

BEHAVIOR TREATMENTS FOR SHELTER CATS

The what's and why's of treatment

- Think of treatment as intervention, modification or management
- Determined on behavior rounds
- Determined during a comforter visit
- Based on notes on observation books
- You can decide who could benefit



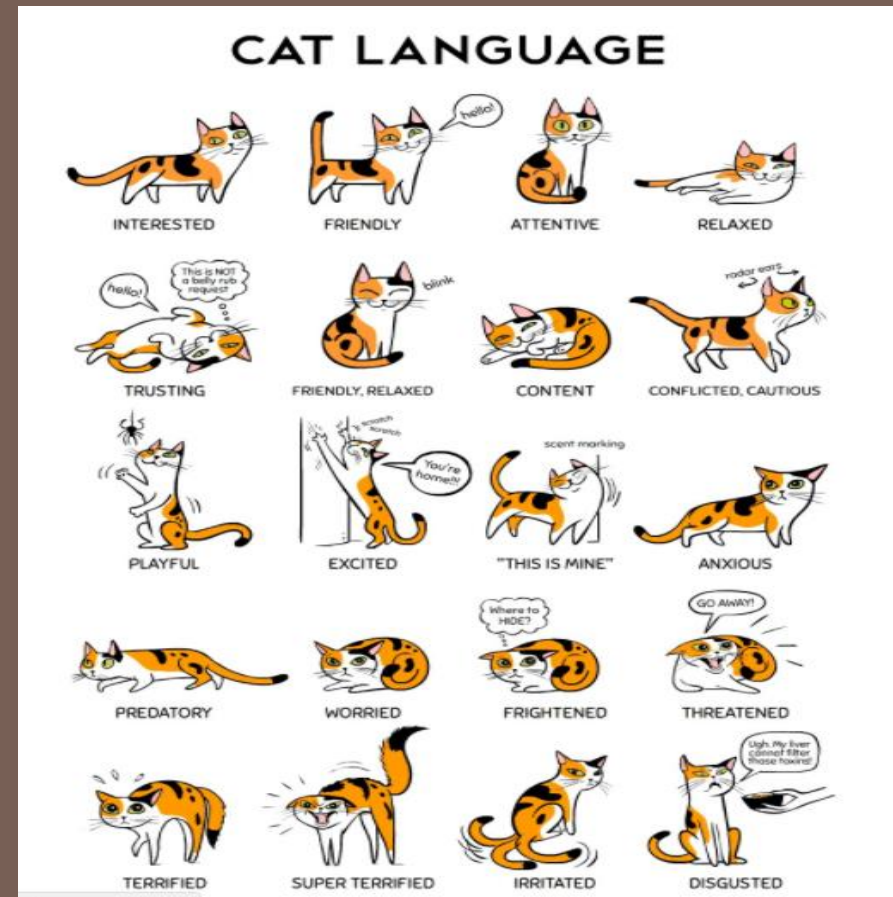
The what's and why's of treatment

- Helps deal with shelter stress, can modify behaviors
- Daily comforting IS treatment
- Cage behavior vs true behavior
- Acute needs vs long term needs



What should I be looking for?

- Blue Dot designation
- “Go Slow” signs
- “Keep Calm” signs
- Observed behavior
 - Each “type” of cat has a typical set of behaviors
 - Behaviors noted by other comforters
 - Your own observed behaviors



Types of cats

- Unsocial kittens
- The frustrated cat
- The scared cat
- The depressed cat
- The cat with a low threshold for handling
- The cat that just came in

In all cases, basic needs should already be met: hiding spot, toys, soft things...



Poorly socialized kittens

- Feral, regardless of mom's level of sociability
- Under socialized- just not enough human contact
- Handled improperly by caregiver(s)
- No real formula, based on observed behavior



Behaviors to expect: fearful kittens

- Hissing/ spitting/ defensive behaviors
- Flee!!
- Immobile in cage
- Little response to handling
- Any combination of the above



What to do: fearful kittens

- Slow and steady- quality over quantity... not always true...
- Introduce yourself
- Offer food motivator
- Try toy therapy
- Pet only if they initiate it and keep it to safe spots
- Attempt pick up
- Stop if kitten struggles or retreats
- Encourage kitten back into your space
- Talk only is always ok!!
- Biggest hurdles for adoption: hissing when approached, being frantic when picked up



Behaviors to expect: kittens handled improperly

- Chasing hands
- Afraid of hands
- Nipping/ biting
- Hard to redirect
- Often cat reactive
- Confident, bold
- Any combination of above



What to do: handled improperly

- Redirect, redirect, redirect
- Reward good behavior (play, attention or food)
- Offer appropriate behavior or remove yourself from visit
- Hand shy kittens: desensitize to handling but watch for fear response
- Adoption hurdles for this group: biting and inappropriate play behaviors



Behaviors to expect: the frustrated cat

- Appear to be the most friendly, happy cats
- Reaching out from cage with paws
- Chasing hands in cage with paws/ teeth
- Vocal
- Escape behaviors: pacing, climbing bars, bolting from cage
- Cage destruction
- Bold, confident cat
- Take in context... one of these behaviors does not a frustrated cat make!



What to do: the frustrated cat

- Lots of cage enrichment!
- Items to redirect energy
- Good scratching outlets
- Clicker training
- Do not handle this cat:
 - Playtime only, appropriate play
 - Pet briefly when calm, safe spots only
 - Reward for appropriate play and calm behavior



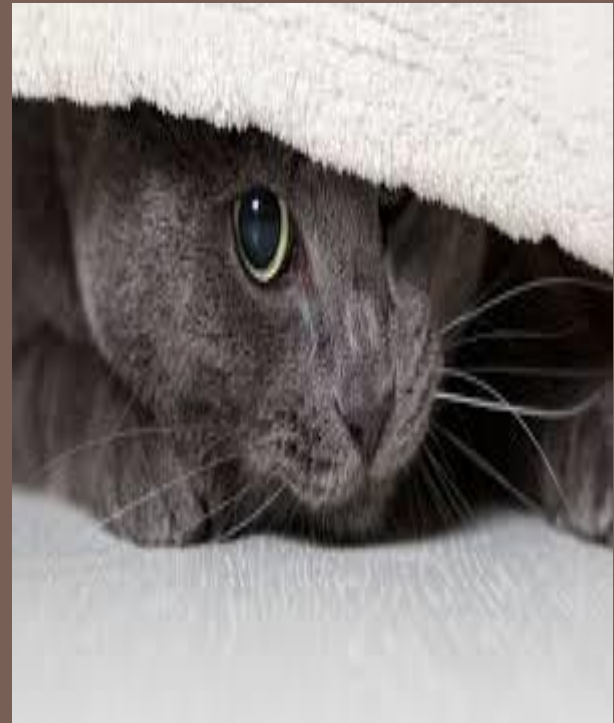
Behaviors to expect: the scared cat

- At back of cage, immobile
- Pupils dilated
- Eyes shut, feigning sleep
- Tense body, ears flattened
- Tail clenched to body
- May allow touch, no response
- Flee from interaction
- Behavior hurdle: public can't interact with cat



What to do: the scared cat

- Must have a good hiding spot
- Soft bedding, stuffed animals (?)
- Slow, quiet, less is definitely more
- Introduce yourself
- Food motivators
- Reward for any initiated contact
- Only touch if they initiate contact, safe spots only
- Talk only
- Some may respond to toys
- Never push into their space
- Stop if social signals decrease



Behaviors to expect: the depressed cat

- A previously social or accepting cat
- May sit in cage without moving
- No longer responsive to interaction
- May stop eating or grooming
- Chronic illness
- Scared/ fearful cats also go through this trajectory of behavior... this is fairly normal... we worry when a previously social cat exhibits these behaviors



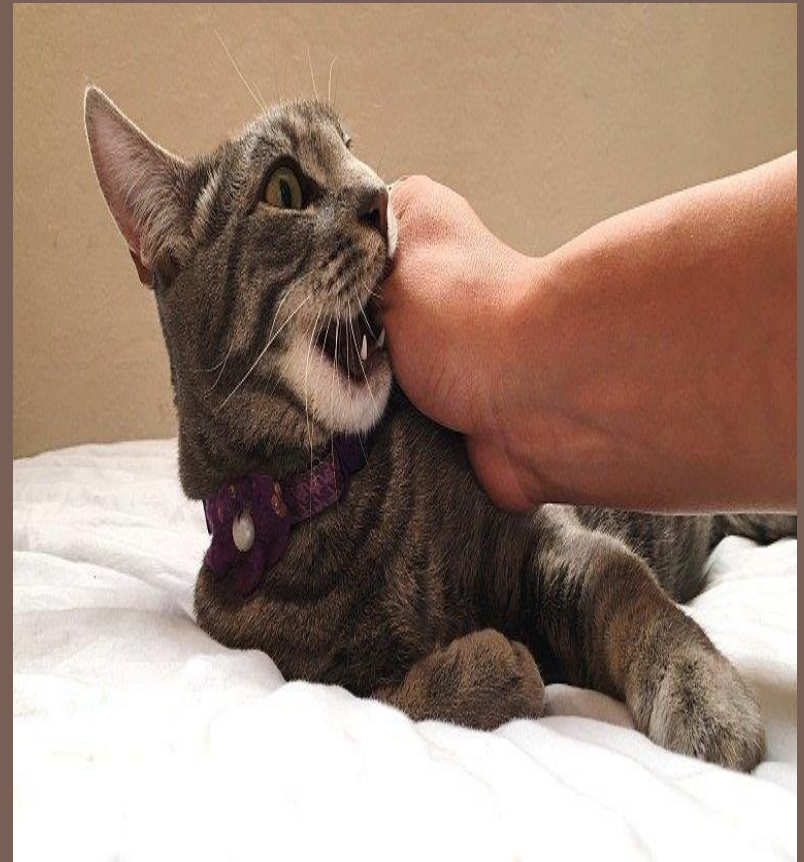
What to do: the depressed cat

- Extra attention (not necessarily handling)-needs to feel bonded and cared for
- Very low impact handling
- May respond to play therapy
- Food motivators
- Talk only
- Lots of comfort items



Behaviors to expect: low threshold for handling

- May appear to be very social
- Often a confident cat, but fearful cats can find themselves here, too
- Draws you in with paws- leads to inappropriate attention seeking
- Tail swishing during visit
- Ears twitch
- Pupils dilate
- Increases attention seeking, more actively seeks attention
- Turns head to hand
- Stares at hand



What to do: low threshold cat

- Less is always more
- No full body pets
- Talk only
- Rewards for calm interactions
- Focus on safe spots
- Play therapy
- May be ok one day and not the next!



The cat that just came in...

- Talk only is always ok
- Less is always more
- No full body pets, ever
- Focus on safe spots
- Play therapy
- Food motivators
- We don't know this cat, tread lightly



Odds and Ends

Cat in the litterbox....

- It's ok!!
- May need a different bed
- May just need time

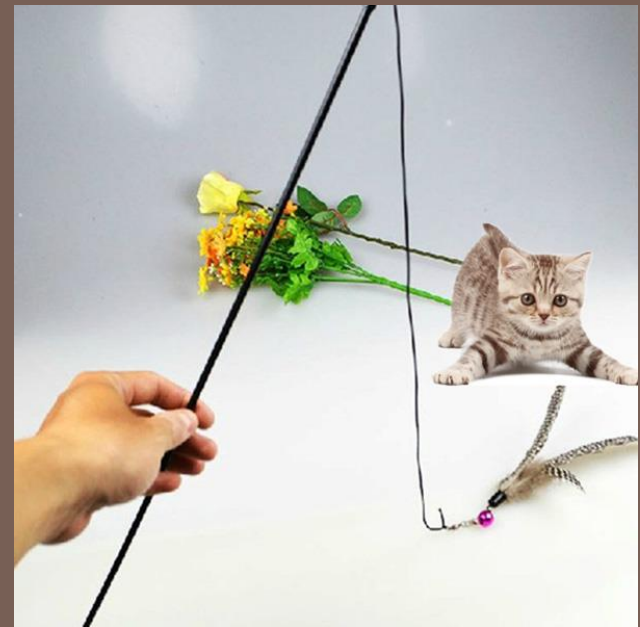
Cats who lick hands...

- Don't let them!
- Redirect with a toy or treat



Final Thoughts

- Everyone finds their way!
- Reward behaviors that we want
- Redirect/ remove interaction for behaviors we don't want
- Be consistent
- Be patient
- Be alert to body language
- Ongoing process



Questions?

