

CAT SOCIALIZATION 101

A PAWS MANUAL FOR CAT SOCIALIZATION VOLUNTEERS

WELCOME AND THANK YOU!

- Thank you for helping us socialize these scared, depressed, aggressive, and bored cats! They need your help, love, and patience to find a happy furrever home.
- This handbook contains general guidelines – Remember that every cat is different and will potentially need a different approach.
- If you have any questions, please feel free to ask our socialization team:
 - Meredyth (staff) - meredyth@phillypaws.org
 - Katrin (volunteer) - katrin@phillypaws.org
 - Katie (volunteer) - katie.klochan@phillypaws.org

WHY SOCIALIZATION?

- Arriving at a shelter is highly stressful and over-stimulating.
- Cats who may have lived their entire lives in the same home now have their world turned upside-down.
- There are many weird smells, loud sounds, tiny living spaces, unending boredom, and often the unpleasantness of illness and being medicated.
- The shelter is such a stressful place that many cats either lash out at humans or become terrified, depressed, and start to “shut down”, meaning they may stop playing, eating, or even moving, out of fear!
- It creates a vicious cycle, as angry or scared cats are not as likely to be adopted as cats who are loving and walk towards adopters instead of hiding from them. The longer a cat stays in the shelter, the more likely they are to decline or get sick, delaying adoption further, and so on.

SOCIALIZATION TEAM MISSION

To help cats become more adoptable by creating a positive bond with humans and providing an outlet for mental stimulation using Cat Socialization and Cat Pawsitive training.

- It's an amazing feeling for an adopter to approach a cat and have it walk right up and ask for pets, or to see a cat do tricks like 'high-five' or 'sit' (which many people think only dogs are capable of). That instant connection is what gets cats adopted quickly, and many cats only get to this level of comfort with humans through socialization.
- Socialization also helps cats and kittens who may never have lived with humans consistently--what we call "semi-feral"--to learn to trust humans and to want to live with them.
- PAWS never takes in cats who do not want to live with humans, what we call truly "feral" cats; instead, our clinic spays/neuters them, and then returns them to where they were living previously, as this is the best quality of life for feral cats.

1. ADMINISTRATION AND TOOLS

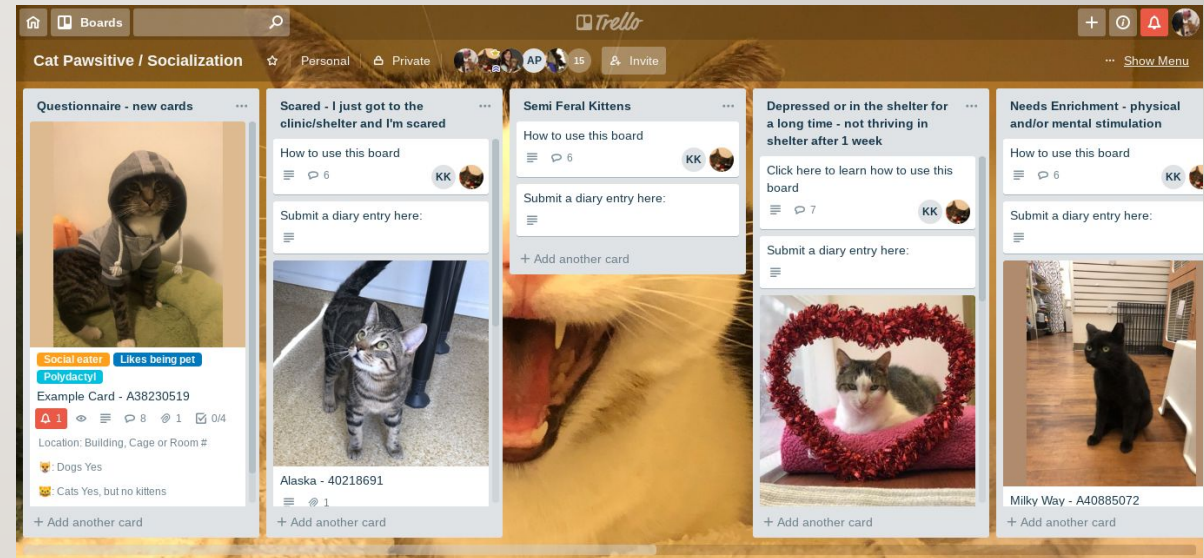
ADMINISTRATION AND TOOLS

We use the following tools:

- Trello
- Questionnaire
- Feliway Socialization List
- Blue Socialization Card
- Clicker
- Wand Toys and Treats
- Brushes

TRELLO

- The Cat Socialization Trello Board shows all cats that need socialization, including notes about what the team has worked on.
- When adding a new cat - always name the card as follows: “Name - A12345678” (without the quotes)
- For access to the board, email katie.klochan@phillypaws.org.
- You can also download the Trello app to your phone and use it on your phone directly.



QUESTIONNAIRE AND “SOCIALIZE ME” LIST

- You can find the questionnaire on the volunteer tablet, in a separate tab from the login page.
- During or after your shift, please either make notes about the cats you are working with directly in Trello or fill out and submit the questionnaire.
- Make sure that you spell the name and A number correctly - the questionnaire data is transferred automatically into Trello once submitted.
- The Socialize Me list can be found on the volunteer shelf at PAC, and is a good resource to see which cats might need some extra love and attention.

CAT PAWSITIVE/CAT SOCIALIZATION CARDS

- To the right is an example of the Cat Pawsitive/Cat Socialization cards (front and back).
- For scared cats, we use the Cat Socialization side of the card; for cats who do not fear humans but need extra mental stimulation, we use the Cat Pawsitive program to help them blossom into their most-adoptable self.
- As you get more familiar with this program, you will be able to see which activities fit best with each cat; a cat does not need to work on every activity all the time, and it may take several days/weeks to make progress with particularly difficult kitty.

CAT PAWSITIVE

I am working on....

- Charging the Clicker
- High Five
- Sit
- Stay
- Fetch
- Spin/Circle
- Jump through arms, th
- High Energy playtime!

CAT SOCIALIZATION:

I am working on...

- Slow blinks
- Charging the Clicker
- Petting with a stick
- Low Five (stick, then hands)
- PURRITO-ing
- Sniffing hands
- Coming forward for pets
- Pets while eating

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

- What to wear:
 - Clothing you don't mind potentially getting stained or dirty
 - Closed-toe shoes
 - Remove any dangly earrings/necklaces that the cats may try to grab
- When working with scared or depressed cats, it is advised for your own safety to wear long sleeves and potentially have gloves ready. You are not required to work with cats that you feel uncomfortable working with.
- Germ control is our main priority! The shelter is full of illness and you want to make sure not to spread it or to bring it home – your personal pets have stronger immune systems than shelter animals, but you should still wash up before leaving and change your clothes as soon as you get home.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

- If an animal seems sick, or you notice something abnormal like diarrhea, a wonky eye, they didn't eat much, etc., then TELL STAFF immediately!!!
- Alert a staff member before you clean up or throw anything out – sometimes they need samples. They may say, “Oh yeah, we know about that already”, but they'd rather hear it 100 times in a day than not at all!
- Symptoms of illness: gooey eyes, runny nose, sneezing, open-mouth breathing
- You can't catch all the same illnesses as the animals, but you can still get sick if you're not careful about washing hands before eating. Ringworm (not a worm – but a fungus like Athlete's Foot) can be a risk in shelters – wash your hands frequently to help prevent this!

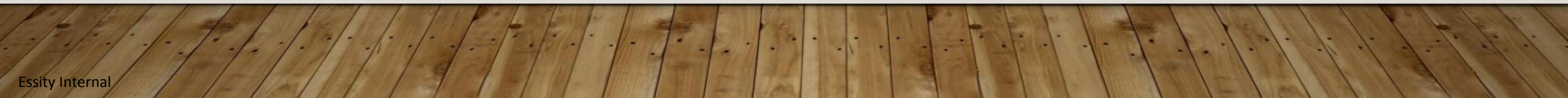
2. THE SOCIALIZATION TYPES

SOCIALIZATION TYPES

1. Scared
2. Depressed
3. Cage aggressive
4. Overstimulated
5. Needs mental stimulation

3. CAT COMMUNICATION

Use communication signals to determine a cat's socialization type



CAT COMMUNICATION SIGNALS

- Cats use a range of signals when communicating both with other cats and with people.
- These include vocal signals, body language, facial expressions, and much more; once you are able to accurately interpret these signals, you will gain a much better understanding of a cat's mood, and even understand what she is trying to tell you!

THE TAIL

The cat's tail can communicate a wide range of signals and emotions, and as this is one of the most obviously identifiable areas of the body, the tail makes for a good starting point!

- A cat whose tail is held up high and erect indicates confidence, interest, and, often, happiness.
- If the cat's tail is held low and straight, it is a good indication to back off--This cat is either annoyed or looking for a scrap!
- If the cat has its tail firmly clamped down against their butt, it indicates that he is scared or unsettled.

THE TAIL

- A tail that is swinging tautly back and forth is a clear warning beacon that the cat is becoming overstimulated or aggressive; you may also see this tail posture as part of hunting behavior or play. The faster the swinging, the more irritated the cat is!
- Gentle swishing of the tail, however, indicates interest. If the tip of the tail is twitching slightly but the tail is relaxed, this is a friendly, contented signal.
- If the cat's tail is bushed up like a bottle brush, this indicates that the cat's fight-or-flight responses have kicked in, and they are trying to make themselves look as large and threatening as possible, so again, proceed with caution!

THE EARS

- If the cat's ears are in a relaxed position and pointing forward, he is either listening to something or is generally at peace and contented.
- Ears laid flat back against the head are an indication of either fear or anger
- Ears pointed up, rotated to the side, and moving like a radar indicates weariness – the cat might not feel 100% safe and is scanning the area for potential threats.

THE FUR AND BODY

- A calm, happy cat's fur will lie flat and smooth.
- When a cat is preparing to fight or to defend themselves, the fur across the whole of their body will stand on end, in order to make themselves look as large and imposing as possible.
- They will also often arch their backs and present a side-on view of their body to their opponent, which are also intended to make the cat look larger.

EYE CONTACT

- For cats, making direct eye contact indicates dominance and, potentially, a threat. If you see that a cat is scared, don't stare them in the eye.
- Slow blinks are a way for a cat to tell you that it feels safe – in return, if we slow blink, we are telling the cat that we do not mean any harm.

VERBALIZATIONS

- Some cats are chattier than others – while some cats rarely meow at all, others have a distinct language of meows that you can learn to interpret.
- Cats that are hunting or play-hunting often make a trilling or chattering sound at the back of their throats, and this is something that you won't usually hear in other situations.
- Growls and hisses are of course clear warnings of anger or defensive aggression.
- Howling or yowling can be an integral part of mating behavior, or used to signify pain, threat, or unhappiness.

4. BODY LANGUAGE

Summary of most important postures

FELINE BODY LANGUAGE

1. **Attentive:** Cat is paying attention to her environment but feels safe

- Ears are up and forward
- Eyes scan the room
- Cat is sitting up and looks alert

2. **Content:**

- Cat sleeps in unusual positions, because she feels safe and unthreatened.
- Often exposes either her belly or side.

3. **Friendly:** Cat is happy and feels safe

- Ears are upright and forward
- Cat is standing or walking with her tail upright – sometimes it will twitch when she is really excited

FELINE BODY LANGUAGE

4. **Playful:** Cat is ready to play, hunt, fetch, and is excited

- Ears up and attentive
- Eyes are big
- Displays playful behavior, such as trying to catch a toy
- Tail moves from side to side

5. **Relaxed:** Ready to play

- Cat is laying on its side with all paws stretched out
- Ears are attentive, in the air
- The cat feels relaxed, but is also ready to defend herself if needed

6. **Terrified:** The cat is terrified and feels attacked/cornered

- Ears are flat and cat is hissing and/or growling
- Body posture is the same as the worried cat (ready to run and attack)

FELINE BODY LANGUAGE

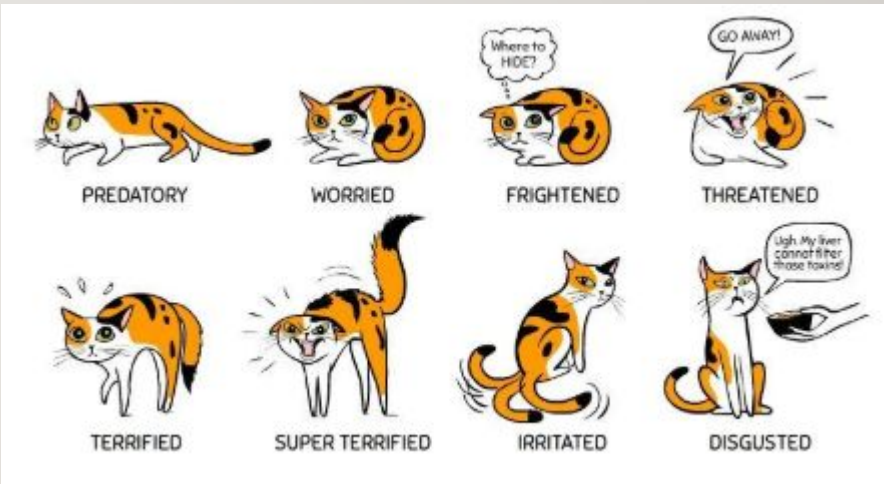
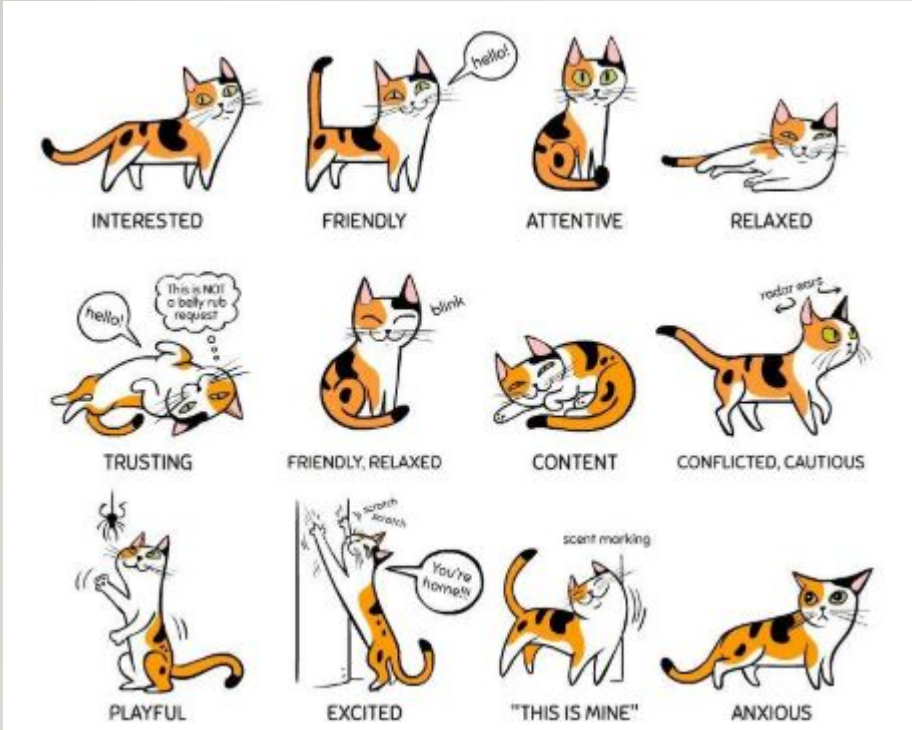
7. **Trusting:** The cat feels totally unthreatened

- Cat rolls on his back and exposes his stomach. The stomach is the most sensitive area, so by exposing it he is showing trust.

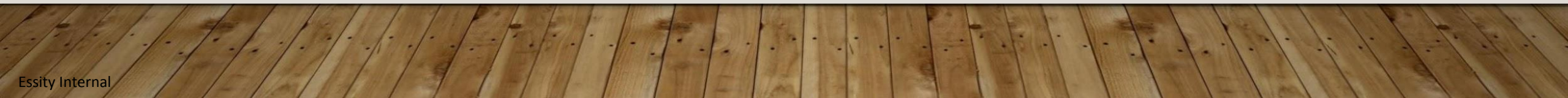
6. **Worried:** Nervous and unsure of surroundings, ready to flee or attack if a threat arises

- The ears to the side – might twitch in different directions to pick up any change in the environment
- Cat is sitting close to the floor but with legs tucked under the body, ready to jump/run, and tail is tucked away under the body

FELINE BODY LANGUAGE



5. APPROACHING A CAT



HOW TO APPROACH A NEW CAT

- Observe the cat's body language
 - Use the information in the preceding section to interpret the cat's mood
- Always reach out your hand to let the cat sniff you
 - If the cat comes forward to sniff your hand, it's a good sign that they are at least receptive to interacting with you
 - If the cat makes no effort to sniff your hand, it's an indication that they are very, very scared, and you should keep your distance
- Slow blinks
 - Slow blinks help cats feel comfortable and relaxed; the cat may slow-blink back at you to indicate that they trust you.

HOW TO APPROACH A NEW CAT

- Gentle stroking with one finger or wand toy
 - If the cat sniffs your hand and is receptive to your presence, you may decide to try gently stroking their cheek with one finger
 - If the cat is not receptive to you, you can try using the stick part of a wand toy to gently stroke their cheek. This method keeps distance between you and the cat, which is less threatening
- Treats
 - Many cats love treats and will warm up to you quickly if you offer them a tasty snack

6. SOCIALIZATION METHODS



SOCIALIZATION METHODS

- There are many different tactics you can use to socialize cats; the method you choose will depend on the individual cat's needs..
- The goal is always positive association; we want to create a positive association with humans, and we use the various socialization methods in order to achieve that goal.
- Start with slow blinks
- Primary tools:
 - Food
 - Treats
 - Playtime

HOW TO MEASURE PROGRESS

- You'll know that you're making progress if the cat does any of the following:
 - Blink at you
 - Come out of hiding
 - Play
 - Eat in front of you
 - Groom themselves with a human around
 - Use litter box in front of you
 - Sleep while you are around

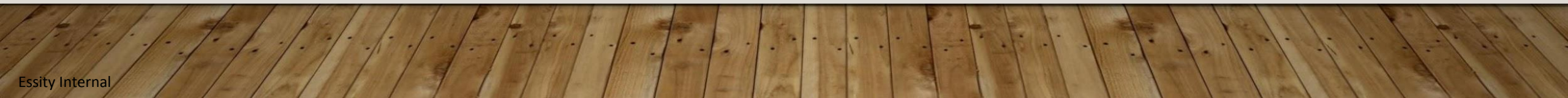
SOCIALIZATION RESOURCES

- The next slide provides links to videos that demonstrate different socialization methods in action; revisit these videos whenever you want a refresher on the various tactics available.
- Links to these videos are also posted on the Cat Socialization volunteer web page.

SOCIALIZATION VIDEOS

- Slow blinks <https://youtu.be/vdLf6l8oE-0>
- Charging the Clicker <https://youtu.be/PYCIuUEIQKM>
- Petting with a stick <https://youtu.be/Bu5nfml-t98>
- Low Five (stick, then hands)
<https://www.facebook.com/PhilaAnimalWelfareSociety/videos/1701707623194843/>
- PURRITO-ing <https://youtu.be/Ep3jKlbZrB8?t=2m32s>
- Sniffing hands
- Coming forward for pets
- Pets while eating
- Socializing hissy feral kittens <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gD4y99kBv0>

7. CLICKER TRAINING



WHY BOTHER TO TRAIN A CAT

- When so many cats live indoors, the one-to-one attention of training provides them with much needed mental stimulation, plus it strengthens the cat-guardian bond. It's also a useful, no-stress way of encouraging the cat to do what you want.
- Most importantly, teaching a cat 'recall' could save their life. Many lost cats are too terrified to move from their hiding place, even when you call their name. A cat trained to recall is more likely to respond because the trained behavior overrides the fear.
- The secret when learning to train a cat is to know that they aren't like dogs. Whereas dogs want to please you, it is no surprise to learn that cats only want to please themselves. This means you must incentivize the cat by providing something they really, really want.
- Find the Purr-fect Treat
- Pilchard and Noni would do back-flips for freeze-dried prawns; Widget is a ham addict, while Gromit loves yogurt drops. The first rule when learning how to train a cat is to know that every cat has their price and it's up to you to find it.

CATS AND CONCENTRATION

- The second rule is to understand that cats have a short attention span. This is attributed to their history of catching mice, which involves long periods of laziness interspersed with short bursts of frenzied concentration.
- To train a cat effectively, go for the little-and-often approach. Keep each session under five minutes, but hold several sessions throughout the day. Training works best when the cat is slightly hungry, so ideal times are before their morning and evening meals.

CATS AND CLICKERS

- The basic principle of clicker training is that the cat associates the click-clack of the clicker with their to-die-for treat. The cat then provides the cued behavior in order to trigger a click and therefore a treat.
- You can use other sounds instead of a clicker, if that is more comfortable for you
- Try using kibble rather than treats – or a mix of both – so that our trainable cats will not gain weight and will be even more eager for their regular scheduled mealtime

CLICKER TRAINING: PROCESS

- **Click and give a treat:** This is a no-strings-attached treat. You are teaching the cat to associate the click-clack with the imminent appearance of a freeze-dried prawn, sliver of ham, or yogurt treat. Repeat this click-and-treat process until the cat automatically looks at you when she hears the clicker.
- **Asking for action:** Once the cat knows what the sound means, you can start training specific behaviors. A successful behavior for a scared cat to start with is asking for “slow blinks”. This allows the animal to interact with you from a distance and possibly from their hiding spot. Slowly blink at the cat, once the cat blinks back, make the clicking sound and give a treat (kibble). Repeat until they constantly respond with a slow blink.
- **Identify the behavior:** To teach recall, you want the cat to come to you. Wait until the cat is walking towards you and click. Mark the behavior you want (approaching you); the sound of the clicker says: “You are so clever for coming to me; I’ll give you a treat.” The cat then thinks: *“What, seriously? All I have to do is walk towards you and I get snacks?! When can I do it again?”*
- **Minimizing wrong answers:** Never get angry with a cat who does not engage in action. It will not boost the cat’s confidence; instead, offer lots of baby steps.

CLICKER TRAINING: TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- **Asking for too much:** Sometimes we are so eager to make progress that we move faster than the cat is ready for. Be patient and give the cat the time it needs to follow your lead.
- **Repeat at every opportunity:** Keep the clicker and treats on you, and whenever the cat walks towards you, click and treat. Pretty soon the cat stops walking and starts running in her eagerness to get her reward.
- **Label the action:** Once she's regularly coming right up to you, try clicking when she looks in your direction. If she responds, now is the time to label the action, "Come" or "Here". As she strolls for her treat repeat the cue word, "Here", and give the treat.
- **Decrease the click rate:** Once she regularly responds to click and cue word, try gradually dropping the click rate and use a verbal command only. Reinforce from time to time with a click, "Here", and treat to keep the lesson fresh.

CLICKER TRAINING – VIDEO EXAMPLES

- Charging the Clicker <https://youtu.be/PYCIuUEIQKM>
- Sit https://youtu.be/TjhPKvm3A_4
- Stay <https://youtu.be/sDPfgL827qg>
- Fetch <https://www.wikihow.pet/Play-Fetch-With-Your-Cat>
- Spin/Circle <https://youtu.be/sM-NRI9jziE>
- Jump through arms, then hoops <https://youtu.be/-EU9YUaMHqg>

8. SHIFTS AND SIGNING UP



SHIFTS AND SIGNING UP

- Single shifts: <http://www.pawsvolunteers.org>
- Recurring shifts: email the following staff member to set up weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly shifts:
 - PAC: Meredyth@phillypaws.org
- Mentoring shifts:
 - Sign up for a Cat Pawsitive mentoring shift to spend an hour socializing cats with an experienced volunteer
 - These shifts can be very helpful for volunteers who are brand new to cat socialization,
- We need lots of help!