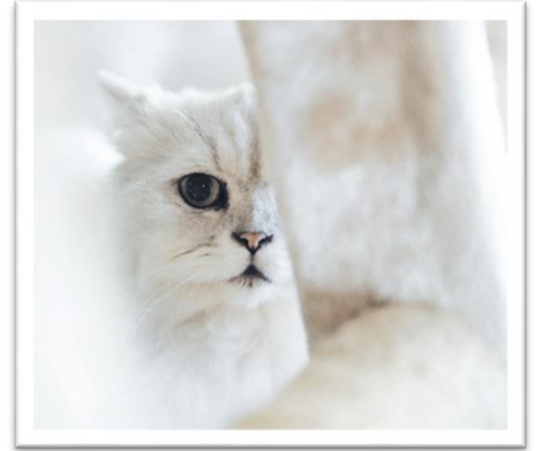


Positive Association Behaviour Modification Plan

Cats can be scared by many things – new places, loud noises, previous negative experiences, or a timid temperament. One of our main responsibilities is to help our cats feel more comfortable and confident in their surroundings – and with us! A great way to do that is to teach them to associate our presence with something they already enjoy (such as food!).



The basics

For a very fearful cat, it is wise to conduct this plan while the cat is confined to a sanctuary room. For other cats, it may be appropriate to allow the cat free access to the whole house. If working with a THS Trainer, make this decision in consultation with them.

Use a considerate approach

Whenever interacting with a cat – but especially those exhibiting signs of fear – you should always approach them in a way that will make them feel comfortable; turn your body sideways, get low to the ground, limit eye contact, verbalize soothingly, and gesture enticingly. It's best if you can get them to approach you and initiate the interaction. If the cat is showing signs of fear, reduce the intensity of your interaction and respect their personal space. This may mean you need to sit back a bit, but it might mean to leave your cat alone entirely.



Pair your presence with things they enjoy

The easiest way to win the love and trust of a cat, is to pair your presence with things they already like. If they have a positive experience every time they encounter you, they will come to associate you with positive things. This builds affection and trust. Common choices for this include tasty food (treats, wet food, Heinz Chicken with Broth baby food, etc.), play, and catnip.

Techniques to try

- 1. Treat fairy** – For cats that are too fearful to eat in your presence, this technique can be a great place to start. Most often used for cats in a sanctuary room.
 - Use the “**smorgasbord technique**” to find an extra special tasty treat that appeals to them: offer a variety of foods on a platter (try cheeses, mayonnaise, plain yogurt, low sodium meats, Heinz Chicken with Broth baby food, tuna, cat treats, etc.) and leave them alone with it. Later, return and check which one they have eaten.
 - Enter their space several times a day and leave them a small amount of this extra special tasty treat. Make sure you leave this treat for them every time you enter their space (even if it is just to retrieve something or clean the litter box). Soon, they will learn to associate your presence with the appearance of this treat and should become less fearful of you. They may even begin to come out of hiding!
- 2. Non-invasive hang-outs** – Ideal for cats that are too fearful for techniques 3 & 4, but *will* eat in human presence. Through repeated visits where people come in, provide tasty food, and don’t pressure them for interaction, the cat will learn that humans do not present an immediate threat.
 - Put some of their extra special tasty treat near your cat
 - Back up far away from the cat, and make yourself as unthreatening as possible. Consider sitting/lying down on the floor
 - Do not attempt to touch the cat, and avoid eye contact
 - Engage in a subtle activity, such as quietly reading aloud
- 3. Treat trail** – This can be a great way to encourage a cat to come out from hiding, choose to approach you on their own, or walk on to a bathroom scale for weighing! Useful for cats both in a sanctuary room and freely roaming the house, but the cat must already be comfortable enough to eat in your presence. Perform multiple times per day. See the “**Tips for Using a Treat Trail with Cats**” video for help.
 - Sit far enough away from your cat that they are not too stressed, but close enough that they are within “tossing distance.”
 - Toss a tasty treat right in front of them (it might be wise to practice your aim first, away from your cat).
 - As soon as they finish eating the treat, toss another *slightly* closer to you. Ideally the treat should land right after they finish the first one and are looking up in hopes of more – the motion will help motivate them to move them towards it.

- Continue doing this until they will follow the trail to right beside you. It is likely that they will get a little further each day.
 - Once start approaching close to you, providing a providing a “**jackpot**” of food (a bowl of their special treat, or warmed wet food) right next to you can help motivate them to make the last few steps.
4. **Low-key play** – Play is a lot of fun and can be a great way to experience breakthroughs with many fearful cats. But it is important to start off by playing in a way that is non-threatening. Techniques that keep space between you and your cat, or that involve smaller movement are best.
- Gently jiggle the wand of a toy under a towel or blanket.
 - Remove the toy part from the end of your wand toy, attempting play with just a string on the wand.
 - Wave a wand toy around while sitting on the other side of the room from your cat.
 - Use a laser pointer to play with your cat, while keeping your distance.
 - Keep in mind that just because your cat is not actively playing doesn’t mean that they are benefiting from your attempt. Even cats that are just watching the toy may enjoy the experience. However, if your cat is showing heightened signs of fear, it is important to respond appropriately by reducing your energy level or proximity. In some cases, it may be best to end the attempt altogether – but be sure to try again another day!