RESPECTFUL CAT HANDLING vs. CAT WRANGLING

FROM THE CAT’S POINT OF VIEW

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Outline

• Improving a cat’s clinic experience
  – Minimizing threats
  – Reading signals
  – Respectful & friendly handling
  – *Think like a cat*

• Compliance
  – Education - *Subtle signs of sickness*
  – Getting to the clinic (or *anywhere*) with less fuss
  – Better home care after visit
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Who and what is a cat?

What makes a cat tick?

What is the ideal cat environment?

Need to understand in order to interact with and help cats
The patient experience
Cats in a clinic setting

Which is it?
Flee, freeze, or fight!

- Easily threatened
- Scary = scared
- Think like a cat
Try to imagine...

Walking on 4 feet
Jumping 7X your height
Perceiving the world in overlapping clouds of smell
Having much better night vision
Grooming yourself with your tongue
Locating sound by rotating ears
Having poor close-up vision
Having a tail
Scooping food and sucking water
Having whiskers
Predators & prey
You are what you eat

• Obligate carnivores
  • Shapes anatomy, physiology, behaviour
• Solitary hunter
  – Territoriality
• Safety from predictability
• Communication
Eating behaviour

• Small rodents, rabbits, birds, insects, frogs, reptiles
• Cats need ~ 50 kcal/kg ideal weight/day
• Average mouse = how many kcal?
• How many mice does a 5 kg cat need/day?
Eating behaviour

- Small rodents, rabbits, birds, insects, frogs, reptiles
- Cats need ~ 50 kcal/kg ideal weight/day
- Average mouse = how many kcal?
- How many mice does a 5 kg cat need/day?
  - 8-10 small meals/day
  - Hunting (success and failure)
  - 10-15 attempts for success
  - Grazing feeding behaviour is normal for cats
Implications of resource dependency

- No hierarchy
- No need for cooperation
- No “taking turns”
- Few appeasement behaviors
- Keeping distance is essential
- Control environment
  - Security = no surprises
As long as everything's exactly the way I want it, I'm totally flexible
Clients don’t understand the need for regular veterinary care.

Cats hide illness.
Territorial

• Rarely leave home
• Social groups are naturally females
• Males on the periphery
• Outside contact kept to a minimum
Communication

- Olfactory
- Visual
- Tactile
- Auditory
- Maintain social groups
Odor marking is critical *long-range* communication

Helps to avoid confrontation

Cannot be changed

Creates spacing

**Olfactory communication**
Visual communication

Medium range

Limited by vegetation or lack of light

Changes rapidly

Increase distance between cats
Scary or, scared?

Posture = first impression
Facial = fine tuning
Emotional state
Not always what it looks like

Visual communication
Visual Cues/signaling

- Arched back
- Crouch
- Tail
- Facial expression
- Ears
- Whiskers
- Pupils
Tactile communication

- Affiliative:
  - Rubbing
  - Head bunting
  - Nose touching
  - Kneading, treading
  - Allogrooming
Tactile communication

• Agonistic
  – Biting
  – Neck bite
  – Scratching
Auditory cues

- Well-developed repertoire of sounds to
  - Convey a need
  - Increase distance between individuals.
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• Sounds for encouraging socialization are a trill/chirrup, purr, puffing, chatter, miaow, and sexual calling
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• The cat that is open-mouth screaming is highly aroused but is probably less aggressive than the cat that is close-mouthed growl/wah-wah/mowling.
Reading the signals

• Ritualized signals
• Establish and maintain structure
• Useful for monitoring group
• Useful for understanding how to handle individuals
Feeling threatened signals: subtle

Look away
Slightly lower ears
Turn head away
Lean back
Feeling threatened signals: more intense

Flatten ears
Lower and curl tail lateral to thigh
Turn head to side
Crouch
Feeling VERY threatened signals: extreme

Roll over
Show weapons

Not an aggressor
“Dominance”/threatening signals

Approach
Stare
Stiffen limbs
Stiff upright ears turned laterally
Elevated tail base
+/- mount subordinate

Aggressor
Threatening signals
About scruffing techniques

“Scruffing” is a general term for a variety of holds on the skin of the cat's neck. Grasping the scruff of the neck varies from a gentle squeeze of skin, to grasping a larger fold of skin with varying amounts of pressure. Consideration of natural feline behavior can help put this technique into perspective. Cats grasp the scruff of the neck of other cats in only limited circumstances. During the first few weeks of life the mother cat may lift kittens by the scruff of the neck using her mouth. This is a method of transport and immobilization, and not a form of discipline. During mating, the tomcat grasps the scruff of the queen. Some veterinarians and veterinary behaviorists do not use scruffing and do

*Footnote: On review of these guidelines, the ISFM/FAB feline expert panel strongly support the view that scruffing should never be used as a routine method of restraint, and should only be used where there is no alternative.

If you think this technique is the only alternative, carefully evaluate the cat for any signs of fear or anxiety. The cat may become immobile but may not be comfortable, or may become aggressive. Handle the cat as gently as possible and guard against using aggressive handling techniques out of anger or frustration. The panel does not condone lifting the cat or suspending its body weight with a scruffing technique because it is unnecessary and potentially painful.

‘Clipping’ or ‘pinch-induced behavioral inhibition’ is a term that pertains to using clips to apply pressure to the dorsal neck skin or other areas along the dorsal midline. Some veterinarians and behaviorists do not use clipping and do not condone its use. Some have reservations about the clipping procedure and have concerns about the ethics of controlling behavior through inhibition of behavioral responses. Others think it has a place when done appropriately, in certain cats and under the conditions described above for scruffing.

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What do cats need?
AAFP and ISFM Feline Environmental Needs Guidelines

• Five Pillars for a healthy environment - providing
  1. A safe space
AAFP and ISFM Feline Environmental Needs Guidelines

- Five Pillars for a healthy environment - providing
  1. A safe space
  2. Multiple and separated resource stations

![Diagram of appropriate and inappropriate resources](Courtesy Sarah Ellis)
Break free from daily scooping!
Let SmartScoop do the dirty work!

Would you step in there with your bare feet?
Let SmartScoop keep it clean!

Litter Box
Think like a cat… How many boxes are there?
Predators & prey
Behaviour therapy may be required. Ask your vet for advice.
Five Pillars for a healthy environment

3. Providing an opportunity for play and expression of predatory behaviours

4. Providing positive, consistent and predictable interactions with humans
Pillar 5 – Provide an environment

The cat’s sense of smell information is detected by the vomeronasal and maximizes their sense of security and comfort. Olfactory information involves many different smells detected by the nictitating membrane and pheromonal signals through the use of scent marking by facial and body rubbing.

Provide scratching areas that allow a cat to explore their environment. If cats sense more upon chemical and olfactory information compared with humans, cats depend much more upon chemicals, medications, antiseptics, cleaners and even, when it is postoperatively, anesthesia gases can be detected by other cats. In such cases, cats that previously got along well can display aggressive behaviors such as inappropriate elimination or scratching and stress-related behaviors, such as inappropriate elimination or scratching and stress-related behaviors.

Addressing environmental needs – expansion of services and increased value

Reduced stress in multi-cat households

An environment that respects the importance of a cat’s physical health, emotional wellbeing and behaviors having a basic understanding of the cat's environmental needs.

Environmental needs include those relating to the home entrance to avoid introducing new items with a different scent profile it associates with its customary surroundings. These terms are not used in the one-liner, as the American Animal Hospital Association’s (AAFP) Environmental Enrichment Guidelines addressed until the cat exhibits signs that overt signals consist of negative behaviors that are labeled as bad, inappropriate or aggressive. Only then do most owners and veterinarians advise clients not only about the importance of meeting the cat’s core living area in which scratching and facial rubbing create a sense of security and comfort. Olfactory information involves many different smells, which are chemicals, pheromones, which are chemicals, detected by other cats. In such cases, cats that previously got along well can display aggressive behaviors such as inappropriate eliminations or scratching and stress-related behaviors.

An opportunity for social interaction, including responses to human participation in the animal's environment.

Positive, consistent interactions with humans.

An environment that respects the importance of a cat’s sense of smell.

The recommendations in the Guidelines apply to all pet cats, regardless of lifestyle.

The AAFP and ISFM welcome multiple and separated resource stations. Environmental enrichment and environmental enrichment activities are often not realized by the American Animal Hospital Association's (AAFP) Environmental Enrichment Guidelines. Environmental needs are often not understood or appreciated by the public, the media and the veterinary profession.
A sense of control => contentment
“Take the pet stress test”
www.helpforstressedpets.com/StressTest.aspx

Is your pet stressed?

Or, more accurately (since stress is an inevitable part of life)...
How stressed is your pet?

The following questions can help you determine your pet's stress level, so you can better help your four-legged friend find his zen.
Has your pet been acting differently since you adopted a new friend for him or her?

Does your pet act strangely when you visit the veterinarian?

Does your pet urinate where he or she shouldn’t?

Does your pet hate travelling?

www.helpforstressedpets.com
CAT MASTERY
TONE BUTFINGTON, DVM, PhD, DACVN

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
she looks as large as possible. Her fur is puffed up to make her look even larger in hopes of scaring the threat away, and her tail will be as close to her body as possible. Her breathing will be faster and deeper, making it easier to see her chest rise and fall. This posture is sometimes called defensive aggression, which means, “get away from me or I will hurt you!” If you see your cat looking like this, she is telling you, “I feel terrified right now!” Do NOT try to pick any cat up that looks like this because it may attack you. Just remove whatever is threatening her if you can, and leave her alone until she calms down enough to come to you.

Once you understand the basic idea of the “words” cats use to tell us how they are feeling, you can use the interactive body language widget on the next page to learn more about some of the many additional ways cats tell us how they are feeling. Soon you’ll be adept at using this new knowledge to understand the language your cat uses, as well as that of the cats you will see in the videos alter in this book.

In addition to knowing what cats are telling us with their body language, knowing where and how they spend their time and how they interact with their surroundings can also tell us a lot about how they are feeling. We will continue to learn to recognize these

Understanding Emotional state by looking at the body

Activity – sleeping or resting, alert or active, may be playing
Breathing – slow to normal

Relaxed

Touch each number to see a cat’s body language for each emotional state, from relaxed to terrified.
Let’s start by looking at her head. The position of her head, the size of her mouth, eyes and pupils, and the position of her ears and whiskers all tell us something about how she feels. For example, when your cat is relaxed, she may lie on her side with her head resting on the same surface as her body, as seen in Figure 1 on this page. Her mouth will be closed, eyes will be relaxed with eyelids somewhere between opened and closed, and her pupils relatively narrow. Her ears will be up, and may be forward, and her whiskers will be away from her cheeks, either flat or forward. She may be purring, or not making any sound. Looking at her body, we see that she is lying on her side (or belly, or sitting) with muscles relaxed, breathing slowly; it may not be easy to see her chest rise and fall. Her legs are laid out from her body, with feet not touching the surface she is lying on, and her tail may be extended or loosely wrapped over her. When you see your cat looking like this, she is telling you, “I feel safe and happy right now.”

We can compare this “statement” with how our cat tells us she is feeling tense, like the cat in Figure 2.
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**Figure 1: Relaxed, safe, happy**

![Relaxed cat](image)

**Understanding Emotional State by Looking at the Head**

- **Head** – near to surface motionless
- **Eyes** – fully open, pupils fully dilated
- **Ears** – fully flattened
- **Whiskers** – back
- **Sounds** – none, plaintive meow, growling, yowling

![Emotional state scale]

*Touch each number to see a cat’s facial expressions for each emotional state, from relaxed to terrified. Pinch open to view full screen.*

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Catio – the best of both worlds

Courtesy of Rhonda Ashcroft – for Larry =>
• Cats use a combination of these different signals in any situation.
• Look for all of them and interpret them together.
Next up: putting purrspective into practice

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