

SAFELY HANDLING CATS

Handling any cat should be a safe and pleasant experience – for both you and the cat. It is very important to take your time and observe the cat and the environment before deciding to interact with or pet any cat. If you ever feel uncomfortable handling any cat, don't do it!

“Getting To Know You...”

Before interacting with any cat observe her body language. Stressed or anxious cats often do not eat, eliminate or groom themselves. They can become fatigued from lack of sleep and will often be more susceptible to disease. Cats exhibiting any of the following signs are too stressed to be handled and should be given time and space to adjust to the stress of their environment.

- ✓ Ears flattened to the side
- ✓ Pupils dilated
- ✓ Tail held tightly around body or twitching
- ✓ Eyes tightly pressed together with a “fake sleeping” look
- ✓ Body is flattened, cat may roll on her back when anyone approaches
- ✓ Whiskers are panned out and forward
- ✓ Rapid, shallow breathing
- ✓ Shaking
- ✓ Hissing
- ✓ Spitting
- ✓ Growling
- ✓ Striking out with claws or attempting to bite

If the cat is exhibiting any of the following signs it is comfortable and confident enough to be handled.

- ✓ Soliciting attention by vocalizing or pawing
- ✓ Regular or deep breathing (especially while sleeping)
- ✓ Ears are up and forward
- ✓ Pupils are normal sized
- ✓ Tail is extended or held up with tip of tail forward over her body
- ✓ Lying on side with chin and/or stomach exposed
- ✓ Whiskers are in neutral position

Saying Hello and Petting

If the cat falls into the comfortable and confident category you may begin to interact with this cat. Approach the cat slowly and talk to the cat to get her attention. Note how she reacts to your approach. If she remains calm and happy, you may slowly continue the interaction. Slowly extend your finger or hand palm side up for her to sniff for a few seconds before moving on to petting. The cat should come to you, not the other way around!

Take a moment to scratch her head, ears and under her chin before moving on to full body petting. Use slow, soft touch when petting any cat. Stroke her from her head to the base of her tail in a deliberate manner. If there is a particular body part the cat enjoys having touched (you'll know when she leans into your touch) you can pay special attention to this area. Continue to observe her during the interaction. If she begins to show any stress signs immediately end the interaction.



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Picking Up A Cat

It is important to remember that both you and the cat will be safe if you hold the cat in a comfortable and firm position. You must ALWAYS control the head and neck while supporting the cat's body weight by holding the back legs. Always keep the cat's body securely against your own body. If the cat is higher than waist level, please use a step stool provided to retrieve the cat. If at any time the cat begins to exhibit stress signs stop handling her immediately and allow her time and space to calm down.

If the cat's body is perpendicular to you, reach around and along her body with one arm. Place your elbow near her tail with your hand between her front legs and hold the front of her chest. Slowly bring her toward you. Lift her gently and place her against your body. You may then use your other hand to support her back legs. If you are supporting her back legs with your elbow of the arm used to pick her up you may give her a nice chin scratch or ear rub.

If you are unfamiliar with the cat, you may gently scruff the back of her neck with one hand. Use your other arm to support her belly and back legs while you lift her from the kennel and place her against your body. Release the scruff and move your hand to hold the front of her chest. You may re-scruff her if she becomes nervous.

Countertops are a great place to gently rest the cat's feet if you need to readjust your hold to make it more comfortable for you and the cat.

If you see a possible panic attack coming due to overstimulation, react quickly. Remember that if stretching or restraining a cat press the cat's weight down, not up. This allows you to work with gravity – not against it.

Setting a Cat Down After Holding

Allow her to place her front feet on a flat surface. Once her front feet are solidly on a flat surface you may gently ease her back legs onto the same flat surface. Always make sure that the cat is supported and has secure footing before releasing your hold on the cat.

SAFETY FIRST!

It is extremely important to determine which cats should or should not be handled based on their body language – or when they have reached their handling threshold and cannot tolerate any more interaction. It is critical to reduce stress in the cats in our care. Handling an already stressed cat can increase the cat's stress and anxiety leaving them more susceptible to disease and increasing the risk that they may scratch or bite to defend themselves. You should NEVER handle any cat that you are not convinced is completely happy to be in your arms!