

Understanding Body Language, Behavior and Process

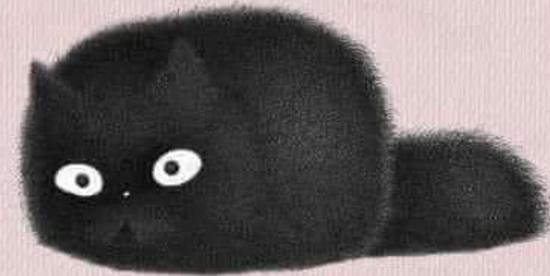
BACK TO BASICS



Agenda

- Who are our cats?
 - Your cat at home vs shelter cats
- Body Language
 - Fear responses
 - Handling sensitivities and overstimulation
- Cage signs and what they mean
- Adoption and visitation process

when touch is wrong
the bite is strong
when touch is right
I still might bite



PURR.IN.INK

Cats Can be Subtle!

- **Almost imperceptible shifts in body language can be confusing and surprising.**
- **Trigger stacking... what happened for them before you interacted with them?**
- **Our goal should always be to make their day easier and less stressful**



Mindful Language

- **Report observable language**
 - **Honestly and with detail**
 - **Comforter logs**
 - **Behavior alert board**
- **Avoid labels**
- **Understand that behavior comes from a response to a trigger... sometimes we are the trigger!**

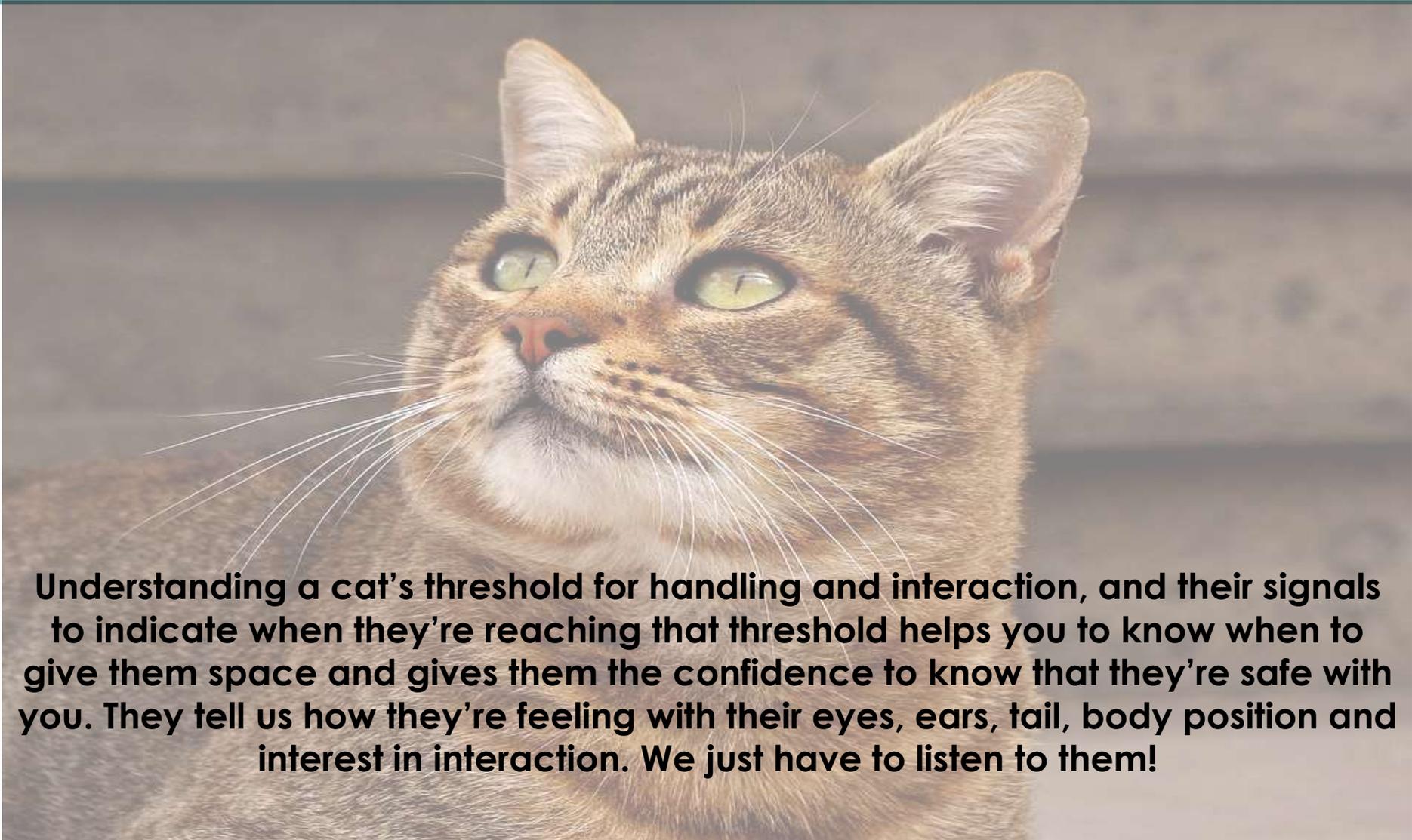


Shelter Cat vs Your Cat at Home

- Shelter cats have lost:
 - Routine
 - Natural environment
 - Control
 - Consistent caregivers
 - Consistent and predictable interactions
 - Touch, play
 - Quiet
 - Comfort
 - Outdoor cats in foreign land



What Does Body Language Tell Us?



Understanding a cat's threshold for handling and interaction, and their signals to indicate when they're reaching that threshold helps you to know when to give them space and gives them the confidence to know that they're safe with you. They tell us how they're feeling with their eyes, ears, tail, body position and interest in interaction. We just have to listen to them!

BODY LANGUAGE BASICS

Loose, attention seeking cats

These are the easy cats!

Soft face and eyes

- Eyes closed or half closed
- No tension in face



Loose body posture

- Paws and legs exposed
- Belly exposed
- Tail out and loose
- Neutral pupils



Tail loose

- Tail up and loose
- S curve
- Body loose
- Pupils neutral



Things to remember when working with a seemingly loose, attention seeking cat

- Proper introductions
- Pet on face and cheeks
- Allow them to seek attention
 - Self pet
- Avoid full body pets
- Offer play
- Watch for other signs
 - Tail, pupils, coat
 - Handling sensitivities
 - High arousal



Fear response

What does a fear response look like?

Dilated pupils

- Pupil wide open
- Context: low light?



Tail tight around body

Protecting vulnerable body parts



Ears

- Flat to head
- Low and sideways
- High and forward facing
- Watch those whiskers



Clenched body posture

- Frozen
- Body tension
- May feign sleep
- Turn away
- Crouched
- “army crawl”
- Paws out
 - Fight or flight
- Often see lip licking



Clenched, alert body position

- Upright body position
- Pupils wide
- Ears alert
- Bracing for fight or flight
- Stare/ frontal
- Can often see paw raise



Kittens... they can be much more difficult

- Fear response often very quickly escalates to fight or flight
- Differentiate between poorly socialized and feral, there is a difference!
- Working with them is the same as working with adults, but we need to be more aware of our presence in the cage and their response to it.



How to respond

- Talk only
- Offer treats or wet food
- Offer toys
- Quiet time in their space
- Clicker work
- No physical touch
- Touch only when cat allows or shows interest

- No “forced loving” AKA flooding
 - Don’t reinforce their fear



Overstimulation, high arousal and handling sensitivities

Can be very easy to miss and very easy to misunderstand

Constricted pupils

- Watch for shift from neutral pupil to constricted pupil
- Coat, tail and pupils are going to tell a more complete story



Tail and coat

- Tail energy
 - Twitching
 - Swishing
- Coat
 - Piloerection
 - Can include base of tail
 - Rippling



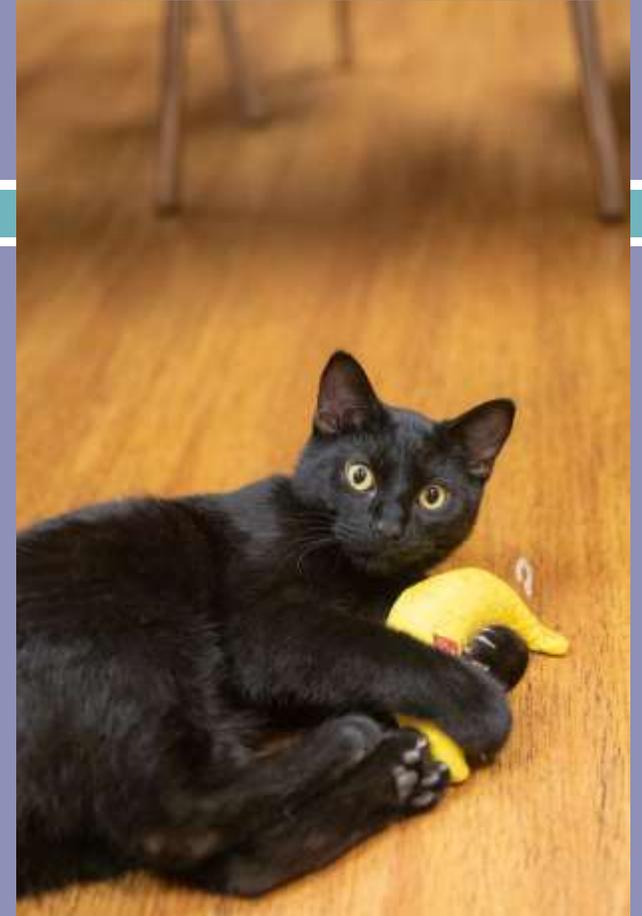
Whole body

- **Constricted pupils**
- **Body tension**
- **Ears high and forward**
- **Frontal gaze**
- **Prepared for energy**
 - **Shifting body weight**



Whole body

- Pupils
- Intensity of gaze
- Crouched body
 - Ready for “attack”
- Play stance



Body posture and energy in movement

- Often attention seeking
 - Can appear loose
 - Transition quickly
- Watch for change in energy
 - Attention seeking to avoidant
 - Arousal level increasing
- Watch energy in the room
 - Lots of people
 - Vocal cats
 - Active cats



High arousal

- Attention seeking
- Hyper aware of environment
- Energy in movement
- Head whipping
- Active



What causes this?

- Discomfort with environment
- Personality/ temperament
- Historical interaction with people
- Lack of trust
 - Threshold not respected
- Trigger stacking

- More often than not, this is cage related and not a true behavior.
 - Intensity should decrease in a home.



What can we do for these cats?

- **GIVE THEM SPACE!!**
- **Lots of playtime**
- **Treat only**
- **Talk only**
- **Clicker work**
- **Face/ cheeks only**
- **Respond to their energy and body language**
- **Enrichment**
- **Pressure free visits**



When the pieces don't add up

When they're conflicted, we're conflicted

Conflicted behavior... our cats are so often conflicted!

- Body language can offer some cues
- Can seem attention seeking
- Show avoidance
- Must pay attention to what they're offering and respond appropriately



What do you see?



Is this cat ready for a visit?



What about this guy?



Visitation & Adoption Support

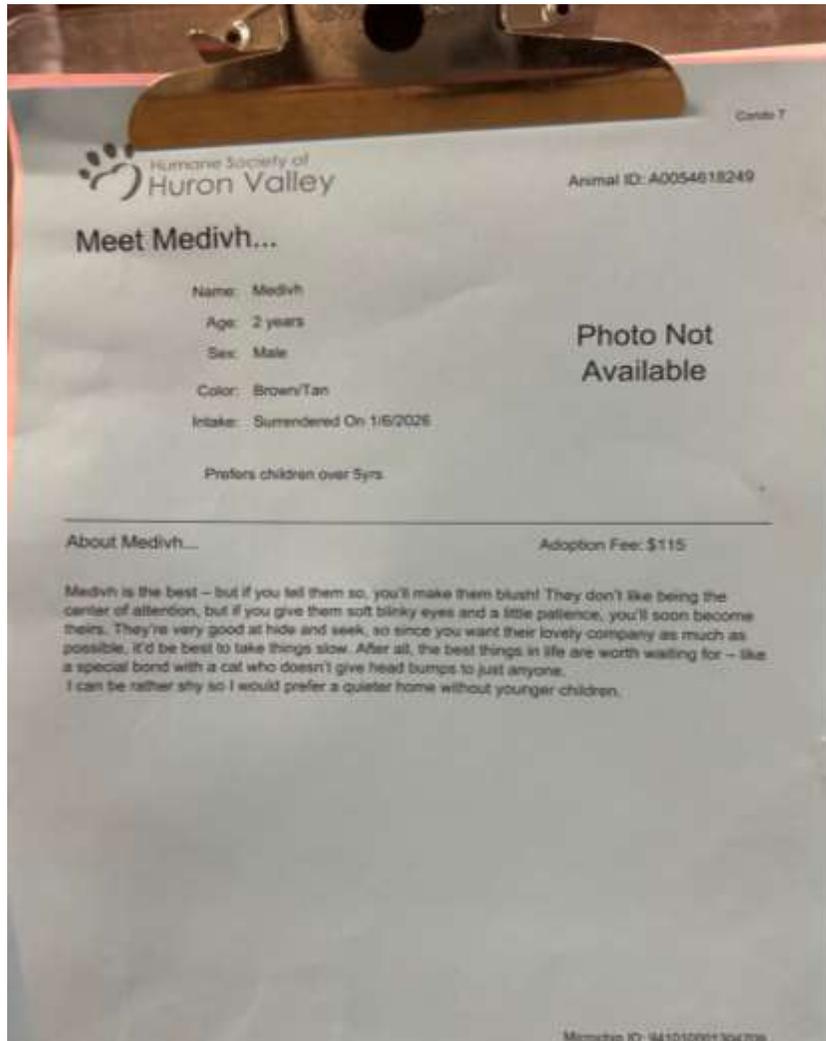
What do I need to know?

Behavior Related Signs and Stickers

- Check all signs before visiting
- I'm New, Go Slow
- Go Slow, I'm Shy
- In Cage Only
- I Might Door Dash
 - Toss treats
- Just Chillin'
 - Staff only
 - Volunteers Ok
- Keep Calm
- Desk or star sticker



Cage Cards – General



Color-coded cards with cat information:

Blue = male cat

Pink = female cat

Yellow = adoption fee waived

White w/ Yellow Sticker-not available for adoption

White w/o Yellow Sticker-not available for adoption

Other information on the cards:

- Name
- Age
- Intake/Surrender date
- ID Number
- Location
- Information about how the cat came to the shelter or our overall observation of the cat
- “Preferences” (i.e whether the cat likes children, other animals, etc).

More info is also available at Front Desk.

Cage Card Additions- Overview

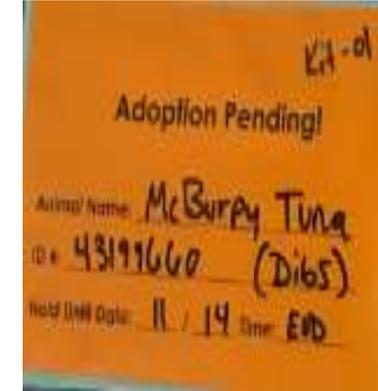
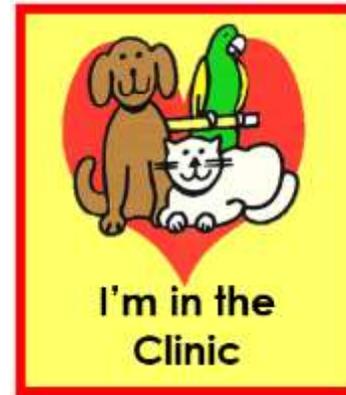
- Drop-In Cards
- Color-Coded Signs
- Icon Stickers



Cages are busy with information, some for staff, some for public, some for volunteers. **Here's what you really need to know...**

Cage Card – Drop-in Cards

- Dropped into the front of the cage card holder
- Indicate important information for staff/volunteers/public



No longer “back up” holds

- **Just Chillin’**

- look for is if the “Volunteers OK” box has been checked.
- **You can ONLY visit with the cat if this is checked!**



Just Chillin’

for information see a staff member

Staff Only -or- Volunteers OK

Placed by _____
(staff first name)

Review Date or Time _____



I just had surgery or sedation...

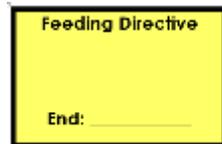
No visitors or volunteers please.

If I'm drooling, lethargic/sleepy, bobbing my head, runny eyes, or unable to stand, that is normal. Please report any other concerns to the adoption desk staff or shelter management.

Remove Sign from Cage, morning of: _____

Cage Card – Icon Stickers

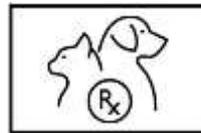
- In general, stickers tell staff there is more info on the back of the cage card.



- Yellow card= special feeding directives
- Note sheet = monitoring food or elimination 
- Rx = cats on medication for non-URI issue



- Rx and I have a cold = on medication for URI



- FIV Positive cat +

- FeLV Positive Cat



Order of Cat 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**

Can visit with FIV+ cats first, although this is not required



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

Has  URI sign**

OR

 FeLV felines**

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

Reviewing and Leaving Notes

Review all documentation before visiting each and every cat

Info from the cat behavior staff with special instructions; these are updated every few days – front pocket of the binders

We document our new observations/info about the cats at the end of our interaction (exception: Meow meadows/purrs plaza (the 2 communal room, & camp Kitten room)

These notes help the vets, behavior staff, other comforters, adoptions staff



Binders – Locations



Uptown Cats – in room (counter or drawer)

Downtown Cats – in room (counter or drawer)

Camp Kitten – no binder

Purrs Plaza & Meow Meadows (the two communal rooms)

No binder

Condos + Visitation Room – in cat comforter station

*Blue Dot Cats will have their own binder for notes

Binders – Best Practices

- Write legibly – including your first/last name
- Enter start/stop time of visit (i.e. 11:15 – 11:30)
 - Vets/staff get idea of how long cats were seen each day; especially important for cats with history of over-stimulation
- Enter comments after EVERY visit
- Try to write a new observation
 - If cat behavior is unchanged, at least enter that comment
 - Include what the cat likes or dislikes (toys, areas of petting/scratching)
 - If cat was indifferent to you but seems to like everyone else, make that note too
 - During your interaction with the cat, think about what you want to write later; this makes it easier to document afterwards, without getting writer's block...

Binders - “At-a-Glance” pages

Each binder has a front page to help you quickly see:

- Which cats were not visited yesterday

- Which cats have already been comforted today

- Which cats are designated as “staff-only” and should not be seen by volunteers

- Which cats are on med/ being watched and therefore determines what order to visit the cats in that room

- Which cats require Blue Dot Training to comfort

This will help you decide where to start comforting each day and decreases risk of cat overstimulation.



Sample: Uptown At-a-Glance



Room-at-a-Glance ~ Uptown

Date _____
 Su - Mo - Tu - We - Th - Fr - Sa
 (circle the day of week)

Write date and circle day of week

Circle Cage # if cat/s were not seen yesterday.
 Write an "e" next to cage # if the cage is empty.

Circle cage # if not seen yesterday or write an "e" for empty cage today

Check boxes for special info

Cat Name Here. No name? Use the animal ID number which starts with "A"

Cage	Special?	Cat Name	Volunteer Name (first/last)	Time
16	<input type="checkbox"/> I have a cold/meds <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Dot cat <input type="checkbox"/> No Vol Visit			Start: End:
e 17	<input type="checkbox"/> I have a cold/meds <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Dot cat <input type="checkbox"/> No Vol Visit			Start: End:
18	<input type="checkbox"/> I have a cold/meds <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Dot cat <input type="checkbox"/> No Vol Visit		.	Start: End:
19	<input type="checkbox"/> I have a cold/meds <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Dot cat <input type="checkbox"/> No Vol Visit			Start: End:
20	<input type="checkbox"/> I have a cold/meds <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Dot cat <input type="checkbox"/> No Vol Visit			Start: End:
21	<input type="checkbox"/> I have a cold/meds <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Dot cat <input type="checkbox"/> No Vol Visit			Start: End:
22	<input type="checkbox"/> I have a cold/meds <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Dot cat <input type="checkbox"/> No Vol Visit			Start: End:
23	<input type="checkbox"/> I have a cold/meds <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Dot cat <input type="checkbox"/> No Vol Visit			Start: End:

Your name here

Start and End Time

Binders - Individual Cat Pages

Each cat has its own page – kept in alphabetical order in binder where it is being housed

This is page where you write your comments

If no page for that cat or previous page is full, start a new one

If the cat has no name/is a stray, use the animal ID number as the name. Animal ID numbers start with the letter “A”.

Exception → Communal Rooms do not use Individual Cat pages!

 Humane Society of
Huron Valley

Individual Cat Page

Uptown Cage # _____ Downtown Cage # _____ **Cat Name** _____
Condo # _____ IRS _____ CVR _____
Purr Plaza _____ Meow Meadows _____

Volunteer Name (initials)	Comments / Observations about this cat			
	Date:			
	Start time:			
	End time:			
	Feed to Calm/ Clicker			
	Date:			
	Start time:			
	End time:			
	Feed to Calm/ Clicker			
	Date:			
	Start time:			
	End time:			
	Feed to Calm/ Clicker			
	Date:			
	Start time:			
	End time:			
	Feed to Calm/ Clicker			
	Date:			
	Start time:			
	End time:			
	Feed to Calm/ Clicker			

VI-007-CatObservationCommentSheet

Cat Kitchen – Medical / Behavior Boards

Examples of what you might write:

Medical: Sneezing, runny nose or eyes, cat seems lethargic, diarrhea (poop score?), nails need trimming

Behavior: obvious ones – hissing or growling; also subtle things –not interested in usual items

Not sure of category? (i.e. seems lethargic) – write on both boards!

Anything you write on these boards should also go into the binders for next comforter to know about.



Medical Concern Clipboard
(just inside kitchen door to right)



Behavior Alert Board
(on left-side kitchen wall)

Adopters-How You Can Help

- If someone is interested in adopting, ask if they have filled out an adoption survey
 - Yes? Get a staff member
 - Staff will open kennel door and get visitation started. This helps to...
 - Avoid potential multiple holds on the same cat
 - Keep staff aware of potential adopters who are visiting
 - No? You can take them up front and show them where surveys are located, have them fill out and take to the adoptions desk.
- Share the experiences/observations you have had working with a particular cat. This is most valuable!

Thank YOU for choosing to adopt!  Humane Society of Huron Valley

Date _____

ADOPTER SURVEY

First Name _____ Last Name _____
Address _____ Date of Birth: ____/____/____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Primary Phone _____ Alternate Phone _____
Email _____ Do not add me to the HSHV email list
Emergency Contact Name _____ Phone Number _____
Driver's License Number _____

Tell Us About Your Household
We have _____ adults in our home and _____ are children
Ages of children in the home: _____
We Own Rent our home
Our home is Active Quiet/Low-key Somewhere in Between
 We have dogs frequently visit our home

Our pet history over the past few years:

Pet's Name	Species/Breed	Age	Currently: in home, deceased, or living elsewhere

We are adopting for
 Our family Our children Another family member Companion for another pet
 Guard dog Barn cat Outdoor pet

When we are not home, our pet will spend time In a crate in the house Loose in the house
 Confined in one room In the yard Other: _____

Our pet needs to be alone _____ (H) of hours per day

Tell Us About a Pet You'd like to Adopt

Copy/ing or Laid Back <input type="checkbox"/> A Must <input type="checkbox"/> Doesn't Matter	Loves other animals <input type="checkbox"/> A Must <input type="checkbox"/> Doesn't Matter	Deaf/blind <input type="checkbox"/> A Must <input type="checkbox"/> Doesn't Matter
Active or Energetic <input type="checkbox"/> A Must <input type="checkbox"/> Doesn't Matter	OK Being Alone <input type="checkbox"/> A Must <input type="checkbox"/> Doesn't Matter	
Quiet <input type="checkbox"/> A Must <input type="checkbox"/> Doesn't Matter	Mouthing/Rough Play <input type="checkbox"/> Definite No <input type="checkbox"/> Can Train	

We will review the pet's medical history and behavior notes with you. Check any other topics you'd like to discuss:

<input type="checkbox"/> Acclimating this pet to our home	<input type="checkbox"/> Introducing pets to a baby
<input type="checkbox"/> Introducing this pet to our resident pets	<input type="checkbox"/> Toys & fun
<input type="checkbox"/> House and crate training	<input type="checkbox"/> Preventatives (i.e. for heartworm, flea & tick)
<input type="checkbox"/> Basic Training	<input type="checkbox"/> Finding a pet trainer
<input type="checkbox"/> Nail Trimming or scratching managing tips	
<input type="checkbox"/> Moving with pets	

Adopter Survey APP

Perfect Pairs each have their own adoption fee

Next Up in the Continuing Ed Series....

A Look at Blue Dot Cats- Body Language Review & Visitation Tips

**Wednesday, March 11th from 4-5:30pm
Ed Center**

Sign-Up in VIC

Thank You!

