to do what you have promised to do promptly, including contacting the neighbor at the agreed upon time to see if the solution is working. If it is, that's great! If not, don't give up. Try a different strategy to address the problem, again setting a time frame for checking back with them. Persistence usually pays off!

**Tips for reaching an agreement with the person who has complained:**

Advice you can share with the caregiver for their discussion with the neighbor:

- **Stay calm:** Try not to react emotionally to the complaint. Remember that if you lose your temper, you will lose the neighbor's desire to resolve the problem and the cats will likely be the ones to suffer as a result.

If you are not able to remain calm, enlist the help of a cool and collected friend who is willing to talk to the neighbor on your behalf.

- **Don't dismiss the complaints as silly:** While the issue may seem silly to you, it's real to the other party, and for the sake of the cats, you want to find a way to work with this individual.

Saying things like; "Cats just don't do that!" or implying that the issue is trivial and the person ought to just live with it, will usually only serve to make the individual dig in and cling to their position.

- **The almost magical power of listening:** Listen respectfully and carefully to what your neighbor has to say. What you learn will help you resolve the concern and protect the cats.

Remember: the complainant is going to give you the clues to fix the problem! For example, you may learn that the concern is not about the community cats in the area, but about someone's pet cat that is wandering. Or you may gain an understanding of the specific concerns the individual has and be able to address them using the solutions offered in the "Addressing Common Concerns about Outdoor Cats" fact sheet.

- **Show a genuine interest in understanding the problem:** Politely ask for any other information that may help you address the concern. What time of day do they see/hear this behavior? What does the cat look like? Where is this occurring? Ask to see the location(s).

Ask if you may come by to observe the behavior so that you can see the cat in question. Sometimes you will discover that it is not a colony cat, but a neighbors pet, a wild animal, or a new colony cat that you did not know about.

- **Get into problem solving mode:** Genuinely try your best to resolve the problem. Some neighbors will appreciate the mere fact that you are trying and will be more willing to work with you not to have the cats removed.

- **Don't make it about you:** Remember the goal is to get your neighbor to feel okay about having the cats around.

Don't tell the neighbor about how much you have done or how upset the complaint made you feel. If you are even tempted to start talking about you, stop yourself! Instead focus on understanding how he or she feels, what his or her problems are, and then calmly explain how Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) rather than removing the cats) is going to benefit him or her and how you will address their specific concerns.

- **Know your facts:** Find out all you can about TNR. Explain why removing the cats away will not work. You'll want to be able to explain the vacuum effect to your neighbors. Below is a list of benefits of TNR that may provide some helpful sound bites.

- **Go in pairs:** You do not want the person to feel out numbered, but it can be helpful to bring a calm friend or a skilled fellow cat advocate along to talk with your neighbor. Let the neighbor know up front that you would like to work together to solve the problem, that you are there to gain an understanding of their perspective and to resolve the issues and you have brought your friend along to help.

- **Provide a timely response:** Once you reach an agreement, be sure to take timely action to keep your end of the bargain. Check back to see if the neighbor notices a difference.
- **Know when to bring in outside mediation help:** Sometimes it's not really just about the cats, it's about an issue the neighbor has with you or your family. If the cats are just one of several complaints the neighbor has expressed with you or your family, it's best to get someone else to help with mediating the grievances.
- **Avoid these three misconceptions:**
  - **“How can people be so uninformed!!??”**  
Many people do not understand why removing all the cats will not solve the problem, or why they cannot be put into a shelter to be adopted or to live out their lives. Others think that if you just stop feeding, the cats will do away.  
  
Most people will not be as knowledgeable about cats as you are, but don't be aggravated with them, instead view it as an opportunity to share information. You need to be able to explain TNR calmly and in a manner that is not condescending -- after all, no one likes to be spoken down to.
  - **“They must be cat haters!!”**  
Many caregivers say that if someone complains they must be a cat hater, but in fact, most people do not hate cats – but they do dislike having to cope with what they view as a problem. If you assume that the individual hates cats, you'll miss the opportunity to address the problem and protect the cats. In most cases, if you can resolve the concerns, people will agree to coexist with the cats in the neighborhood.
  - **“To know cats is to love them!”**  
Don't expect everyone to love cats: The fact is that not everyone will love cats the way you do. Telling people that cats are beautiful animals, or that they have a right to be there, is not going to convince everyone. The more effective approach is to respect their view point and focus on finding a solution to their specific complaints.  
  
Providing factual information about why TNR works and removal does not can help win over people who do not “like” cats, but can accept that TNR is the most effective way to deal with them.

Try to end the dialogue by encouraging the caregiver; they are the cats' guardian and public relations agency, and in most cases the only source of help for the cats should unhappy neighbors or property owners complain. It can feel like a heavy responsibility for sure, but it can also be a very rewarding experience to be part of creating a lifesaving solution for the cats and helping people find ways to live in harmony with animals in the neighborhood.

## **Advice for people who are upset about cats in the neighborhood and/or a neighbor who is feeding them:**

Often the caller will say something like: **“There are these cats hanging around in the neighborhood, and they are causing a problem.”**

### **Common concerns and questions people have about t by cats in their area and answers for each.**

#### **Why are there cats in our neighborhood?**

When you notice cats outdoors they are either neighbors' pets, lost or abandoned pets, or feral cats. Feral cats are the “wild” offspring of domestic cats. Kittens that grow up outdoors without human contact are naturally fearful and inclined to stay away from people.

Feral cats are the result of owner abandonment and failure to spay and neuter pets. Colonies of cats can be found behind shopping malls or businesses, in alleys, parks, abandoned buildings, in urban as well as rural areas, across the country and around the world.

### **Won't the feral cats just go away if people stop feeding them?**

While you might expect it to work that way, feeding the cats (and getting them neutered) actually keeps the situation in check. If caregivers are prevented from feeding them, the cats are instead forced to forage and scavenge for food, possibly seeking food in nearby trash bins and on neighboring property.

Feeding locations can be established away from public areas to help reduce chance encounters between cats and people.

### **Couldn't we just have these cats trapped and removed?**

Removing the cats is not really the solution it might appear to be. In reality, when cats are removed, new cats and other animals migrate into the area to fill the void. This is known as the vacuum effect.

Removal of cats is also a very expensive strategy especially considering that it provides only short term results. Removed cats are housed and killed at taxpayer expense, costing on average over \$100 per animal.

Fortunately there is an effective, long-term solution; Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR). With TNR the cat population is controlled and the resident cats maintain the turf, preventing other animals from migrating into the area. TNR is typically done by volunteers, at no cost to taxpayers.

Surveys conducted in San Francisco and Chicago suburbs found that whenever a neighborhood TNR program was implemented, the number of cats in the area decreased. Conversely locations that employ lethal methods of controlling cat populations continued to struggle with cat population growth.

### **Do the cats pose a risk to public health?**

A study conducted by Stanford University's Department of Environmental Health and Safety found virtually no risk to human health or safety from feral cats. Research at the University of Florida has found that feral cats and owned cats share similar health status, confirming that the cats do not pose a risk to public health or to other cats.

People sometime worry about rabies, but this is unjustified. Cats are not a natural carrier for rabies. There has not been a single human death from rabies attributed to transmission from a cat in the U.S. in over three decades. Also, as part of a TNR program, cats are vaccinated against rabies and then provide an immune barrier between humans and wildlife in the community.

In relation to Toxoplasmosis, the British Medical Journal states that: "contact with cats, kittens, cats' feces, or cats who hunt for food was not a risk factor for infection. No significant associations were detected between infection and presence of cats. . ." The study concludes that eating undercooked meat is the primary risk factor in contracting toxoplasmosis.

### **Are feral cats vicious?**

Feral cats are naturally wary of people and will not approach humans they do not know. Feral cats will not attack anyone unless they are cornered.

It's always a good practice to avoid touching or cornering any animal you are not familiar with. Parents and caregivers should teach children to not approach or touch any unknown animal.

### **Wouldn't the cats be better off brought to an animal shelter?**

Over 99% of the feral cats who are taken to animal control are killed. Since they are not friendly toward humans, they are not candidates for adoption. Feral cats are at home outdoors, and TNR is truly the most humane way to deal with them.

Even if the cats are friendly, there are not yet enough adoptive families for every friendly stray cat in our city.

### **Don't the cats live short, miserable lives?**

Generally, feral cats are healthy animals, experiencing no more or worse medical issues than housecats. Spaying /neutering, a key part of a TNR program, further improves cat health by reducing wandering, mating, and fighting. It is not uncommon for feral cats to live ten or more years, a lifespan comparable to many pet cats.

While feral and abandoned cats may face hardships, we don't believe that death is better than a less-than-perfect life. Many animals, such as raccoons, foxes, and field mice face similar hazards and do not live extraordinarily long lives, yet we would never consider "euthanizing" them "for their own good."

### **Don't the cats kill many birds?**

Studies have shown that the bulk of the feral cat diet consists of insects, plants, and scavenged food. In terms of their hunting ability, cats are rodent specialists, widely recognized to have low success at bird predation.

The World Watch Institute lists habitat loss, pollution, pesticides, and drought as the primary factors affecting bird populations today. Other significant factors include collisions with windows, cell phone towers, and automobiles. Cats do not make the list.

If you feed birds, use hanging or pole feeders, rather than feeding them on the ground. Place the feeders away from shrubbery that may provide cover for predator animals.

### **What is TNR?**

Trap-Neuter-Return or TNR, humanely controls and effectively reduces outdoor cat populations.

Each cat is trapped in a humane trap and taken to a veterinarian. The cats are tranquilized, examined for general good health, vaccinated for rabies, and neutered. After a brief recuperation they are returned to their home turf, where they are fed and monitored daily by volunteers.

### **But how can anyone afford to get these cats spayed or neutered?**

Free (or low-cost) spay/neuter services are available in our community.

### **Concerns about cats and how to address them**

#### **"The feeding area is messy and attracts insects."**

- Ask the caregiver to keep the cats' feeding area neat and free of leftover food and trash.

#### **"Too many cats around!"**

- Ensuring that all of the cats are neutered, and adjusting the physical location where the feeding occurs can usually address the number of cats you are seeing. Ask the caregiver to move the feeding area and to be sure that all the cats are neutered.

#### **"Cats are sleeping under my porch."**

- If cats are sleeping under a house, in a shed, or other locations, the cat is seeking a warm, dry, safe, shelter from the elements. You may ask the caregiver to provide a shelter (similar to a small dog house) for the cats. Meanwhile, physically block or seal the location the cat is entering with chicken wire or lattice when you are sure the cat is not there.

#### **"Cats are getting into my trash."**

- Cats and many wild animals are opportunistic scavengers. This can be reduced by caregivers providing a regular food source at a set time in an out of the way location, during daylight hours.
- Keep trash properly covered and secured to avoid attracting raccoons, skunks, and possums, in addition to cats.

#### **"Cats are hanging out in my yard. . ."**

There are many safe, ways to discourage feral cats from hanging out where they are not wanted.

- Ask caregiver to be sure the cats are neutered. This curtails the urge to roam.
- Use a repellent to keep cats out of the area. Options include:
  - Chemical repellents such as; "Repel Away From My Garden," "Havahart Cat Repellent" and "Reppers," can be used around the edges of the yard, the top of fences and on any favorite areas;
  - Motion activated water sprinklers, such as "The Scarecrow";

- Ultrasonic devices, such as “Cat Stop Automatic Outdoor Cat Deterrent” or “Yard Control Cat Repeller, Model P7810” emit a high frequency sound annoying to cats, but not perceptible by people (be sure to match device to size of area to be covered);
- Household items and herbs that repel cats include; Cayenne pepper, citrus peels, coffee grounds, pipe tobacco, citrus scented sprays and oils of lavender, lemon grass, citronella, peppermint, eucalyptus, and mustard.

**“Cats are digging in my garden.”**

- Use one of the repellents listed above.
- Create a physical barrier to digging: Gardens and flowerbeds can be protected with "Cat Scat" plastic mats that can be purchased online and pressed into the soil. Heavy plastic carpet runner (pointed side up) also works. Cover exposed ground in flower beds with attractive rocks. Branches from a thorny plant, like a Rose of Sharon tree, wooden or plastic lattice fencing material or chicken wire can be placed over the soil, or pine cones, wooden chopsticks, skewers, or plant stakes embedded into the soil every eight inches.
- Ask the caregiver to create an outdoor litter box for the cats in an acceptable place (works especially well when combined with a deterrent to digging in the old favorite spots). We can advise caregivers on how to do this.

**“Cats are drinking from my swimming pool.”**

- If cats are coming to drink from a swimming pool or landscaped pond, ask the caregiver to provide an alternative water source away from the pool.

**“I can smell cat urine.”**

- Eliminate the smell of cat urine by spraying the area thoroughly with white vinegar, which can be purchased inexpensively by the gallon at the supermarket.
- Neutering the cats is the best way to eliminate their desire to spray-mark. Ask caregiver to ensure that all of the cats are neutered.

**“Cats are making a lot of noise, fighting and yowling”**

- These are all behaviors associated with feline mating. The solution is to humanely trap and neuter the entire colony. Once a cat is neutered the hormones leave their system within three weeks and the behaviors usually stop.

**“Cats are walking on my car.”**

- A car cover to protect the car from cat prints.
- Ask the caregiver to move shelters and feeding stations away from the area where cars are parked.

**“We’ve tried these solutions and are still having difficulty with the cats and/or the neighbor.”**

Offer to talk to the feeder to see if we can resolve the conflict.

**“No one seems to be taking care of the cats in our neighborhood.”**

Check the Trappers’ Network to see if we have a volunteer in the area who can check the situation out and try to recruit someone locally to manage the colony.

## **Other Outdoor Cat Related Situations and Possible Solutions**

### **Taming Feral Kittens**

You may also suggest that people could order the Urban Cat League’s video; "Socializing Feral Kittens." Information about ordering it can be found online at; [www.urbancatleague.org](http://www.urbancatleague.org).

### **Basic Advice on Socializing Feral Kittens** from Tompkins County SPCA

Kittens who are not exposed to humans early in their lives learn from their mothers and quickly become feral. However, if they are caught and handled at a young enough age, feral kittens can be socialized and placed in loving homes.

Remember that spay/neuter is the single most important thing you can do to help feral cats. It is best to alter as many cats in a colony as possible before you begin socializing.

Kittens under four weeks old can usually be socialized in a matter of days, and kittens up to eight weeks old can take approximately two to four weeks to socialize. 10-12 weeks old kittens can also be tamed, but it may take longer. Taming feral kittens over 12 weeks old can be difficult and they may never be fully socialized to people.

### **Getting Started**

- Kittens cannot be socialized while they are still in their colony. They must be brought inside and confined so you have regular access to them. If you cannot do this, have the kittens altered and return them to their colony.
- Kittens can be taken from their feral mothers when they begin eating canned food on their own at approximately four weeks of age.

### **Housing the Kittens**

- You will need to confine the kitten(s) at first, preferably in a dog crate, large pet carrier, cat condo, or cage. If you do not have a cage or carrier, you can keep the kittens in a small room. Be sure to block up anything they could crawl into or under and remove anything that could injure them.
- Do not let feral kittens run loose in your house. They can hide in tiny spaces and are exceptionally difficult to find and coax out. In addition, a large room can be frightening and hinder the taming process.
- If possible, kittens should be separated from each other to facilitate taming. Left together, one kitten can become outgoing and playful while another remains shy and withdrawn. If you cannot separate them, the kittens can be housed together, but be sure to spend time alone with each one.
- The cage should contain a small litter box, food and water dishes, and something to cuddle in like a soft towel, small fleece throw, or old sweater.

### **Socializing**

- Food is the key to taming. Make dry kitten food available at all times and give the kitten a small amount of wet food at least twice a day. The kitten may hesitate to eat in your presence at first, but be patient. Eventually the kitten will associate your presence with food.
- Chicken-flavored baby food is a special treat that almost no kitten can resist.
- How soon you begin handling the kitten depends on the kitten's age and temperament. Older kittens and those who are more feral are harder to handle. With these kittens, start by offering baby food or wet food on a spoon through the cage. Once they are used to this, you can begin handling them.
- Younger and less feral kittens can be picked up right away. Wear gloves if you will feel more comfortable, as it is important to be confident and gentle when picking up any animal. Wrap the kitten in a towel allowing her head to stick out. Offer baby food or wet food on a spoon. If she does not respond, dab a tiny bit on the end of her nose. Once she tastes it, she will soon want more.
- When petting a feral kitten, approach from behind his head. Gradually begin to pet the kitten's face, chin, and behind the ears while talking gently. Try to have several feeding/petting sessions (15-20 minutes) with each kitten as many times a day as you can.
- Progress will depend on the kitten's age and temperament. Each day you will notice improvement. Falling asleep in your lap, coming towards you for food, meowing at you, purring, and playing are all great signs. Once the kitten no longer runs away from you but instead comes toward you seeking to be

fed, held and petted, you can confine her to a small, kitten-proofed room rather than a cage. Siblings can also be reunited at this point.

- Expose the kittens to a variety of people. Everyone should use low voices at first, and approach the kittens in a non-threatening manner.

### **Important Tips**

- Handle feral kittens cautiously, their claws and teeth are sharp.
- Do not give kittens cow's milk, it can make them sick.
- Once the kitten is willing to play, offer toys and use a string (not yarn) or a cat dancer for him to chase. Do not let the kitten bite, scratch or play with your hand.
- If the kittens are staying awake at night, try to play and socialize with them more during the day and cover their cage(s) at night with a towel or blanket.
- Leave a television or radio on (not too loud) during the day so the kittens get used to human voices.

## **Socializing Feral Kittens**

The Urban Cat League's Guide: Tough Love, by Mike Phillips

### **Some Helpful Guidelines for Socializing Feral Kittens**

Kittens under eight weeks of age can usually be socialized without much difficulty following the guidelines detailed below. Kittens over 8 weeks of age who've had no positive interaction with humans often take much longer to socialize. However, these same guidelines are often effective up to 6 months.

Location – The best place to socialize kittens is anywhere where the socializer can get on their same level and comfortably interact with the kittens without the kittens feeling “backed into a corner,” or hiding out of reach. A dog pen large enough for the socializer to enter can be set up in any room and has the added advantage of more frequent exposure to typical human activity if placed in a busy room of the house. Most bathrooms work very well although they are isolated from continual household activity. A small room without hiding spots under couches and beds or behind furniture can also work very well. Radio and television sounds can contribute to getting outdoor ferals accustomed to the indoor environment.

Small cages or carriers don't work well since the cats always feel cornered when we reach in and they have no room to make the important “mind shift” where they decide to approach us out of self-interest in order to get the food they desire. They need to have the option not to be near you in order to make that decision to approach.

**CATS SOCIALIZE THEMSELVES BY CHOICE! We only provide the incentive... FOOD.**

FOOD is the most important tool to facilitate the socialization process. Growing kittens have an insatiable appetite which will give them the courage to approach you and be touched when they might normally never allow you anywhere near them. Putting food down and walking away takes away any incentive for them to welcome you into their world.

The following guidelines are not hard fast rules. You may find that the kittens skip to advanced stages very quickly or you may find they follow a sequence of their own design.

Evaluation - If the kittens are healthy, using the litter box, and will eat in front of you, you can safely begin delaying meals just enough to give you the advantage of hunger. (If not, you may decide to give them a “free ride” until this situation stabilizes. Once they seem calmer or the vet gives the OK, you may begin the “tough love” stage of socialization where you space out the meals so that the kittens are eager to learn.)

Tough love – Never put food down and walk away. If the kittens will eat in your presence, progressively pull the dish as close to you as possible. Stay with the kittens until they have eaten and then take the food away with you when you leave. Always leave water of course.

Eating off your finger - When the kittens are eating from a dish right beside you, start offering something tasty off your finger. Gerber or Beechnut baby food are favorites in Turkey, Chicken or Beef flavors. You may want

to try this in place of step 2 if they won't move close to you to eat from the dish. The order is of no importance as long as they are improving on some level. Be flexible but don't let them hold you hostage at the stage of their choice. "Get tough," and make them work for it.

Lead them onto your lap – Once they are used to eating off your finger, use that to lead them up into contact with your body by their choice. You can also try putting a dish in your lap and let the entire litter climb up onto you to eat. The braver ones will start and the shy ones may need to be worked with individually at their level. Lead the braver ones as close as possible and see if they will make eye contact with you while licking from your finger. That's a biggie for them!

Initiate Contact – Initiate contact at the beginning of a session where the kittens are particularly hungry and eagerly engrossed in eating. Start with them eating from a dish or while eating off the finger and eventually progress to touching them and petting while they are in your lap eating. Start in the head and shoulder area only. If s/he runs off lure them back with baby food on the finger and any bad experience should be soon forgotten. (This approach works at any stage. Back up to a stage that they've mastered and work back up to where they "freaked-out." Don't stop the session until they've forgotten the bad experience and are happily doing one of the steps with which they feel comfortable.)

Preparation for lifting – Expand petting and touching around the head and shoulders by moving to touching the underbelly to desensitize them for being picked up. Also try nudging them from one side to the other while they are engrossed in eating. Just having your hands near them and gently pushing them around is an important preparation to being picked up.

Moving on the ground - Set up two dishes and gently scoot a kitten the short distance from one dish to the other. If the kitten is engrossed in eating s/he won't mind being lifted if it goes smoothly and quickly. If not, lure 'em back, back up and start over.

Picking them up – Start sitting on the floor work. Have a full jar of baby food opened and ready before you try the first pick-up. Try it when they are engrossed in eating right next to you rather than scrambling after them on the run. Lift them under their chest with the food right in front of them. Hold them as loosely as possible onto your knees and eventually to your chest. Young kittens are often reassured if they feel the warmth of your body and can feel your heart beat when held against your chest. If it works you can try it up onto your knees the next day and eventually standing up.

Handling without food - After a good long session where the kitten(s) are very full and getting sleepy, try gentle petting and work up to holding and petting without the incentive of food being present. If this works you should be able to try it at other times between meals. It may be hardest just before feeding when the kittens are very hungry and confused and stressed by being held when they have only food on their minds.

Transition to adoption -Before putting them in a cage in an adoption center, test them with a few different socializers. If the volunteers at the adoption center can continue the baby food training there is often a smooth transition. Older and especially shy kittens do better when they go directly to an adoption and bypass the adoption center altogether. A crash course in socializing for the adopting family may be needed to assure that the transition to the home goes well. If the adopter starts them in the bathroom rather than turning the kittens loose to the run of the house, it will assure that they can bond with the kittens and that the kittens will know where the litter box is. If not the kittens often run off under the couch to hide for the foreseeable future.

INTERACTIVE PLAY – most feral kittens are frightened by interactive play when first exposed to humans. There is no rule for when to introduce it, or when they will accept it, but the best way to start is with a toy which isn't too threatening. A string on the end of a stick or some toy that allows you entice them from a distance allows them to get involved with your game without being face to face with you.

Save Baby Food (or whatever proves to be their favorite food) as a reward for new steps or to break through a plateau. Once a step has been mastered, only offer regular food as a reward for that step saving special treats for new territory. Remember the Mantra is "tough love."

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## **Relocation**

If the cats cannot stay where they are because they are in imminent danger, relocation may be a solution. Relocation is stressful for feral cats and should always be a last resort. Exhaust all possibility of negotiation before relocating feral cats. Remind callers that fixing the cats eliminates many of the annoying mating behaviors (fighting, howling and spraying) that are the cause for complaints from the public.

Sometimes the problem can be solved simply by moving the cats' feeding location a short distance away, to a spot out of public view. (See "Feeding the cats" at left for a good way to do this.)

If the cats must be relocated to a more distant place, there are particular steps that must be taken to ensure their well-being. At a minimum, relocated cats must be confined at the new site for three weeks; otherwise, they may attempt to return to their old site. During the adjustment period at the new site they will need to be kept safe from predators (the cage or place where they are being held needs to provide protection from dogs and wildlife), and they need to receive daily food and water and be furnished with a litter box. The idea is for the cats to become familiar and comfortable in the area so a view of some of the surroundings is helpful. Moving cats with others from the colony (keeping the group or at least some of the group members together) helps the cats remain at the new location as well.

Here are some other suggestions for relocation:

- Advertising for barn homes for the cats may be an option. To find an appropriate site, rescuers might try advertising in the livestock section of the classified ads, distributing flyers or hanging small posters in feed stores, and contacting stables, farms, ranches, or even warehouses (which may be interested in the cats as mousers). Rescuers need to be sure that the owners of these places will commit to providing food and care to the cats.
- In some cases, the individual can relocate the cats to his or her own yard.
- Building an outdoor cat enclosure (cattery) or putting up a cat fence around an area for the cats can be an option in some situations.

## **Feral Cats That Can't Be Released**

Rarely will you run into a situation with a feral cat that cannot be released back into a feral cat colony: These are generally limited to

- A cat with a very serious disability that makes survival outdoors impossible (blindness, for instance)
- Feral cats that were taken in as kittens but were never tamed

These cats are in a tough spot, stuck between two worlds – they aren't equipped to be released, but since they are feral, they can't be adopted. We usually recommend building an outdoor cat enclosure, or cattery, which will offer the cats the protection they need, but also the opportunity to be as feral as they please. We can provide instructions for building catteries and/or cat-proof fencing.

It's important to note that healthy feral cats who have been confined, even for long periods of time, for example in a hoarding situation, will usually readily readjust to life outdoors in a relocation site.

## **If They Need Additional Help**

If the caller is elderly or infirm, we may be able to enlist volunteers for trapping or feeding feral cats and can sometime find foster homes for taming feral kittens.

## **Cats without a Caregiver**

If the caller reports that the cats are not being cared for, and you are unable to convince them to get involved

(or if they are unable to do so) you may want to consider contacting our Volunteer Coordinator to see if any of volunteers would be willing to take on the locations or contact Community Cats to see if there are other feral cat feeders in the area.

## **Unwelcome Cats**

You may get calls from people who do not want feral cats wandering onto their property, or from people who are trying to resolve a neighborhood dispute about the cats.

The list below includes most of the common concerns that may come up around feral cats and Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR). A variety of solutions are offered for each issue. The solutions are often most effective when several are implemented at the same time.

### **“The feeding area is messy and attracts insects/wildlife.”**

- Keep the cats’ feeding area neat, clean, and free of leftover food and trash.
- Do not over-feed the cats; leftover food draws insects and other animals, which can trigger complaints.
- Remove leftover food after an hour. Be sure to remove dry as well as canned food. The cats will adjust to a specific feeding time.
- Feed during daylight hours and remove any remaining food before dusk to minimize cat/wildlife interactions.
- Always feed in bowls, never directly on the ground.
- Pour out the water bowl and refill it with fresh water daily to prevent mosquitoes.

### **“There are cats hanging around!”**

Adjusting the physical situation can usually address this concern – the old adage; “out of sight, out of mind” applies here.

- Locate the feeding area, and any shelters provided for the cats, away from public view.

If the cats are presently being fed in a public spot, the site can easily be changed to another nearby location. For example, the feeding area can be moved from in front of a building, around to an out-of-view place at the back of the parking lot, or from in front of the dumpster into a nearby wooded area or behind a fence. In some cases they can be moved several yards over a property line to a place where they are welcome. The cats usually adapt quickly, but depending upon the situation you may want to make the move incrementally over the course of a few days.

Keep in mind that the cats’ natural instinct to be fearful of people helps them to survive. Keeping the cats out of sight helps them retain their wariness and prevents injury to the cats, as well as complaints, and drop-offs.

- Do not feed at peak hours when people are most likely to be in the area and see the cats. For example, if you always feed on your way into work and someone else entering the building sees the entire colony waiting for you, they may think there is a population explosion! Change the feeding time and location.
- Discourage others from leaving handouts for the cats. If other people are leaving food scraps around, invite them to join you in creating a feeding schedule for the cats at the designated feeding location. (If you cannot identify the feeder in person, try leaving a polite note with your phone number or e-mail address, where the food was found.)
- If you provide a feeding station or shelter for the cats it’s best to make it as inconspicuous as possible. Painting them green, brown or some other natural color helps shelters and feeding stations blend into the environment.

### **“Cats are sleeping under my porch.”**

If cats are sleeping under a neighbors' house, in a shed, or other locations, the cats are seeking a warm, dry, safe, shelter from the elements.

- Recommend that the property owner physically block or seal the location the cat is entering with chicken wire or lattice when they are sure the cat is not there. (You could offer to help with this.)
- Provide shelters for the cats. (The Alley Cat Allies website provides information on how to build a shelter.) Multiple shelters may be needed for a colony. Place the shelters away from public view and paint them an inconspicuous earth color.

### **“Cats are getting into my trash.”**

Cats and many wild animals are opportunistic scavengers.

- Scavenging can be reduced by providing regular food for the cats at a set time and in an out of the way location.
- Keep trash properly covered and secured to avoid attracting raccoons, skunks, and possums, in addition to cats.

### **“Cats are hanging out in my yard. . .”**

There are many safe, low-tech methods to discourage feral cats from hanging out where they are not wanted. Offer to provide and apply these methods at your own expense. If there are other caregivers, consider pooling resources to cover the cost of such items.

- Be sure the cats are neutered, this curtails the urge to roam and mark territory.
- Use a repellent to keep cats out of the area. There are several types of repellents:
  - Chemical repellents (keep in mind that these need to be reapplied routinely). Cat and dog repellent (get the yard and garden type) can be purchase at most large garden centers, home improvement stores, pet supply stores, as well as online. Some of the common brands include: “Repel Away From My Garden,” "Havahart Cat Repellent" (uses capsaicin pepper and oil of mustard), and “Reppers.”  
Repellants should be sprayed or distributed around the edges of the yard, the top of fences and on any favorite digging areas or plants.
  - Motion activated water sprinkler/repellers, such as “The Scarecrow” work to keep cats out of yards.
  - Ultrasonic devices, such as “Cat Stop Automatic Outdoor Cat Deterrent” or “Yard Control Cat Repeller, Model P7810” emit a high frequency sound that is annoying to cats, but not perceptible by people. The key to their effectiveness is matching the capacity of the device to the size of the area to be covered; if the device is not powerful enough for the area, it won't work. Devices designed for rodents will not be effective with cats.
  - Household items and herbs that repel cats (keep in mind that these need to be reapplied routinely): Cayenne pepper, citrus peels, coffee grounds, pipe tobacco, citrus scented sprays and oils of lavender, lemon grass, citronella, peppermint, eucalyptus, and mustard, all repel cats.
  - Plants that repel cats include: The border plant "Coleus-Canina," is now being marketed as an effective scent deterrent for dogs and cats. The herb rue can also be planted to repel cats.
- Do not feed birds on the ground. Use hanging or post bird feeders that cats cannot reach.
- Put up a six-foot fence that comes right to the ground.
- As a last resort your own yard can be enclosed with cat fence to keep the cats confined to your property. Purrfect Cat Fence and Cat Fence In Systems are two manufacturers of cat fencing that can be found online.

### **“Cats are digging in my garden.”**

- Use one of the repellents listed above.
- Create a physical barrier to digging:
  - Gardens and flower beds can be protected from digging with "Cat Scat" plastic mats that can be purchased online and pressed into the soil. Each mat has flexible plastic spikes, which are harmless to cats and other animals, but discourage digging. Heavy plastic carpet runner (pointed side up) also works.
  - Cover exposed ground in flower beds with attractive rocks.
  - Take branches from a thorny plant and lay them on the ground in a lattice-type pattern, then plant flowers and seeds in the openings. Wooden or plastic lattice fencing material can be used in this same way.
  - Chicken wire can be firmly set into the dirt (sharp edges rolled under).
  - Pine cones, wooden chopsticks, skewers, or plant stakes can be embedded into the soil every eight inches.
  - Keep sand boxes covered when children are not playing in them.
- Make an outdoor litter box in an acceptable place (works especially well when combined with a deterrent to digging in the old favorite spots).
  - Dig up or loosen, or till the soil, as you would for a garden, in an acceptable, out-of-the-way spot in your yard.
  - Use a very large plastic storage container, make drainage holes in the bottom and fill it with sand box sand. Some people use a taller storage container and leave the lid on to protect the sand from the elements, cutting large entry and exit holes on both ends. The sand will need to be scooped regularly and replaced periodically. Putting a couple of pieces of the cats' feces into the boxes initially helps them get the idea.
  - Cats love peat moss for doing their business. A 4 foot square area, 6 to 8" deep, in a corner of the yard, replaced once a month or so, works nicely. It's very inexpensive and easy to handle and dispose of.

**“Cats are drinking from my swimming pool.”**

- If cats are coming to drink from a swimming pool or landscaped pond, provide alternative water away from the pool. Be sure to change the water frequently.

**“I can smell cat urine.”**

- Eliminate the smell of cat urine by rinsing the area thoroughly with white vinegar, which can be purchased inexpensively by the gallon at the supermarket, or with products available in pet supply stores.
- Neutering the cats is the best way to dramatically reduce or eliminate their desire to spray-mark and make the smell of cat urine less pungent.

**“Cats are making a lot of noise, fighting, yowling, spraying, and/or breeding.”**

- These are all behaviors associated with feline mating. The solution is to humanely trap and neuter the entire colony. Once a cat is neutered the hormones leave their system within three weeks and the behaviors usually stop.

**“Cats are walking on my car.”**

- Purchase a car cover to protect the car from cat prints.

- Cats like a high platform from which to view the world. Provide a table, create a platform in a tree, or provide a shelter that cats can lay on top of, as well as inside – anything that gives them a higher vantage point.
- Move shelters and feeding stations away from the area where cars are parked. The cats will follow the food and shelter.
- Sometimes in the winter cats will lay on top of a car for warmth. Provide shelters with outdoor heating pads (available online for dog houses) will keep them warm and away from automobiles.

**“The cats might have fleas.”**

- If fleas are a problem in your area, have your veterinarian treat for fleas when the cats are spayed or neutered. Revolution works well and can sometimes be reapplied if you are able to touch the cats while they are eating. Another option for ongoing flea control is Capstar which can be put into the food.
- Change the straw bedding material in the cats’ shelters regularly. Sprinkling a nontoxic herbal flea powder, other flea powder that is safe for cats, or diatomaceous earth (be sure to use food grade) beneath the bedding material inside the shelters. Spaying the interiors of the cats shelters with Insect Growth Regulator, available online in a concentrate without insecticides is effective in long term flea control (allow it to dry before the cats come in contact with it).

**“I’m worried about our (or our children’s) health and safety.”**

- Feral cats are naturally wary of people and will not approach humans they do not know. Feral cats will not attack anyone unless they are cornered.
- It’s always a good practice to avoid touching or cornering any animal you are not familiar with and to wash your hand thoroughly after gardening. Parents and caregivers should teach children to not approach or touch ANY unknown animal.
- Studies show that feral cats and owned cats share similar health status and do not pose a risk to public health. (Refer to the Alley Cat Allies website for further details.)
- TNR involves vaccinating and neutering the cats and providing ongoing care to them. It is the very best way to protect the public as the cats create an immune barrier between humans and wildlife.

**“The area will become a dumping ground for cats.”**

- Keep feeding stations and shelters out of view so that it’s not obvious that cats are cared for here.
- As part of TNR, a new cat that appears must be humanely trapped then either reunited with his owner, adopted into a home (if tame), or neutered, vaccinated, and returned as the other cats have been.
- If dumping is already a problem in the area posting official-looking signs stating that dumping cats is criminal abandonment punishable by law and that the area is monitored. Ask all caregivers and neighbors to keep an eye out for cats being dumped and to try to get the car license numbers so that an official police report can be filed.

## **SECTION 8: OTHER SITUATIONS**

### **Reporting Suspected Cruelty or Neglect**

You will get calls from people who have noticed cruelty toward or neglect of an animal (usually a dog, but sometimes other animals) and want to do something about it. Cruelty and neglect cases are often complicated; initially it would be wise to discuss any cases you get that involve cruelty or neglect with the Animal Help Desk Coordinator or with the Humane Officer.

### **Sending an NHS or WCRAS Humane Officer**

In many cases the right thing to do is to send the NHS humane officer.

In other cases it can be best to ask the individual to try to improve the situation in some way or to try talking with the neighbor. Learning which option will be best in a given situation requires experience, so you will want to run your initial cruelty reports by the Animal Help Manager/Coordinator before making decisions.

### **Counseling people to get involved:**

There are three primary ways for the caller to help when they suspect cruelty or neglect.

**1. Improve the dog's situation in the current home.** This may mean helping with repairing a hole in fencing, purchasing a large water bucket, or walking the dog a few times a week. This option is particularly appropriate in a case of neglect, rather than abuse, or when the dog would not easily be placed into another home. If the animal is in serious danger, and the caller feels that the only option is to contact animal control, then he/she should not try to improve the situation beforehand. Otherwise, when animal control shows up, everything will look fine to them.

**2. Offer the owners assistance with placement.** With the owner's cooperation, and, ideally, his assistance, the dog may be placed into a new home, which is more appropriate to his/her needs. If the animal is young, healthy, and behaviorally sound (no extreme fearful or aggressive behavior), this alternative may work out well. If the caller thinks this may be an option, it should be tried before reporting the owner to animal control. The owner will be less likely to want to work with the caller if he/she thinks the caller has complained to animal control.

**3. Attempt to have the dog removed from the home by animal control or our humane officer.** The owner may be **cited** by animal control if food, water, shelter, or vet care are not provided. The owner will usually not be cited simply for keeping the dog on a chain or for not providing attention, or what we may think of as good care -- unless the abuse is witnessed by an officer, or the dog's life is clearly in danger from the abuse or neglect the dog is not usually removed from the home. Although contacting the humane officer is the most appropriate in many cases, there are sometimes some risks involved. First, it is quite unlikely that the animal control officer will actually remove the dog from the household. A citation may incite an owner either to improve the dog's situation or to further abuse a dog – it's not always possible to tell which way they will go. Even if a dog is removed, there is no way to prevent the person from simply getting another dog, and continuing the cycle.

Here's some advice to offer the caller:

**Communicating with the dog's owner.** Tell the caller that it is extremely important that he/she come across as non-judgmental when communicating with the dog's owners. While the frustration is understandable, criticism will NOT help the animal. For instance, instead of using this approach:

*Your dog is miserable, and you're not taking care of him. He needs...*

Try this approach:

*I know you have a lot going on, and taking care of a dog is a big responsibility. If you would like, I could ask around and try to find him a new home.*

The demeanor, as well as the words, should be empathetic, non-aggressive, and open. Understand that in extreme cases of abuse, an owner may react to criticism by abusing the animal more aggressively, or may even go after the caller's pet. Tell callers to use caution.

**Stealing an animal.** No matter how bad the current situation is, stealing an animal is an illegal and punishable offense. It is often tempting to people to just go get the dog, and deal with it on their own. We cannot encourage this. If the person is prosecuted, the punishment could be severe, and the dog will end up no better off. Even if the person is not caught, there is no way to prevent the owner from going out and picking up a puppy the next day.

**Understanding the way the law works.** In some situations it may be advisable to talk with the caller about the real options for the animal. We cannot control the actions of others. Our humane officer can only enforce laws, encourage people to do the right thing. Legal authorities can only limit and/or control actions that are illegal.

## **Pet Store or Puppy Mill Complaints**

If someone calls with a complaint about a pet store or puppy mill, refer the call to our humane officer or to WCRAS officers for follow up.

If the caller is outside Washoe County our officer may be able to provide a referral or the caller can consult Pets911 for help with finding a local organization. Phone 1-888-PETS911 or access their website at [www.1888pets911.com](http://www.1888pets911.com).

You can also advise callers to write a letter detailing what they observed and why it is a concern and send it to the following:

- The state Bureau of Animal Health (which licenses pet stores in many states)
- American Kennel Club, 5580 Center View Drive, Raleigh, NC 27606
- The local Better Business Bureau
- The state Representative and Senator
- Ask them to copy us on the letter.

## **Spay/Neuter Assistance**

Low-cost spay/neuter assistance is available from various sources. The local specifics are documented in our Standard Resources.

Spay/Neuter is a key element in bringing local animal populations under control so it is very important that we do whatever we can to facilitate getting the animal neutered. It would be ideal if you can follow up to ensure that the caller got the needed help and pet was ultimately neutered. In the event of hardluck cases, please see the Community Programs Director to see if we can find some way to help.

Out of area calls can be referred to Spay USA 1-800-248 SPAY or [www.spayusa.org](http://www.spayusa.org).

## **Legal Help**

You may occasionally get calls from people who want to know where to get legal help for animal-related issues (for example, dogs that are accused of barking or biting, feral cat issues).

One helpful book is *Dog Law*, by attorney Mary Randolph (published by Nolo Press, [www.nolopress.com](http://www.nolopress.com)). It provides legal information about issues like barking and biting, and also addresses the responsibilities of dog owners and neighbors' rights.

Some local bar associations have committees on animal welfare, so they may want to contact the local or state bar association for referrals.

## **Lifetime Care**

Requests for us to take an animal (or animals) as part of a bequest (donation in a person's will) should be accepted. Information needs to be documented and provided to NHS staff responsible for donations.

## **Injured or Orphaned Wildlife**

If someone calls about an injured or orphaned wild animal, the advice they get in the first few minutes can be especially critical for the well-being of the animal. Standard information is provided to help you walk a person through when the animals should be left alone and when they need help. If it is determined that

they do need help, then these calls need to be promptly passed on to our Wildlife Staff at ext. 306. It is illegal to keep wild animals in most states. Injured animals need to go to a licensed wildlife rehabilitation facility.

Sometimes people think that animals are injured or orphaned when, in fact, they are fine and should be left alone. Tell callers that if they “find” baby wild animals, the best solution is often to leave them alone. Explain that many animals leave their young for extended periods; the absence of the parents does not necessarily indicate that the babies are orphaned. The mother will be afraid to return while humans are in sight. Anyone who thinks they have found an orphaned wild animal should bring pets and kids inside and watch from a considerable distance. See resource section for info sheets on orphaned birds and small animals.

### **Request for Financial Assistance for Vet Care**

All requests for financial assistance for sick, injured or dying animals are referred to Shakespeare Animal Fund at 775-342-7040.

### **Medical Emergencies**

The local animal control authorities should be called for injured stray animals. In Washoe County, it is Washoe County Animal Services. Take care to advise the individual to exercise caution in approaching an injured animal.

If it is their own pet who is in need of urgent care advise them to go to their own vet. After normal business hours, refer them to the Emergency Animal Center in Reno (775-851-3600). If they do not have funds they can be referred to Shakespeare Animal Fund.

### **Request for Information on Volunteering**

If callers inquire about volunteering here at the shelter, put them in touch with the Volunteer Coordinator, ext. 308 or have them send an e-mail to: [volunteer@nevadahumanesociety.org](mailto:volunteer@nevadahumanesociety.org). They will receive a volunteer application that will help us match them with the volunteer opportunities of their liking.

### **Request for Information on Adoptions**

Invite people to come down to the shelter whenever possible – tell them that we are open daily and give them the current hours.

If they cannot come down, refer people to [petfinder.com](http://petfinder.com) or [petharbor.com](http://petharbor.com) to view our animals available for adoption online.

Standard adoption fees are below, but please advise people of any current adoption specials.

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Dogs.....                     | \$50.00   |
| Cats.....                     | \$50.00   |
| Dogs & Cats 10yrs or older... | \$25.00   |
| Seniors for Seniors program:  | Free (People 55 or older adopting an animal 6 years or older) |
| Ferrets.....                  | \$50.00   |
| Rabbits.....                  | \$35.00   |
| Small Mammals.....            | \$10.00   |
| Snakes.....                   | \$55.00   |
| Lizards.....                  | \$65.00   |
| Large & Exotic Birds.....     | \$50.00   |
| Small Birds.....              | \$20.00   |

### **Threatening Calls**

If you speak with a caller who is threatening to harm an animal, contact the Animal Help Desk Coordinator. Follow-up on difficult cases, such as threats against animals, often depends on your obtaining the name and address of the caller at the very beginning of the call, before the conversation gets out of hand.

### **Lost Pets**

You may get calls from people wanting help with finding their lost pet. Here are the steps to take for locating a lost animal:

- Do not waste any time. Begin your search as soon as you notice that the animal is missing.
- Ask EVERYONE: neighbors, children, mail carriers, EVERYONE! Show them a photo of your pet. Even if they have not seen him, they may be able to keep an eye out for him.
- Hand out flyers with your pet's photo and your phone number.
- Offer a reward.
- Put ads in the local papers.
- Create posters with your pet's photo and your phone number. The poster should clearly say "LOST CAT" or "LOST DOG" and include the date that the animal was lost, where it was last seen, a clear brief description (breed, color, sex, age, wearing a collar?) and the name that the animal will answer to. Offering a reward helps! Post them everywhere - telephone poles, libraries, stores, vet clinics, etc.
- Go to WCRAS animal shelter (or your local shelters) – bring a color photo of your pet with your phone number on it. Ask to see all the animals in the shelter and visit every single cage. Animal control in most areas, including Washoe County only holds stray animals for a limited number of days before adopting them out or putting them down.
- Don't depend on someone remembering that an animal like yours was brought in. Shelter employees are often very busy. Go back and check all the shelters every day.
- Call area vet clinics and send them a photo of your pet. Ask if any animal fitting that description has been brought in.
- Report your pet missing to the local and surrounding animal control agencies. In Washoe County, this is the Washoe County Animal Services.
- Check [www.petharbor.com](http://www.petharbor.com) or your local animal control websites and visit their shelters in person.
- Read the found-pet section in each of the local papers daily. Many run found ads for free. Follow up on any ad that sounds close, since you cannot count on the finder to describe your pet in the same exact way that you would.
- Look around the neighborhood carefully. Cats can wander into neighbors' basements or garages, fall asleep and accidentally get shut in.
- Go to the place where your pet was lost, late at night or very early in the morning, when the area will be quiet. Bring his favorite food, a flashlight and a friend
- (for safety). Call his name and wait quietly to see if he shows up. Try this repeatedly.
- If the pet is an indoor cat that does not usually get out, place his litter box outside, where he may be able to get his own scent, and recognize his home. (Do not clean it out first!)
- If your pet is registered with a lost pet network organization, call them right away.
- DO NOT GIVE UP! Animals have been found after months of being missing!

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# Chapter 4 Resources

Standard Casework Resources

Casework Forms