

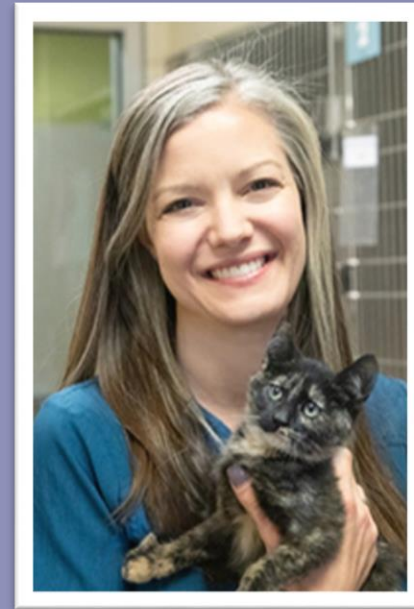
FOSTERING CATS WITH BEHAVIORAL NEEDS



Meet Our Cat Behavior Team



Jess VanKoningsveld
Cat Behavior Specialist



Dr. Courtney Heck, DVM,
CCRP
Director of Shelter Medicine

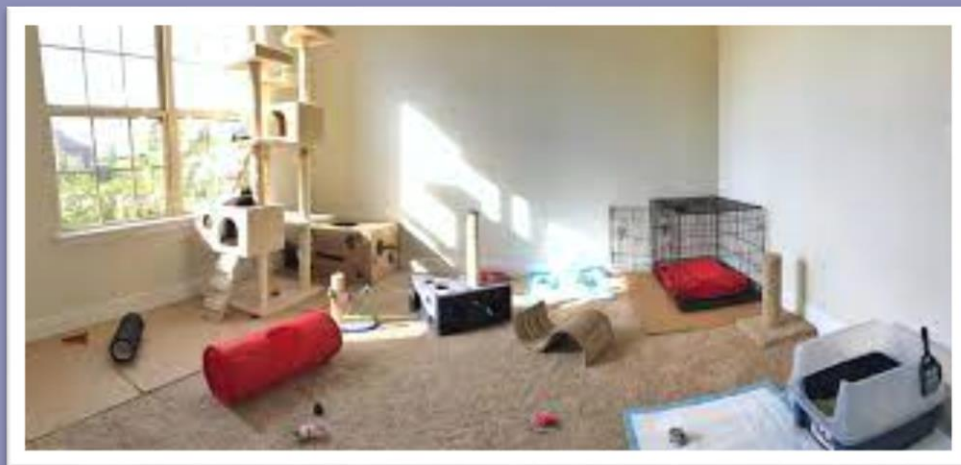
Behavior Needs of Cats

- Cats of all ages
- Fearful cats
- Litterbox avoidance
- Rough play/attention seeking
- Low handling threshold
- Kitten primer
- Safe Harbor
- Cruelty case animals



Preparing for Your Foster Cat

- Start with a small space - why?
 - Bathroom
 - Bedroom
 - Office
- Set up essential supplies
 - Litter box
 - Food/water
 - Hiding places
 - Beds and blankets
 - Scratching post
 - Toys
 - Comfort items from the shelter
- Check for safety
 - Cords, loose items, etc.



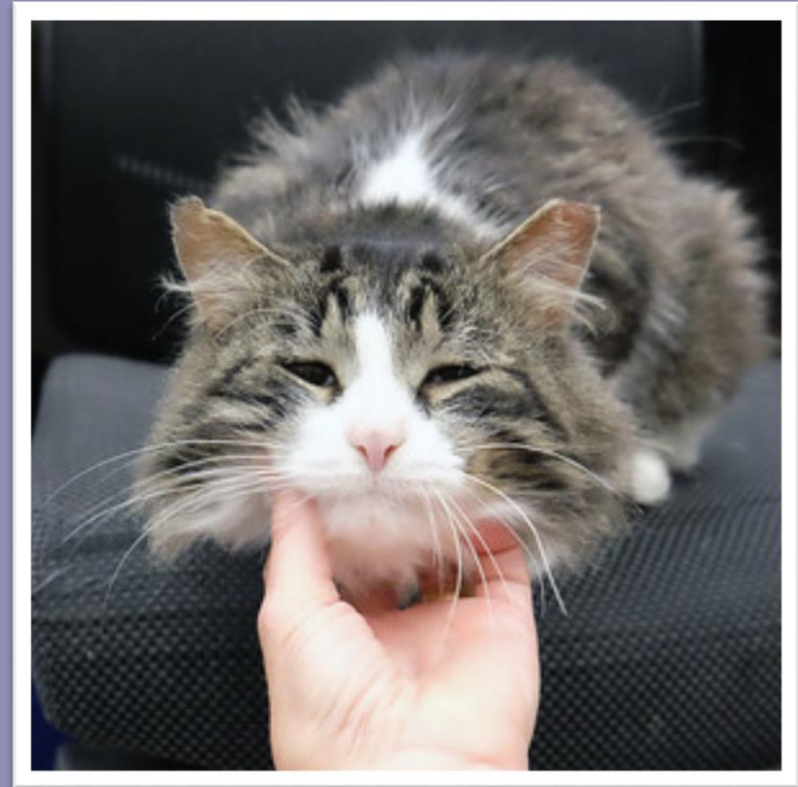
Bringing Your Cat Home

- Carrier
 - Open in the small room
 - Allow the cat to come out when they are ready
 - Leave the carrier open and in the room (may be a hiding place for the cats)
- Allow time to adjust/decompress
 - Avoid petting unless they initiate
 - Keep the room quiet
 - Refrain from other people at first



Bringing Your Cat Home

- Once they build comfort and confidence
 - Slowly introduce other human family members
 - Avoid pet introductions, unless requested to do so
- Create a routine for your kitty



Working with fearful cats or kittens

- Adult cats will likely be foster to adopt, kittens will not.
- Age may differ, but treatment is the same
- Could meet other cats, on a case by case basis
- Kittens will be in a crate, x pen or “kitten tent” with hiding den
- Time is key, patience is needed!
- Allow adults to hide but limit hiding spaces to those you can reach
- Talk/ read only



Working with fearful cats or kittens

Once out in the room and settled, eating consistently and using litterbox, start offering handling more consistently:

- Use wet food/ treats
- Try Toys
- Reward any brave movement
 - Eye contact
 - Loosening body
- Offer hand - pet only when the cat is accepting
- Build with food rewards, playtime



Working with fearful cats or kittens

- Kittens:
- Offer choices to build confidence and trust
- Picking them up:
 - once they're staying close when you feed them, work on picking up (wrap in towel/blanket)
- Don't force interaction
 - Retreat, let them go
 - Struggle, put them down
- Barn cat adoption program can be an option



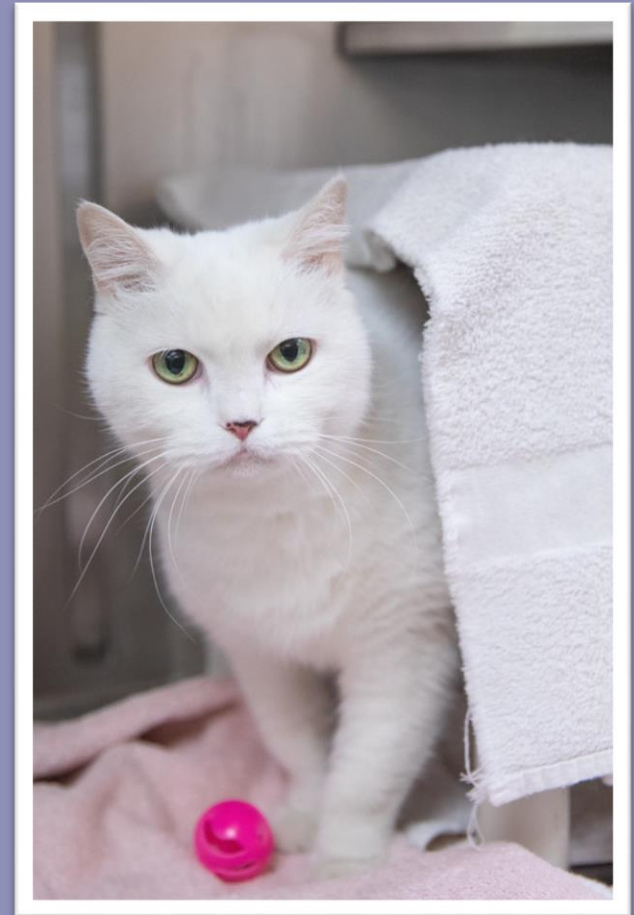
Litter Box Avoidance

- In most cases, these guys are not foster to adopt, unless they have other medical or behavioral needs
- Every case handled individually
- Must be housed in a safe room, bathrooms are best
- Offer multiple boxes
 - Size, type
 - Start with the most appropriate traditional box and go from there
- Different types of litter offered
- Can need a lot of experimentation
- Generally pretty easy, but can be frustrating
- Barn adoption can be an option for those that can't be rehabbed



Low Handling Threshold

- Often foster to adopt
- May have been up for adoption at the shelter, may need evaluation/assessment prior to going up for adoption
- Cats who don't tolerate much or any handling
- Spend time watching their body language and interactions with the environment
- Identify threshold
- Don't pet these guys, let them seek attention on their terms

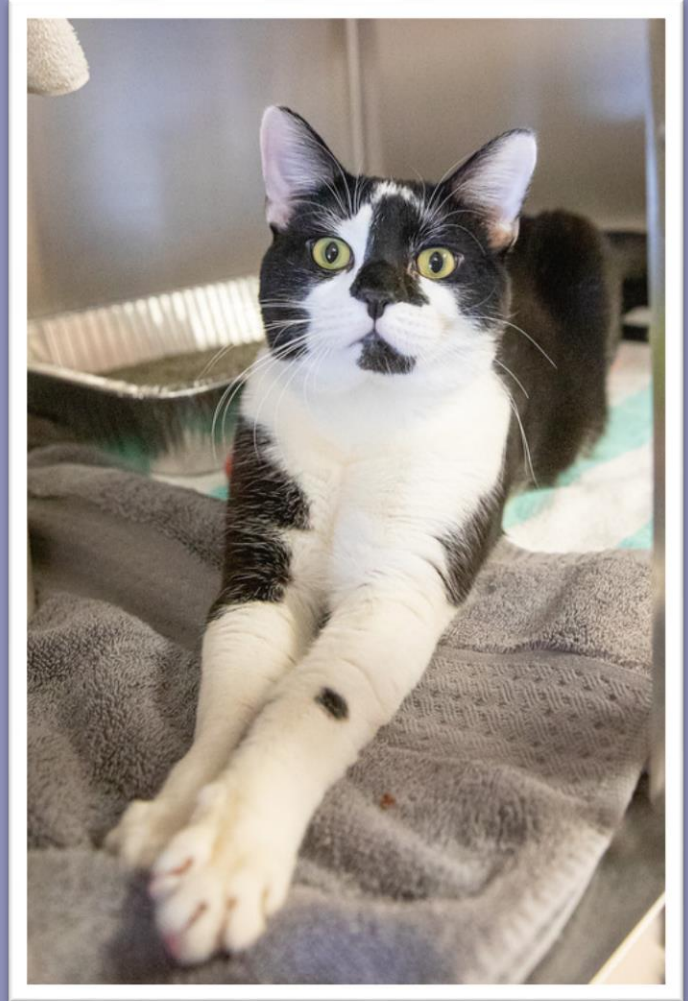


Low Handling Threshold

Reward for allowing interaction, but more than anything, understanding their threshold will reduce unwanted biting behavior

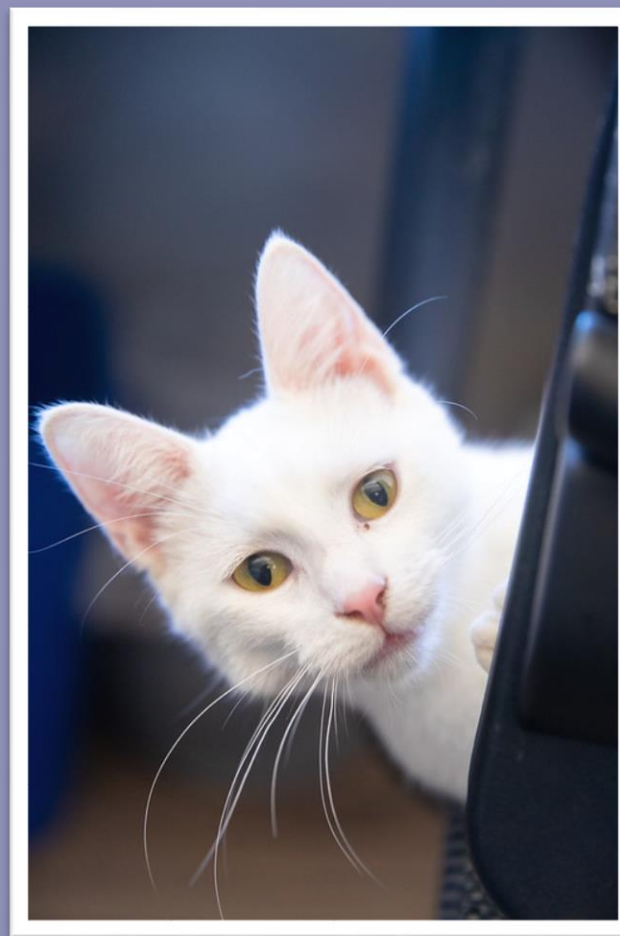
Signs of agitation/ overstimulation:

- Tail swishing/ twitching
- Ears twitching
- Coat changes
 - Small twitches of energy in coat
 - Piloerection
- Pupils- dilated or very constricted



Rough Play/Attention Seeking

- May be foster to adopt
- May be in conjunction with another behavior
- Identify attention seeking vs play seeking
- Always approach an energetic cat with a toy, not your hand
- Wand toys!
- Create a schedule/ routine of playtime
- Hunt, catch, kill, eat (they're predators!)
- Redirect inappropriate play/ attention seeking with appropriate interaction
- Reward appropriate interactions with food rewards or play



Kitten Primer

- All kittens need socialization
- Appropriate play and attention seeking
- Working on consent for handling
 - Nail trims
 - Brushing
 - Medical handling
- Sounds, sights, people, pets... exposure while in the home
- Carrier training
- Litterbox use



Safe Harbor and Cruelty Case Cats

- Have not been surrendered to the shelter
- May be short term or long haul
- Could really present with any mentioned behaviors
- May need intros to other animals in the home, depending on length of time in foster... case by case and we'll work with you on that!
- No photos or sharing information on these animals



Thank you for Helping!

Resources:

Jess V's Email: jessv@hshv.org

- [HSHV Website](#)
- [Jackson Galaxy Videos](#)
- [Kitten Lady on Youtube \(check in regarding socialization videos as we have some great alternatives\)](#)
- [Pamela Johnson Bennett – Facebook and print books](#)
- [Tabitha Kucera on Facebook or her website, Chirrup and Chatter](#)

