

BLUE DOT CATS

INDEPENDENT STUDY PROGRAM FOR CAT
COMFORTING VOLUNTEERS

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS:

Cat Comforters interested in working with our blue dot cats, must complete the following steps:

1. Already comforted cats for a minimum of 40+ hours
2. Read/study the training materials
3. Take the online quiz (yes, this is open book)
4. Submit quiz for review
5. Receive email congratulating you on completing your blue dot cat training
6. Pick up a blue dot for your nametag (located in the cat comforter station)



Goal for Blue Dot Cat Program

Recognize that cats with the blue dot designation do better with fewer visits that are high quality.

Provide volunteers the opportunity to work with more challenging cats under our care.

Help keep blue dot cats happy and adoptable.





Blue Dot Cats

Types of Blue Dot Cats

- Frustrated
- Fearful/Shy/
Anxious
- Low Threshold





Frustrated Cat

Frustrated Cat: Defined



Cats and kittens have interactions with the public whether they like it or not. These factors can lead to over stimulation or excess energy without appropriate outlets or under stimulation with the result being boredom.

Frustrated Cat: Observations

- Dilated pupils
- Inappropriate use of claws
- Cage destruction
- Playful nipping
- Rhythmic vocalizing
- In general, over active, pacing the front of the cage

What to look for:

- Friendly one minute, possibly reaching out with paws or teeth the next moment
- Reaching out of cage for attention, can pace at front of cage
- Vocal behavior
- Escape behavior including pacing, climbing cage bars and trying to escape
- Destruction behavior of things in cage
- May sit at front of cage meowing with increasing intensity as you arrive or depart and may seek eye contact

Frustrated Cat: Solutions

The solution would be:

- To provide active toys for the cat (see following slide)
- Preferred housing will be a low stress cage away from doors and high traffic areas
- May do better in top cages so that they can see you at eye level.



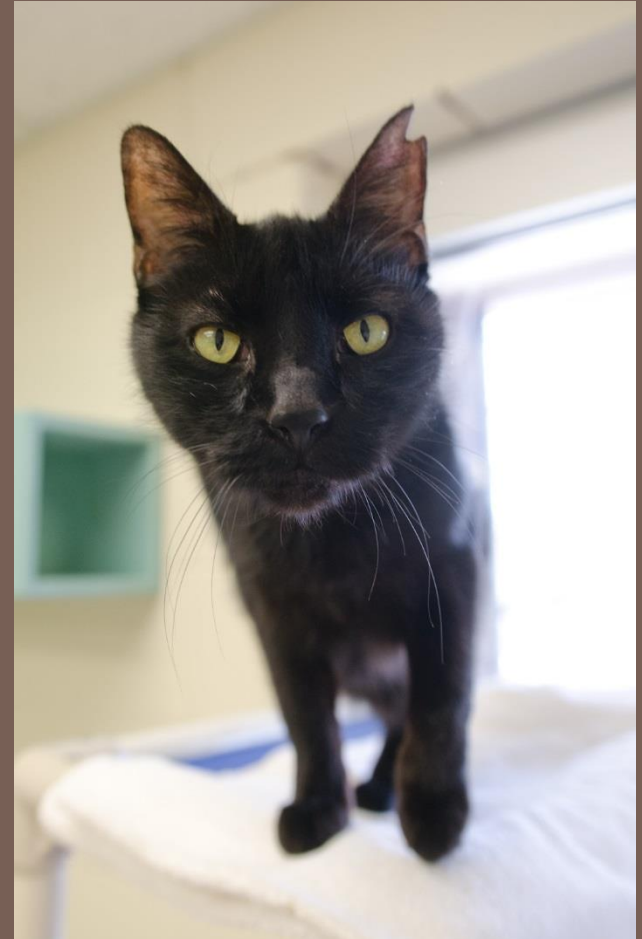
Frustrated Cat: Active & Thinking Toys

- Anything tied to the cage bars or dangling from the cage bars to encourage batting and stretching
- Small rolling balls or ping-pong balls to roll around the floor or hide under a towel. Plastic golf balls are even better as cats can get their claws in them
- Any toy that they can hold between their paws and kick at, a sock filled with fluff material is good for this
- Cardboard, newspaper or any other safe material that a cat can shred
- Hiding treats in the cage for cat to seek out during the day
- Mouse-sized toys for predatory play
- Crazy Circle toy
- Wand type toys
- Food puzzle type toys



Frustrated Cat: Interactions

- Provide extra items to redirect energy, i.e.-batting toys, items that can be shredded
- Tactile stimulation should not be done with hands.
 - Provide the cat with different textures to lie on, play with, and work with them with a wand type toy if playing with them. Choice is key for this type of cat. Spend time with this cat playing with them as opposed to handling them.
- We can also work with this cat using treats, if the cat is interested in them. After playing with them, offer treats when the cat is quiet or calm.



Miss Moppet, Frustrated Cat (Notes from Jess)

Open cage door and offer her your hand. Allow her to self-pet by rubbing face or body on you, but don't pet any more than face and cheeks.

Redirect her attention shortly into the visit with a wand toy, if she returns for attention, allow her to rub briefly on your hands. You can also toss ball or mouse toys, let her lead the game by choosing what's most interesting to her, but don't engage her by petting too much.

If at any point during the visit she calms and stops moving around the cage, pet her face and cheeks but no full body pets for her. If she becomes overstimulated by this, redirect with a toy once again.

Keep all visits short, if she can no longer be redirected with a toy, move out of cage and talk to her from outside of the cage for a moment and then move on to another cat.

Fearful/ Shy/ Under-socialized/ Anxious Cat

Fearful/ Shy/ Under-socialized/Anxious Cat: Defined

During the first few days at the shelter, cats are more prone to anxiety and fear.

Reducing these negative feelings and stress during the first few days can go a long way towards preventing the onset of disease



Fearful/ Shy/ Under-Socialized/Anxious Cat: Observations

- Cat is at back of cage, frozen or immobile
- Eyes open with pupils dilated or eyes shut to feign sleep
- May lie immobile in litterbox
- Body/ ears can be flattened
- Tail held tightly to body, body clenched
- May allow touch, remain immobile, or retreat/flee from touch
- May lick lips repeatedly or make a lip smacking sound
- Can display defensive, distance increasing behaviors if flooded with too much stimuli
- Can also be cats who will take the opportunity to flee

Fearful/ Shy/ Under-Socialized/Anxious Cat: Solutions

- Use your body to create a barrier when comforting to avoid the cat from trying to escape.
- Plenty of soft blankets or towels
- Large soft toys, such as teddy bears.
- Avoid making direct eye contact, rather use a soft blinking eye
- Preferred housing will be in low stress cages away from doors and high traffic areas.
- Often do better in top cages



- **Remember: building trust with this group is about finding the thing that they respond to and never forcing your presence on the cat.**

Fearful/Shy/Under-socialized/ Anxious Cats: Interactions

- Soft, gentle, slow and quiet interactions. No loud noises or quick movements.
- Spend a few minutes talking to the cat and if he responds positively, offer your hand for him to smell.
- If cat shows interest in offered hand (may sniff hand or even rub their head on hand), gently scratch ears and cheeks, but no further.
- If, at any point the cat becomes tense or clenched during handling, slowly retreat from cage. Do not continue to handle cat if he stops showing social signals.
- If no interest in offered hand, just talk to cat quietly. Do not push interaction with cat.

Flora, Shy Cat (Notes from Jess)

Begin visit by talking to her, do not approach her initially. If she loosens for you, offer your hand to her. If she shows interest, scratch her chin, cheeks and forehead, do not push into her space too much. If she shows no interest in your hand, offer her some wet food on a spoon. If there's still no interest, remove yourself from the cage but continue to talk to her.

Build confidence with her slowly, as she shows interest in attention, move from wet food to scratching head/ cheeks/ chin to her shoulder blades, eventually moving to slow full body pets. If at any point she becomes tense, take a step back, move back to her cheeks or remove yourself from the cage and spend some time talking to her.

Once she's loose for gentle full body pets, try to draw her out with treats. Offer treats at the front of the cage and reward her with attention and treats once she comes out. Allow her to move freely in the cage, if she retreats, allow her to do so. If she becomes tense during the visit, give her space to feel safe and stop petting her.

Keep these visits short initially, giving her time to retreat to her safe space. As she builds confidence the visits can be longer, let her set the pace.



Low Threshold: Less is More

Low Threshold: Defined



- This is a cat who only allows you to pet them for a short period of time.
- They may bite or swat, presumably without warning.
- Occurs while interacting with caregiver, can happen at any point during visit.
- In the cage, these are often cats who show more interest in handling and attention than they do toys.

Low Threshold: Observations

- Actively seeking attention, may rub on hands or body of caregiver while they're in the cage with them.
- May lay on side or back, offering tummy for petting
- Tail may be swishing rapidly
- Pupils may dilate
- Ears may twitch or move forward on head, may be flat.
- May reach out with paw to draw hand in, may mouth hand or "love bite" before actual bite attempt happens
- Body may stiffen slightly, hair may raise on the back
- Often, body is loose just prior to bite attempt, it's important to look at tail, ears, pupils and other body responses during visits.

Low Threshold: Solutions

- Short visits only for these cats. The quality of the visit is more important than the length of time spent with them.
- Let the cat come to you, don't reach into their space or "force" attention on them.
- Let the cat rub on your hands, petting only the face and cheeks. No full body pets at any point during the visit.
- Offer a treat or wet food if the cat remains calm for attention, very gradually increasing the length of the visit using treats as the reward for allowing handling.
- Stop petting if at any point the cat shows behaviors listed above. Leave cage on a positive note, speaking calmly and gently to the cat but not offering more attention other than this.
- If cat is displaying above behaviors when you enter the cage, don't touch them. Speak quietly to them for a moment and leave cage, return if cat seems to have calmed at a later point.
- Cat Behavior Specialist may use homeopathic remedies or a calming collar with this cat

Thule, Low Threshold (Notes from Jess)

Sit on condo floor and offer him your hand. Allow him to self-pet by rubbing face or body on you, but don't pet any more than face and cheeks.

Just sit with him, let him come and go at his own pace but don't force attention on him by petting him. Allow him to self-pet, he may rub on your hands or body. You can touch his face and cheeks briefly on occasion, but keep all handling to a minimum. If you do pet him on the face during this time, you can offer him a treat if he remains calm after the attention. Do not offer full body pets at any point.

If at any point during the visit he calms and stops moving around the condo, offer him a treat. We're rewarding him for being calm and accepting attention appropriately.

If he becomes overstimulated and tries to nip, you can try redirecting him with a toy. This doesn't always work and you may need to move out of the condo quietly if he can't be redirected. Do not offer a treat to redirect. Do not continue to stay in his space if he's nipping, we're trying to teach him that he gets attention entirely on his terms as long as he's calm and accepting, but that we'll have to let him calm down on his own if he starts to nip.

Keep all visits short, if he can't be redirected with a toy, move out of condo quietly. However, if he remains calm and accepting, it's ok to push a visit a little longer. We're looking for improvement in his interactions with people, and if he can remain relaxed and calm following the steps above, it's ok to stay longer with him. Any overstimulation needs to be cut off by the end of the visit.

This guy is a great candidate for simply reading to. Bring in your favorite book and just read to him, following the steps outlined above.

By being near him and allowing him to seek attention without forcing handling on him, he's learning that he can trust his people to understand what he needs. Keeping him calm during these visits is key, any overstimulation means we need to slowly leave and try again another time.

Body Language Basics



Learning to read cat body language can help you better comfort our “tougher audience”

Ear Position

- Ears forward:
 - Confident
 - Playful
 - Focused
 - Happy, content



Ear Position

Ears to the side:

- Threatened
- Prepared for fight
- Prepared for flight
- On alert
- Not comfortable



Ear Position

Ears swiveled downwards:

- Trying to diffuse
- Deciding between fight or flight
- Stand ground?
- Flee?



Ear Position

Ears down, flat to head:

- Last defensive pose before striking
- Folded for protection
- Fight is only option



Whiskers

Whiskers down:

- Happy and relaxed

Whiskers pointed forwards:

- Interested/ aroused
- Hunting, threatened, aggressive, very interested in something

Whiskers against cheeks:

- Fear
- Streamlined for fight or flight



The Stare

Direct stare = challenge or threat

- **Denotes confidence**
- **Intention- Play? Attack?**
- **Want to engage**
- **Intended to make you leave**



Blinking, the opposite of the stare

Slow blink:

- Diffusing
- Mean no harm
- Calming



Pupils

Slit pupil:

- Normal, relaxed state



Round pupils:

- Scared
- Hunting



Almond pupil:

- Tension
- Aggression



Tail Position

Tail up: Interactive greeting... Hello!!! Play with me! Pet me!

**Tail up and whipping:
Frustration... whipping/
switching/ flicking
quickly all = frustration**



Tail Position

Tail out and behind:

**Happy, relaxed, confident,
alert and ready to explore**



Lowered tail:

**Lowered and flicking can
mean offensive aggression**

**Lowered and loose can mean
defensive aggression**



Tail Position

**Arched tail:
Defensive aggression**



**Tail between legs or
clenched to body:
Withdrawing from social
interaction... leave me
alone!**



Arched Back

Halloween kitty!

- On high alert
- Usually performed side on
- Are you just stretching?



Belly up

Vulnerability.... Context!!

- Avoiding fight with another cat
- Avoiding “attack” from human
- Relaxed in your presence
- **DON'T PET THAT BELLY!!**



Coat

- Rippling/ twitching is often overstimulation
 - Often in conjunction with tail swishing
 - Watch for other body language!!
- Fluffed out is a defense mechanism



Low Crouch

- Defensive
- Play/ “attack”
- Shy
 - Ears, eyes and tail all important to discern meaning

Allows for forward motion if needed...



The Daily Details

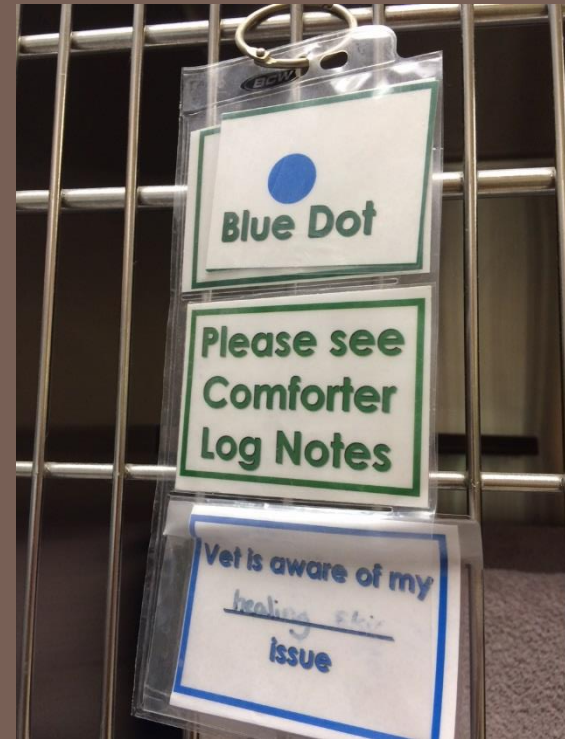


Volunteering as a Blue Dot Cat Comforter

Approval in this program will continue until you are done volunteering at HSHV or comforting blue dot cats is no longer a good fit for you and the cats



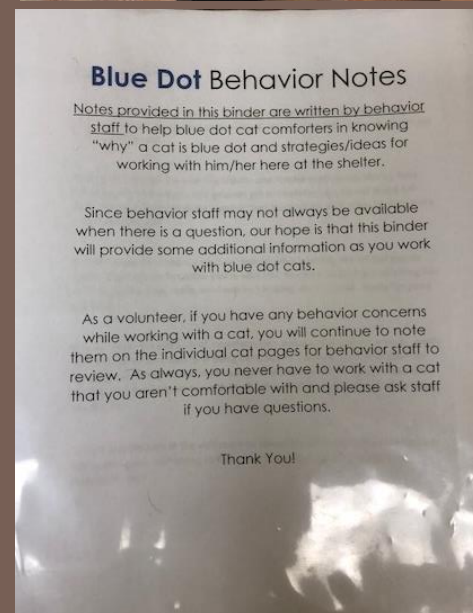
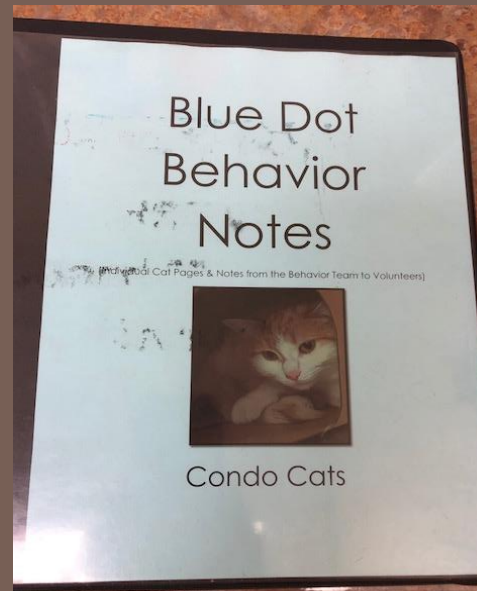
How will I know who is blue dot?



Cats that are blue dot will have a cage card with the blue dot designation.

Look for the Blue Dot Binders

- Each area will have a blue dot binder to document notes about your visit.
- In the front of each binder will be notes written by behavior staff about the blue dot cats. Read these before visiting.
- Be sure to document your visit, even if nothing has changed.



Order of Visitation

CAT COMFORTING & DOG/PUPPY VISITATION Sequence



FIRST - not sick or being treated for non-contagious medical issue –
Kittens/Puppies then Cats/Dogs

Healthy/Non-Contagious = NO



URI sign**



LAST - on medication for URI, kennel cough or other contagious issue
Kittens/Puppies then Cats/Dogs

Has



URI sign**



FeLV felines**

**Other cage card stickers that may be present on the cage card are not considered in the handling sequence.

VIC Scheduling

Because most Blue Dot Cats do better with fewer visits, the number of shifts in VIC will be limited to twice a day for about two hours.

You MAY visit with non-blue dot cats on the same day, but you MUST observe the order of visitations.

The time shift allows us to know that we have a blue dot cat comforter available sometime between designated times in one of the three areas listed. When you sign up for a shift, it does not mean that you have to spend the full amount of time comforting blue dot cats. And you can comfort in different areas. Remember to follow the order of visitation.

VIC Blue Dot Cat Schedule

Monday-Friday

- 11:00am-1:00pm
- 3:00pm-5:00pm

Saturday & Sunday

- 11:00am-1:00pm
- 3:00pm-5:00pm

Watching the Video

You are almost there!

Next step~

Grab some treats and watch
the video:

<https://youtu.be/wQ0TZQZWvIU>



Taking the Quiz

You are almost there!

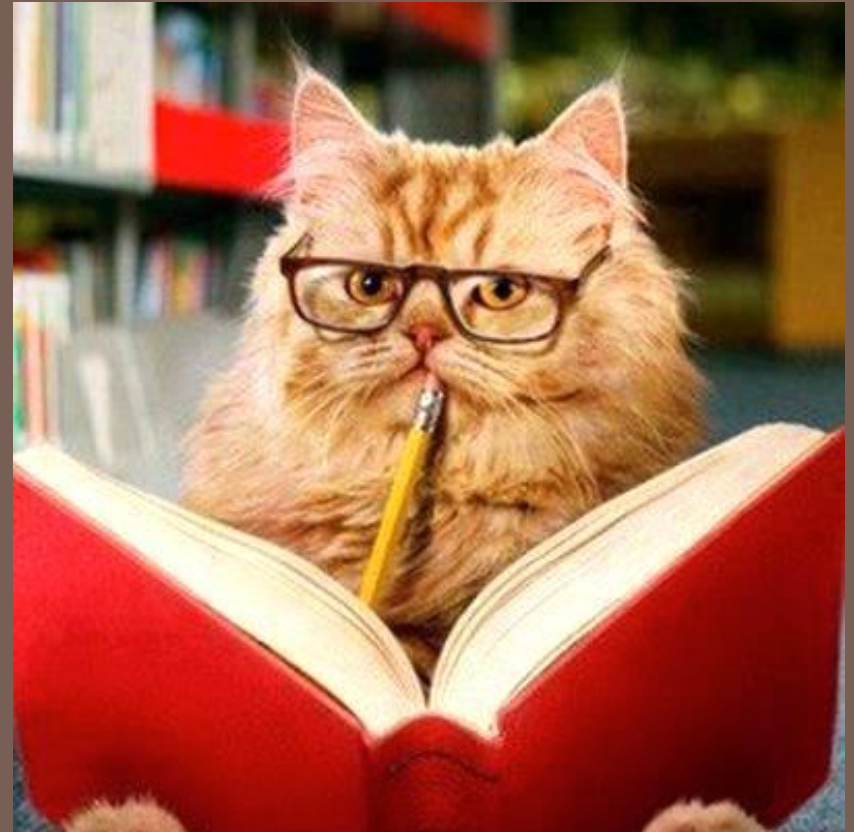
Next step~

Complete the online quiz.

Here is the link:

<http://tinyurl.com/BlueDotCatQuiz>

Turn your paper quiz into
the Volunteer Dept. or
submit your answers
through the online quiz



You are approved!



Look for your “Welcome to blue dot cat comforting”

Once approved, assignment will open in VIC

Schedule some time to work with our “less is more cats”

Continue to be awesome!