

PROVIDING POSITIVE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS TO CATS IN BOARDING

TIPS WHEN FIRST APPROACHING A NEW CAT

- Approach the cat calmly and slowly
- Keep some distance so the cat has the option to approach you if they want to
- Get down to their level. The cat will be more likely to approach you
- Talk to the cat using a soft, calm voice
- Use a 'slow eye blink': when the cat looks towards you, close your eyes slowly and keep them partially closed for a couple of seconds
- Offer the cat the back of your hand to sniff, before attempting to touch the cat
- Use desensitization and counterconditioning to help the cat get used to new people, environments, or tools



- Avoid fast or sudden movements
- Avoid wearing strong perfumes and lotions, as this may discourage the cat from approaching you
- Avoid leaning over or reaching down to the cat to not appear threatening
- Avoid prolonged direct eye contact, especially if the cat is nervous. Position your body at an angle rather than directly facing the cat
- Avoid loud, abrupt, or "shh" sounds that the cat may perceive as threatening as they may sound similar to a cat hissing



Adapted from Atkinson, T., 2018. Practical Feline Behaviour: Understanding cat Behaviour and Improving Welfare. CABI International, Oxfordshire, UK.

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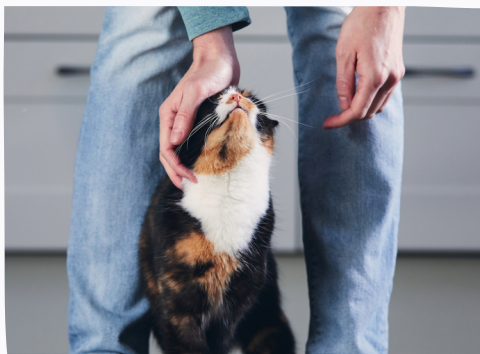
“CAT” INTERACTION GUIDELINES

C: CHOICE AND CONTROL



PROVIDE THE CAT WITH
CHOICE AND CONTROL
DURING THE
INTERACTION

- While in a seated or lowered position, gently **offer your hand to the cat**, **allow the cat to approach you**, and let them choose if they want to interact with you or not
- **If the cat wants to be touched, they will rub against you.** If they don't make contact, avoid stroking the cat
- **Allow the cat to move away from you if they choose**, and don't be tempted to follow after them
- **Allow the cat to control how much you stroke them.** If stroking the cat, briefly pause every 3 to 5 seconds to “check in” with the cat—when you stop stroking them, do they rub against you to ask for more? If not, they may be ready for a break



Adapted from Haywood et al. 2021 <https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2021.714143>

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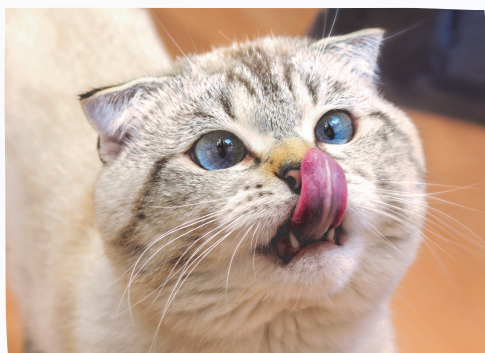
A: ATTENTION

**PAY ATTENTION TO
THE CAT’S BEHAVIOUR
AND BODY LANGUAGE**



The following are signs that the cat may need a little break:

- The cat turns their head or moves away from you
- Their ears become flattened or rotate backwards
- They dilate their pupils
- They shake their head
- The fur on their back appears to ripple
- They lick their nose
- They go still and stop purring or rubbing against you
- They sharply turn their head to face you or your hand
- They suddenly start grooming themselves, lasting only a few seconds
- Their tail twitches or ‘swishes’ vigorously, usually when held horizontally or close to the ground
- They hiss, growl, or swipe at you with their paw



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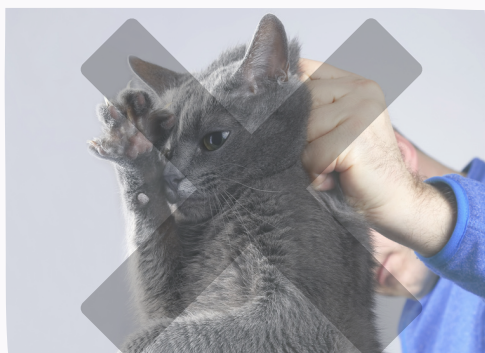
“CAT” INTERACTION GUIDELINES

T: TOUCH

THINK ABOUT
WHERE YOU'RE
TOUCHING THE CAT



- Most cats prefer being touched at the base of their ears, around their cheeks, and under their chin, so mainly touch these areas
- Avoid the base of their tail and belly, and be cautious when touching the cat's back, legs, and tail—pay attention to their body language
- **NEVER** pick up a cat by the scruff of their neck. This can be painful and frightening for the cat
- Ensure the cat is well supported underneath their body; do not 'dangle' the cat by only holding them around their chest
- If the cat shows any sign of wanting to be released (e.g., struggling, attempting to escape), do so immediately
- Encourage the cat to come to you and jump on your lap rather than forcing the cat into a physical interaction



PROVIDING POSITIVE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS TO CATS IN BOARDING

BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS OF GOOD AND POOR WELFARE

Summary of behavioural indicators of good and poor welfare of cats during social interactions

INTERACTIONS WITH PEOPLE

Signs of good welfare

- Positive interactions with people (seeking human presence, making direct contact, staying in proximity)
- Positive responses to human-initiated interactions



Signs of poor welfare

- Absence of, or negative response, to human-initiated interactions
- Redirected aggression
- Direct aggression



INTERACTIONS WITH OTHER CATS

Signs of good welfare

- Rubbing
- Mutual grooming
- Not avoiding contact
- Not hiding



Signs of poor welfare

- Hostility
- Aggression
- Avoiding contact
- Hiding

