

Positive Reinforcement, Desensitization and Enrichment

BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION AND TREATMENT FOR CATS



Making interactions intentional



**It's fine to just offer
pets!**



**Understanding other
methods allows us to
focus on needs**



**See more consistent
results**



What is positive reinforcement training?

For our purposes, we're talking about reinforcing behaviors we'd like to see increase, while redirecting behaviors we'd like to see decrease. In this way, we're encouraging "good" behavior and offering appropriate alternatives for "bad" behavior.

Punishment doesn't teach lasting learning; it merely teaches the cat (or any animal) to stop offering the behavior when someone is there. They're not learning what behavior **IS** appropriate. They can eventually learn to fear the trainer, which breaks bonds with their caregiver.



Desensitization

- Allowing them to get used to us being in their space slowly
- Give them control of their space
- Builds trust with people entering their space
- Allows for quicker acclimation
- Lessens handling sensitivities and fear response



Cats can learn!

- We need to speak their language
- Find the right motivator
- Offer alternatives that serve the same function as the behavior we're trying to modify
 - Make that alternative really, really appealing
- ALL animals can be trained... your cat definitely has you trained!



Working with shelter cats

Our objectives are to:

- Build confidence and trust
- Begin reinforcing appropriate behaviors
- Begin redirecting from inappropriate behaviors
- Set the stage for an adopter
 - Progress here can translate to a home
- Get to know the population better



What kind of training is commonly used at HSHV?

- Rewarding for...
 - Forward movement
 - Eye contact
 - Calm behavior
- Clicker work
 - Clicker vs voice marker
 - Click to calm
 - JV volunteers
- Play therapy
- Mindful handling
 - Reinforces trust



Translates easily to working with fosters and cats at home

- **Reward for any behavior you'd like to see increase**
- **Clicker training**
 - You can train for advanced skills at home!
- **Play therapy**
 - Play aggression
- **Mindful handling**
 - Work on handling sensitivities



Kittens

- Socialization
 - Both fearful and social kittens
- Appropriate play
- Appropriate attention seeking
- All reward based!



Small bit of housekeeping

This is for all cats, not just Blue Dot

Watch for food bowl stickers

Read previous comforter notes

Read Blue Dot notes, if applicable

Implement any method that the cat responds to

Be mindful of response

Document what you see/ do

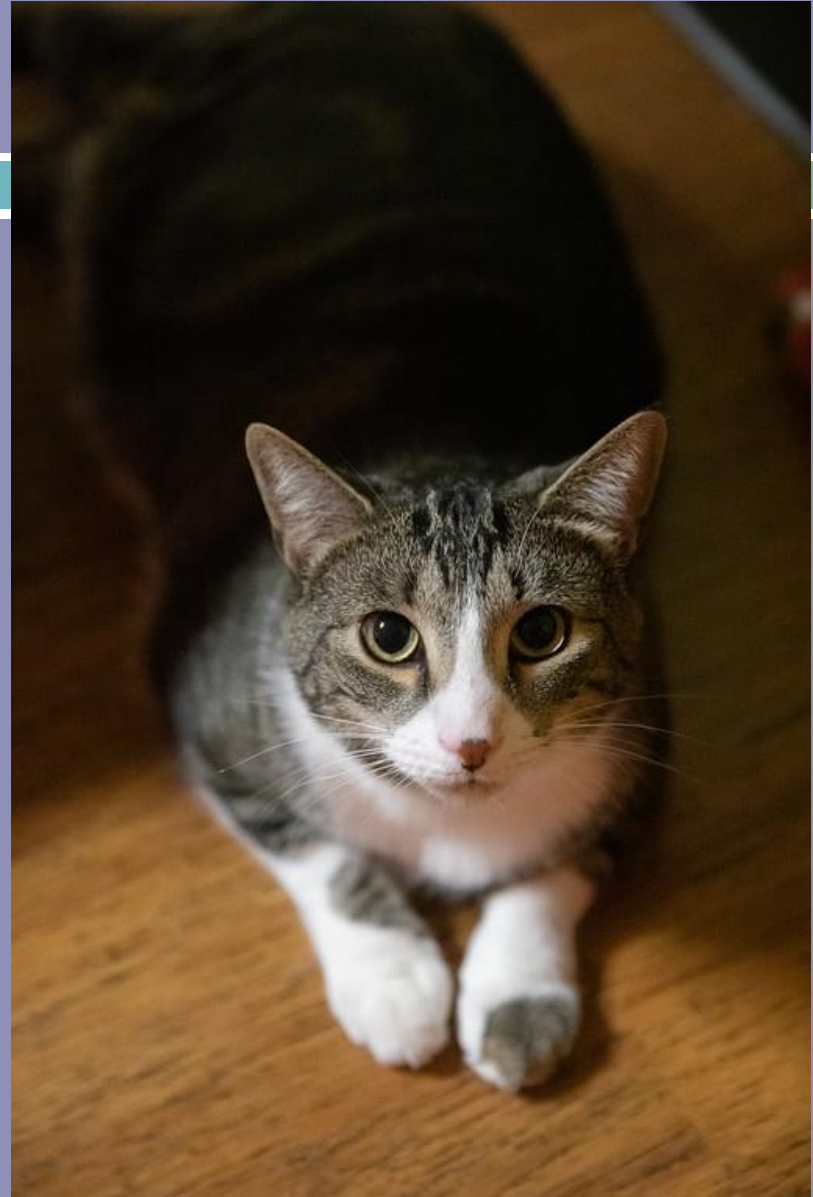


Desensitization

No handling involved; we can start here!

Talk, read, sing

- With or without entering the cage
- No handling at all
- Leave treats
- Desensitize
 - Fearful cats
 - Cats with low handling threshold
 - High energy cats
 - New cats
 - Getting to know us and their space



Preferred for:

- Fearful cats
 - New cats showing a fear response
 - Cats with lower socialization
- First visit with a new cat
- Cats who have notes of concern
- Rescue Reading!



Positive Reinforcement Training

Rewarding what we'd like to see increase

It's all about timing!

- Decide what behavior you'd like to see increase
 - Check notes
 - Observe behavior
- Reward when that behavior is offered
 - Adding a voice marker or click... we'll get into that!
- Interaction is based entirely on this activity
- Brain working, make that visit count!



The “why”



Asking for and rewarding a behavior gives them a brain workout



It allows fearful cats a chance to choose



Training visits take the pressure off! No handling = lower stress



Why type of rewards are we using?

- Treats!
 - You can use anything available in the cat kitchen
 - You can bring your own
 - Let us know, we'll buy new kinds of treats!
 - I have a stash in the behavior office
 - Play can be used as a motivator
 - It's ok if they don't eat while you're there!



The “how”

- Example:
 - Cat is burrowed in a corner of the cage
 - Reward for eye contact
 - Quietly enter cage
 - Talk to cat
 - Offer treat any time the cat looks at you
 - No touch

Another example

Cat is fearful, but seems to be loosening

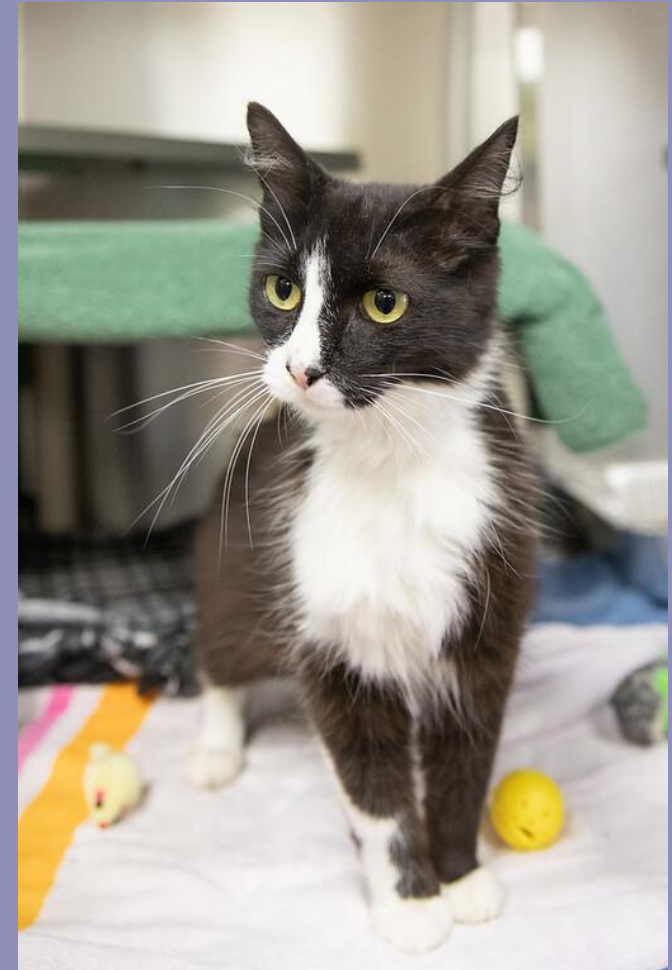
Reward for forward movement

Quietly enter cage

Talk to cat

Offer treat any time cat loosens or moves any part of body towards you

No touch



One more example

- Cat is high energy in the cage
- Reward for calm behavior
- Do not enter cage
- Offer treat every time they stop at the front of the cage
- No touch

Variations on these concepts

- During a visit you could decide to reward for:
 - Allowing touch
 - Leaning into touch
 - Engaging with a toy
 - Great for cats who use teeth or claws inappropriately
 - Also great for shy cats learning to play
 - Calm behavior
 - Increasing arousal during visit
 - You can decide!



Clicker training

Using a sound marker

It's far simpler than you think it is!

For our purpose, we're simply looking to increase the likelihood that the cat will offer a behavior... we're not training for behaviors that an adopter will expect.

This means that you really can't go wrong! Even when your timing is off or the session isn't working out, the worst that has happened is that the cat had a low stress visit and was rewarded for just being who they are!

The mechanics

- Decide on a behavior you'd like to work on
- Click/ mark the behavior with a sound when it happens
- Reward directly after
- You can use a clicker or a sound marker
 - I use "yes" far more than an actual clicker

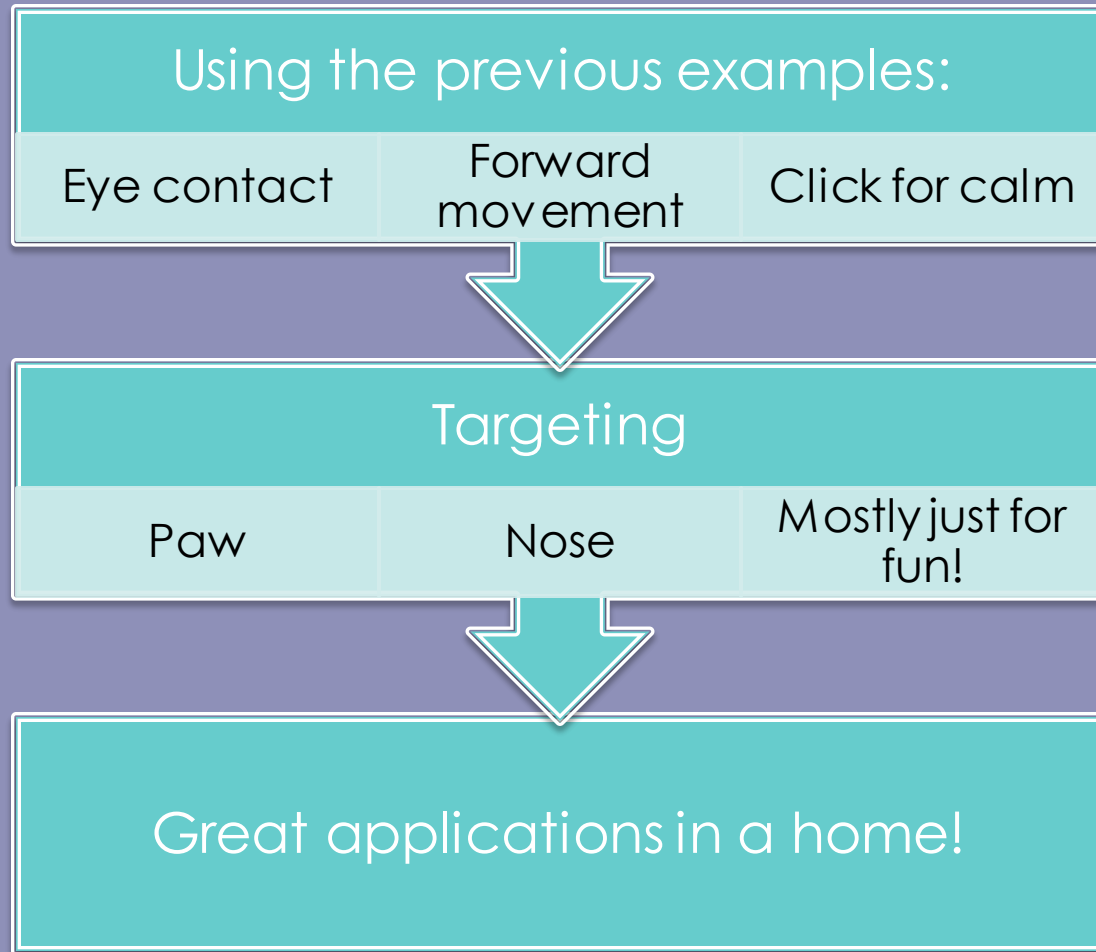


Why would we use this over simply rewarding?

- Marking the behavior clues the cat to what they've done to receive the reward
- With consistency, the behavior is offered with more frequency
- You can build on this
 - Increase your parameters
 - Eye contact to forward movement
- Rewarding the cat for a behavior they're already offering can build confidence



How does it work?



Encouraging forward movement



Click for eye contact/ calm behavior



Targeting



Play therapy

Using toys to give our cats control and burn energy

Play only visits

- **Great for:**
 - Cats who are high energy
 - Those who've had a lot of visits that day
 - On days that have been very busy
- **Wand toys preferred**
- **Mice/ balls**
- **Another “no touch” visit**



Play therapy for inappropriate attention seeking/ play

- Shift a more “traditional” visit to play
- Redirect with toys
- Stop touch
- Offer play
- Can reward with treats if they engage with toys on their own

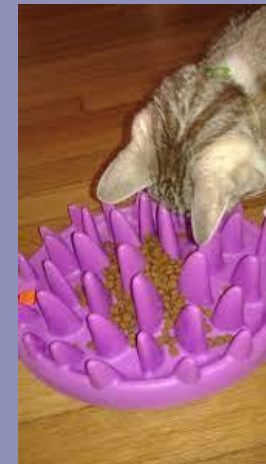
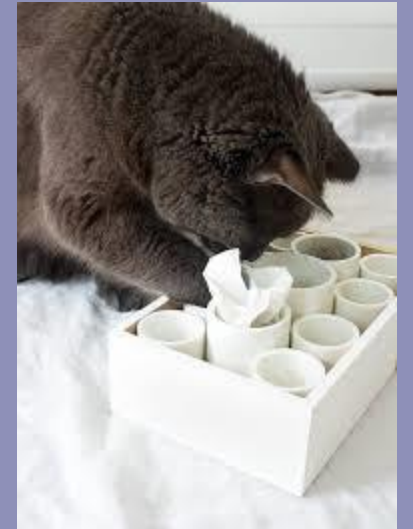


Enrichment

Offering chances to explore in the cage

Physical enrichment

- These are most used with our cats:
 - Boxes
 - Feeding puzzles
 - Hide and seek
- You are more than welcome to create enrichment!
 - Working on process for this
 - Feel free to bring to behavior office!



Mindful interactions... the best form of enrichment!

- Paying attention to body language
- Keeping an eye on response to interactions
- Allowing for choice
- Be mindful of your presence
- You can decide what kind of visit to offer!



Final tips:

- Keep training sessions short to avoid frustration
- Break treats into smaller bits
- Be prepared to shift gears
- Watch body language!
- It's ok if they don't eat while you're there
 - It's a positive experience no matter what happens!

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THANK YOU!!!!
PLEASE EMAIL FOR MORE RESOURCES!

