



**Heartland Humane**  
shelter & care

# Cat Handbook for Volunteers





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# Getting Started





# Introduction

Welcome to volunteering with the cats at Heartland Humane Shelter & Care! We're so glad you're here to share your love for cats. While you may feel comfortable with your cat handling skills, it is important to remember that cats in a shelter may act differently than the cats you've met before. Shelter animals are in a strange new environment with no familiar smells, bedding, people, and lots of weird noises. It takes time for cats to adjust to a shelter. With this guide, you will be able to make their adjustment more comfortable.

It's important to know the signs of stress and fearful behavior to ensure volunteers remain safe, while the animals are kept as comfortable as possible. To learn how to read the signs of stress and keep yourself safe, please read the entirety of this handbook.





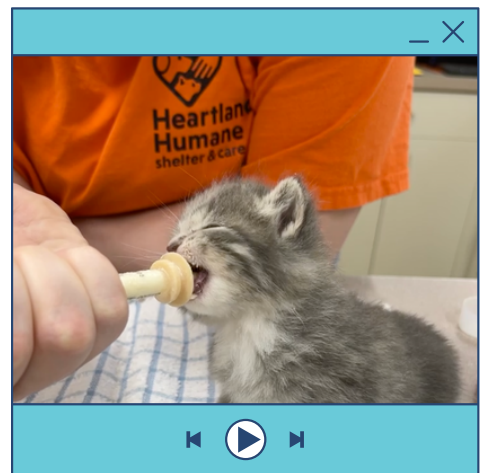
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# Who can volunteer with cats?

Anyone can volunteer! We allow anyone who is interested in volunteering to help our cats; regardless of experience, age, or disability.

- Youth volunteers under the age of 16 require supervision from a parent, guardian, or a volunteer with guardian approval.
- Accommodation requests related to disability should be made by to our volunteer coordinator.
  - [jason@heartlandhumane.org](mailto:jason@heartlandhumane.org)
  - 541-757-9000 x107

**The first step to start volunteering is to apply on our website!**



1. Once you have completed your application, you will need to attend the Volunteer Orientation that you registered for within the application.
2. After attending the general volunteer orientation, you will be able to schedule yourself for a Cattery Orientation, which is an in-depth tour of the catteries at our shelter.
  - a. Once you have attended the Cattery Orientation, you will be able to schedule yourself for Cat Care and Cat Socialization shifts!

**Read through the rest of this handbook to learn the following information:**

- Understanding of which cats you are allowed to handle, which shifts you are qualified for, and what benefits you will have depending on your cat volunteer level.
- Requirements and expectations that must be met in order to volunteer with our cats
- How to safely enrich our cats with toys, treats, and play time.
- How to prevent diseases from spreading in catteries
- Kitten, surgery, and zoonosis protocols.
- Basic understanding of cat body language.
- Basic understanding of what your body language tells the cat.
- Your limits!
- How to grow your skills as a cat volunteer!





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# Cat Handling Levels





# Cat Handling Levels

Based on each cat's behavior, the cat will receive a handling level, represented by the color of their cattery card. Please check cards EVERY time you volunteer as cattery cards may change based on observations.



## Blue Cats

About me 

Approved for all Blue Cat volunteers. These cats are usually great for new volunteers, and they are easy to handle.



### Statistics

-  Breed
-  Spayed/Neutered
-  Age
-  Vaccinated

Adoption Adoption Fee

Find out more about adoption and other programs here 






## Pink Cats

About me 

Approved for Pink Cat volunteers. This cat has demonstrated a need for an intermediate level of cat handling skills.



### Statistics

-  Breed
-  Spayed/Neutered
-  Age
-  Vaccinated

Adoption Adoption Fee

Find out more about adoption and other programs here 



## Yellow Cats

About me 

Staff only; Yellow Cat volunteers may handle ONLY with staff approval. This cat is not yet evaluated, or has been evaluated and needs to remain staff only. Pink and Blue Volunteers are NOT allowed to handle them unsupervised.



### Statistics

-  Breed
-  Spayed/Neutered
-  Age
-  Vaccinated

Adoption Adoption Fee

Find out more about adoption and other programs here 



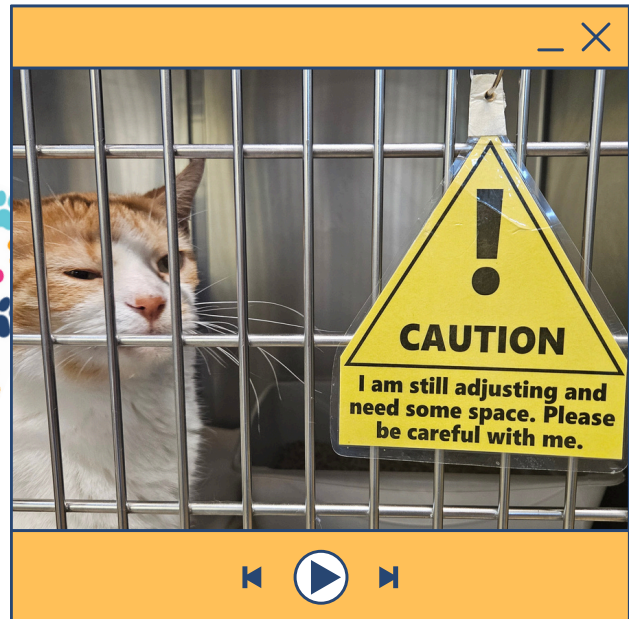


# Handling Exceptions

Our cats are given their color entirely based on their behavioral evaluation. The one exception is some **YELLOW** cats. Some cats are given a **YELLOW** rating because their behavior, but they could also receive **YELLOW** for any reason that the cat is to remain as staff only. For example, a cat in safe housing has its presence at the shelter kept confidential from members of the public.

**ALWAYS** ask staff before interacting with or taking photos of a **YELLOW** cat.

There are other factors to consider beyond handling levels. Here are some examples:



**ALWAYS** check above their cattery card for additional information before interacting with one of our cats.

**Volunteers are identified via the stickers they have on their name tag.**



A blue cat sticker indicates a **BLUE** Cat Certified Volunteer. A blue cat volunteer is new to volunteering with cats at Heartland. Vollin Tierre is a youth volunteer who prefers working with our dogs, and only wants to visit the cats when they are done volunteering in kennels.



A pink cat sticker indicates a **PINK** Cat Certified Volunteer. A pink cat volunteer has some volunteer experience and has demonstrated an intermediate understanding of cat behavior. Mr. Baelan Teer is only interested in working with cats, and is on track to get yellow cat certified.



A yellow cat sticker indicates a **YELLOW** Cat Certified Volunteer. A yellow cat volunteer has proven themselves to have an advanced understanding of cat behavior and Heartland practices. Ms. Vola Entyre has been a volunteer for a long time, and has proven to be someone we can rely on for any task.

When a volunteer has completed all items on a certification checklist to level up to the next color, they may be approached by staff and asked if they would like to level up. Or they may email the Volunteer Coordinator to express interest.

Work with **BLUE** cats to provide:

- Basic enrichment and socialization

Work with **STAFF** to provide:

- Assistance with cattery maintenance throughout the day, keeping cat dens clean and our cats comfortable
- Clean laundry and dishes
- Creative enrichment toys



## Volunteer Shifts for **BLUE** cat volunteers:

Upon completion of **TWO** New Cat Volunteer shifts, OR 25 hours of Shelter Sidekick Volunteering (Coming Soon) with cats, you will have access to the following shifts:

- Morning Cat Care (9AM-12PM)
  - Assist with morning cattery cleaning and feeding
- Early Afternoon Cat Socialization (12PM-2PM)
  - Provide basic enrichment and socialization to our cats
- Mid Afternoon Cat Socialization (2PM-4PM)
  - Provide basic enrichment and socialization to our cats
- End of Day Cat Care (4PM-6PM)
  - Assist with end of day feeding and cat enrichment



## Volunteer Benefits for **BLUE** cat volunteers:

Upon completion of **BLUE** Cat Volunteer Certification, you will have access to:

- Unsupervised interactions with **BLUE** cats onsite.
  - Interactions with **PINK** and **YELLOW** cats are permitted with staff supervision.
- Shelter Sidekick (Coming Soon) volunteering anytime!
  - 8AM-6PM everyday.
- Access to the Fear Free Shelter program





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# Cat Volunteer Certification

## BLUE

**Instructions: New cattery volunteers will be oriented then shown some kitty basics at HHSC. This is done by attending a Volunteer Orientation, followed by a Cattery Orientation. Here is a checklist we use to make sure you are ready to go!**

- Received the HHSC Cat Volunteer Handbook**
- Catteries layout and supplies orientation**
- Cattery rules and expectations of volunteers at HHSC**
- Knowledge of acceptable language and how we talk about the cats.**
- How we greet and handle BLUE cats and get them out of cat kennels.**
- Cleanliness inside and out of cat kennels.**
- A review of Kitten Protocol.**
- Reporting concerns accurately and in a timely manner to appropriate staff.**
- Euthanasia discourse and Q&A**

**Please return this form to the Volunteer Coordinator or Staff Supervisor so that we can update your file**

**Coordinator Use Only:**

**Completed: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Updated in Volgistics: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Added to File: \_\_\_\_\_**



## Pink Cat Volunteer Tasks

All **BLUE** level tasks, AND

Work with **BLUE** and **PINK** cats to provide:

- Intermediate enrichment, socialization, and training

Work with **STAFF** to provide:

- Cat handling at Outreach Events
- Help potential adoptees adopt a cat!
  - Requires attending an Ambassador Orientation

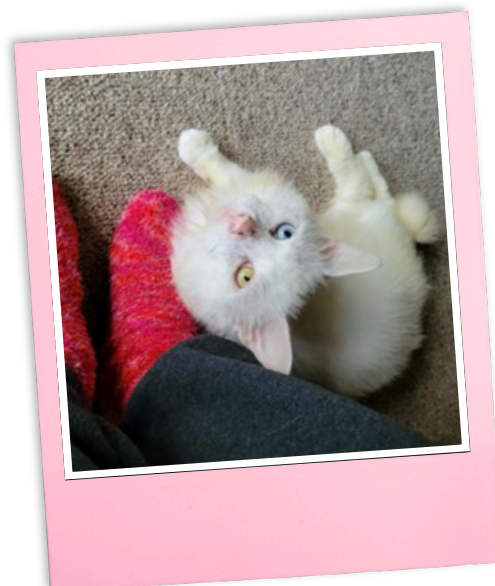




## Volunteer Shifts for **PINK** cat volunteers:

Upon completion of **PINK** Cat Volunteer Certification, you will have access to the following shifts:

- All **BLUE** Volunteer Shifts
  - Can now interact with **PINK** cats unsupervised during these shifts.
- Early Afternoon & End of Day Cat Ambassador (12PM-3PM & 3PM-6PM)
  - After attending an Ambassador Orientation, assist potential adoptees by answering questions, matching them with a **BLUE** or **PINK** cat that fits their interests, and monitoring cat meets.



## Volunteer Benefits for **PINK** cat volunteers:

Upon completion of **PINK** Cat Volunteer Certification, you will have access to:

- All **BLUE** cat volunteer benefits.
- Unsupervised interactions with **BLUE** and **PINK** cats.
  - Interactions with **YELLOW** cats are permitted with staff supervision.
- Handle **BLUE** and **PINK** cats at adoption and other outreach events!
- Work with the public to get our cats into their forever homes as a Cat Ambassador!
  - Requires attending Ambassador Orientation.





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# Cat Volunteer Certification

## PINK

**Instructions: Some of these items will NOT be covered in your requisite 10 hours of volunteering. Ask a staff member or **YELLOW** Cat Volunteer for assistance in completing this list, they can sign off for you!**

- Have completed 10 hours of volunteering as a **BLUE** Cat Volunteer (about 4 shifts)**
- Completion of online Fear Free training; print/email certificate to Volunteer Coordinator.**
- Demonstrating properly crating a cat for transport.**
- FIV, FeLV, and Ringworm protocol.**
- Learning feline behavior de-escalation tactics.**
- Understanding of why cats may be Pink and what we can do to help them get to Blue or meet them where they are at.**

**Please return this form to the Volunteer Coordinator or Staff Supervisor so that we can update your file**

**Coordinator Use Only:**

**Completed: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Updated in Volgistics: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Added to File: \_\_\_\_\_**



## Yellow Cat Volunteer Tasks

All **BLUE** and **PINK** level tasks, AND

Work with **BLUE**, **PINK**, and (with staff approval) **YELLOW** cats to provide:

- Advanced enrichment, socialization, and training

Work with **STAFF** to provide:

- Care to our cats in Staff and **YELLOW** Cat Volunteer areas
- Training and mentoring new volunteers!



Volunteer Shifts for **YELLOW** cat volunteers:

Upon completion of **YELLOW** Cat Volunteer Certification, you will have access to the following shifts:

- All **BLUE** and **PINK** cat volunteer shifts
  - Can now interact with **YELLOW** cats unsupervised during these shifts as long as you receive staff approval.
- Cat Care with our Partners (Time Varies)
  - Clean our cat dens at PetCo and PetSmart. This is a huge help!





# Yellow Cat Volunteer Benefits

Volunteer Benefits for **YELLOW** cat volunteers:

Upon completion of **YELLOW** Cat Volunteer Certification, you will have access to:

- All **BLUE** and **PINK** cat volunteer benefits.
- Unsupervised interactions with **BLUE**, **PINK**, and **YELLOW** cats.
  - Unsupervised interactions with **YELLOW** cats require staff approval.
- Bring a guest volunteer to help with your shift!
  - They do not need to apply, but they must sign a waiver.





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# Cat Volunteer Certification

## YELLOW

Instructions: **YELLOW** Cat Volunteers have displayed an advanced understanding of HHSC practices and have established trust with the staff. If you believe that you have met these requirements, ask an Animal Care staff member to submit an endorsement. Receiving an endorsement does not guarantee you will receive **YELLOW** Cat Volunteer Certification.

- Have completed 60 hours of volunteering with as a **PINK** Cat volunteer (about 20 shifts)
- Animal Care Staff Endorsement submitted to the Volunteer Coordinator for review

### Endorsement:

**Animal Care Signature** .....

**Please return this form to the Volunteer Coordinator for consideration**

Coordinator Use Only:

Completed: \_\_\_\_

Updated in Volgistics: \_\_\_\_

Added to File: \_\_\_\_



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# Cat Volunteer Basics







# Basic Requirements

- Youth volunteers under the age of 16 require supervision from a parent, guardian, or a volunteer with guardian approval.
- Wear appropriate attire. Long pants and closed toed shoes are required even in the summer.
- Wear your ID badge whenever you are volunteering
- Communicate all valuable findings with staff, including cat preferences, behavior, or medical concerns.
- Track your volunteer hours by logging in and out of the Volunteer Information Center (located in the volunteer room)
- Only volunteer in areas you are qualified for, and animals you are certified for.
- To begin volunteering with cats, you must be **BLUE** cat certified.



## Only interact with cats that you are certified for

- Remember, you may interact with cats of your color or lower unsupervised. You can interact with animals above your level, you just need staff approval and supervision.
- ALWAYS ask staff before interacting with or taking photos of a **YELLOW** cat.



## Before you handle a cat, sanitize your hands.

- Sanitizing your hands between every cat prevents the spread of disease.
- You do not need to sanitize your hands again if you are handling a cat that is from the same window or cat den



## Treat our cats with kindness

- Heartland staff and volunteers use positive reinforcement only.

## Maintain Cleanliness in catteries and cat dens

- If you see an accident inside a cattery, please place a cat into their assigned crate and clean their area. If you leave it for staff, it may be left there for a while, as staff is constantly on the move with other tasks.



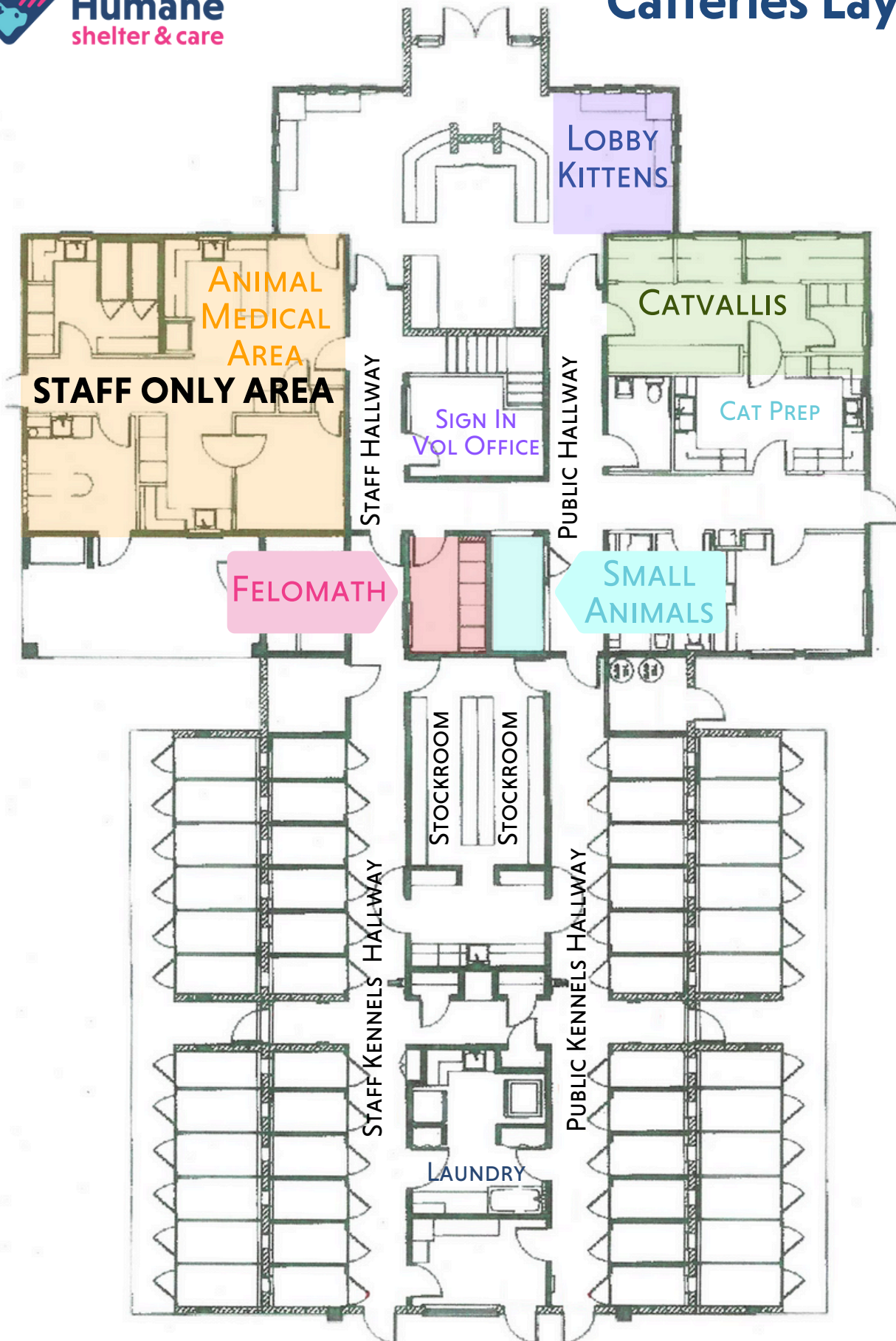
## DO

- **Observe before handling**
  - Start by reading the cat's cattery card. Then observe the cat in their space. If the cat exhibits concerning or unfamiliar behaviors, do not handle that cat.
- **Get acquainted before handling**
  - Let the cat get used to your presence, smell, voice, and give them a treat.

## DON'T

- **Punish or use negative reinforcement**
  - At no time are you to strike or yell at an animal.
- **Corner a cat; at any time for any reason.**
  - Avoid forcing a cat into doing something it does not want to do. Please move on and this cat will be handled by staff.
- **Hold cats in close proximity to each other or let multiple cats on the floor**
  - Multiple dens may be open, and multiple cats may be held as long as they are kept separate, but there should only be one cat on the floor at a time.
  - Don't allow sick cats near other cats or on the floor
- **Grab a cat by their scruff**
  - If you are having difficulty with a cat, use a towel to wrap them up or ask a staff member for help.

# Catteries Layout



**Daily enrichment is important mental stimulation for a cat's mind.**

## **Toys are provided for enrichment**

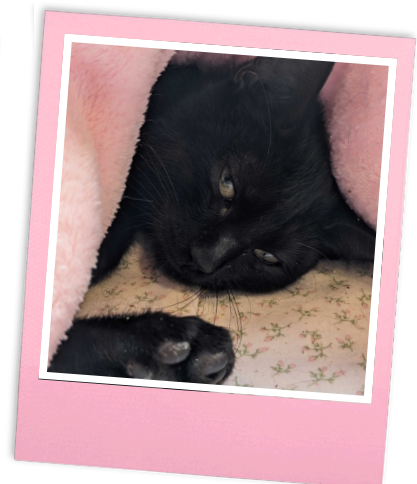
We have a variety of toys available for our cats. Each cat gets toys to play with in their cat dens or windows. (unless it is an unsafe toy for them, i.e. they eat them). Some toys can't fit in their den, so they are kept outside the den to play with on the floor, such as cat wands.

## **Food Enrichment Options**

We have a variety of food enrichment options available. Food enrichment provides mental stimulation for cats while they are in their den. It gives them an outlet for chewing/entertaining themselves.

## **Cat Socialization**

Providing socialization to our cats enhances their well-being by reducing stress and fostering trust with humans, making them more approachable, playful, and adoptable. This increased engagement not only improves their behavior but also helps them develop essential skills for their future homes.



**Cats are allowed on the floor of their catteries to play, socialize, and stretch their legs. When you have a cat on the floor, remember these guidelines:**

- **Do not let sick cats on the floor**
  - If a sick cat is on the floor, return it to its den or window and mop the areas it touched.
- **Keep the door closed**
- **Only one cat on the floor at a time**
  - Multiple dens can be open if someone is attending each open den, but only one cat on the floor at a time.
- **Avoid leaving cats unattended on the floor in a cattery**
  - Cats may escape if someone enters a cattery and is unaware that there is a cat in there.



Different precautions are used with kittens who have not received all their vaccines.

## Guidelines for Kittens

- Sanitize your hands before handling a kitten, you don't need to sanitize your hands again if you are handling a kitten from the same litter
- Do not let kittens onto unsanitary surfaces, such as the floor.

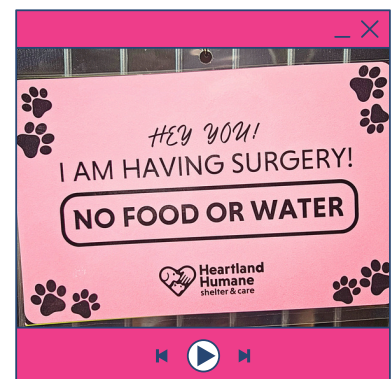


Because we spay/neuter every cat and kitten at Heartland, you will often see signs for cats and kittens that are scheduled for surgery, or who are recovering from surgery.

## To prevent complications during or after surgery, follow the guidelines listed below:

- **Scheduled for Surgery**
  - Must not be given food or water prior to surgery.
- **Recovering from Surgery**
  - Limit play to to prevent them from overworking themselves
  - Be careful not to touch any surgery sites when picking them up

**If you see what you think is a complication, let staff know immediately**



## Zoonosis Definition:

Zoonosis, or zoonotic diseases, are diseases and infections that can be transmitted between species, including animals to humans.

## Common Zoonosis in Kennels:

- **Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)**
  - Spreads through blood and occasionally saliva. While not the most contagious, there is no cure. Not contagious to humans.
  - Could possibly develop into feline AIDS.
- **Feline Leukemia (FeLV)**
  - Spreads through saliva and is highly contagious. Not contagious to humans.
  - Leads to the destruction of white blood cells, leaving infected cats more susceptible to infection and cancer.

**To avoid contracting or spreading zoonosis in the catteries, please follow these guidelines:**

- **Wash your hands with soap and water after handling infected cats.**
- **Do not let cats with highly contagious infections on the floor or near other cats.**
  - Keep cat windows with infected cats locked during public hours.
- **Read their cattery card for additional information.**





To provide a safe, healthy, and comfortable experience for each cat in our catteries, you should know the equipment we have available.

- **Flat or Paper Collar**

- All cats must have a collar with their name or an ID tag while in the shelter.



- **Kuranda Bed**

- Elevated bedding provided for their cat den.
- Cats feel safer when on an elevated surface.



- **Feral Den**

- Used for feral cats so they have a space they can retreat to for their and our safety.
- Feral cats can be closed in their feral den.



- **Assigned Carrier**

- Each cat has an assigned carrier that they are kept in during the morning cleaning routine.
- Carriers can be found in Cat Prep.





# Possible Issues in Catteries

## **CAT-ON-CAT ALTERCATION**

If a cat-to-cat altercation is to occur, DO NOT try to separate the cats. Never put yourself between the cats. Call for staff IMMEDIATELY.

- You may try to stop the altercation with loud noises, yelling, banging bowls, or by throwing a blanket over the cat's head.

## **CAT-ON-HUMAN ALTERCATION**

Your safety is our priority. If you are feeling uneasy with a cat, please return them to their den or window immediately and let staff know what happened. If you are unable to do so:

- DO NOT make any quick movements, try to remain calm and move slowly.
- Avert your eyes and turn your body. Do not stare at the cat.
- Call for a staff member

Animal bites are always a risk while working with animals. With caution and proper training most bites are preventable.

**If a bite does occur and breaks skin, it is required by law to follow these guidelines below:**

**1. Report the bite immediately to a staff member.**

- The animal must be placed on a 10 day bite hold as required by Benton County, OR law.

**2. Clean the wound.**

- Staff can help you by providing access to a first aid kit.
- Please seek additional medical care if necessary.

**3. Fill out a bite report and a CHUBB form (insurance).**

- The bite report will be filed with the Benton County.
- The CHUBB report will be kept on hand in case any additional medical treatment is needed.



# Personal Protection Equipment

We use a variety of cleaning products that are designed to eliminate common zoonotic diseases, such as giardia, while also being safe for animals. While it is safe for animals once cleaning is done, it can be hazardous during the cleaning procedure if it makes contact with your skin, eyes, or it is inhaled.

In kennels, the cleaning supplies we commonly use are:

- Rescue
- Virkon
- Kennelsol

**When cleaning, volunteers are required to wear personal protection equipment (PPE) according to this chart: →**

**Volunteers should never be handling concentrated cleaning materials. This is a staff only task.**

<b>Required PPE</b>		
<b>Disinfectant</b>	<b>PPE for Deep Cleaning</b>	<b>PPE for Spot Cleaning</b>
Rescue	Eye Protection, Gloves	Gloves
Virkon	Mask, Eye Protection, and Gloves	Gloves
Kennelsol	Eye Protection and Gloves	Gloves

**Volunteers should never be handling concentrated Rescue, Virkon, or Kennelsol**

**Rescue**



**Virkon**



**Kennelsol**



**Scan for  
the Safety  
Data Sheet:**

You may see some staff-only tasks being performed by a select few volunteers. These are volunteers who have demonstrated advanced understanding of Heartland protocols and have been trained to perform these roles.

**Below is a list of some tasks you should not perform unless you have received proper certification and have been given approval by staff.**

- When new cats arrive for an intake or surrender, do not approach and attempt to pet these animals. This is a difficult time and space must be given.
- Cleaning cat dens and interacting with cats in the Animal Medical Area
- Handling concentrated cleaners such as Rescue, Virkon, and Kennelsol.





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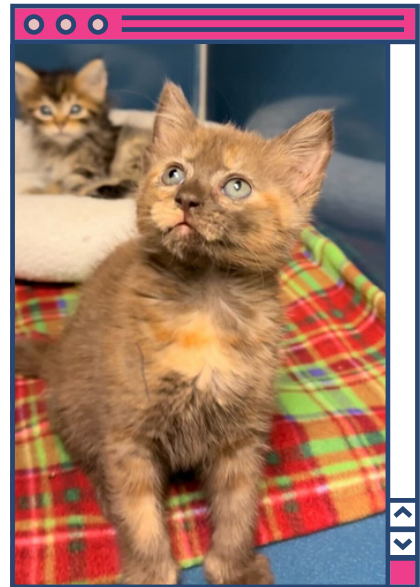
# How Cats Communicate



Knowledge of basic cat body language will help you meet the cats we have in the shelter. The ability to read cat body language will help you understand if cats are feeling uncomfortable or if they are ready to be your friend. First impressions are especially important. Not only will a bad first impression hurt your relationship with the cat, but it makes it harder for the cat to get comfortable when meeting potential adoptees.

Here are a few tips to help!

- Always allow the cat to walk up to you!
- Extend a relaxed finger and allow them to sniff you before petting them.
  - This mimics how cats meet other cats!
- Approach them from an angle.
- Turning sideways and bending at the knees.
- Never lean over the cat. This allows the cats to feel like you are not being overbearing or threatening.
- Looming may be intimidating to a fearful cat. Sometime it is best to try and let them sniff you and move on.
- Stay relaxed as cats can read your body language.
- Do not stare the cat in the face; keep a soft gentle gaze. Offer a low, soft voice when greeting or giving praise.
- Do not take a cat's food or other high value items (toys & treats).





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# Introduction to Body Language

Just because a cat is purring, it does not mean they are content. It's important to understand what our cat's are telling us, ensuring our interactions are safe and enjoyable for the cats.

Take the time to observe each cat before interacting with them. Understanding their individual personalities and needs will make the time spent with them better for all parties involved. Your handling skills will grow with practice!

Be sure to observe the whole cat. Study the ears, mouth, and tension in the face. Look at the body position and tail together. This will help to give you the most accurate reading of their body language.

If at any time you are unsure of the cat's behavior, return the cat to it's cat den or window and inform a staff member. They can help you interpret what the cat is trying to tell you.







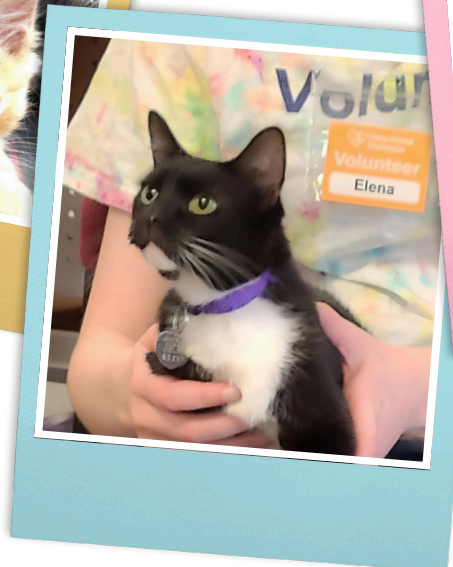
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# Body Language of Happy Cats

Body language of a happy cat may appear differently depending on the cat. Remember that all cats are individuals. They usually display more than one of these signs when they are relaxed and happy.

**Be sure you are looking at their full body, not just one part of the cat.**

- Eyes: soft gaze, pupils small and oval shaped.
- Mouth: closed and relaxed.
- Ears: upright and relaxed.
- Hair Coat: normal and natural.
- Body: sitting, neutral, loose.
- Tail: loose, not tucked.





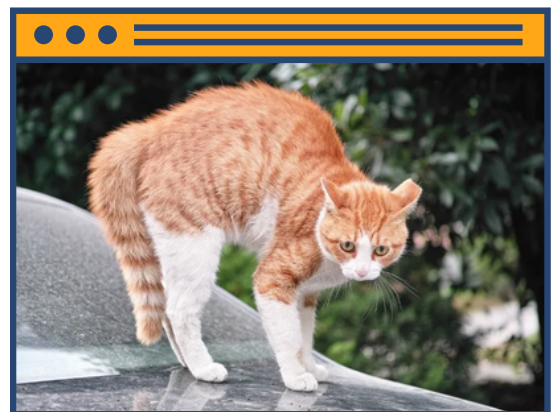
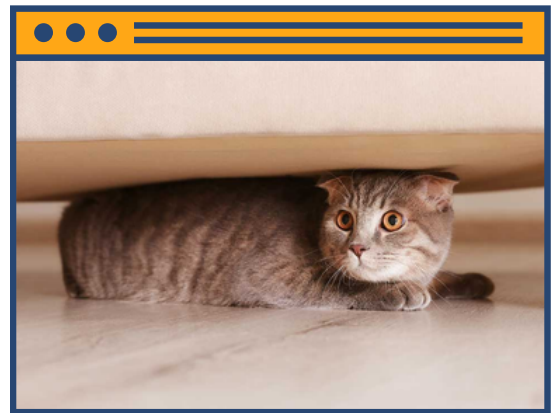
# Body Language of Fearful Cats

Body language of a fearful cat may appear differently depending on the cat. Remember that all cats are individuals, they may display one or more of these signs. Please allow these cats to have their space, these are cats that staff will handle.

- Eyes: hard stare; wide, pupils large and round.
- Mouth: growling, open (hissing), lip licking.
- Ears: flattened and turned.
- Hair Coat: slightly puffed up, especially along the back.
- Body: crouched, tense, legs tucked, arched back, head drawn back; hiding or retreating as far back as possible.
- Tail: tightly wrapped, tip may be twitching.

**Remember that cats do not want to be comforted the way a friend would.**

Hugs, overcrowding, or lingering in front of a cat may make them more stressed and uncomfortable. Give a fearful cat its space.



To learn more about reading cat behavior, and how to reduce stress in our cats, take the Fear Free Shelter online course. This program is required in order to advance from a **BLUE** to a **PINK** cat volunteer.



The goal of the Fear Free Shelter Program is to improve the experiences of animals by educating shelter, rescue, and animal welfare employees and volunteers like you about their emotional needs.

Fear free aims to empower you to apply key strategies and techniques designed to reduce the negative emotional states that are commonly experienced by shelter and rescue animals—including fear, anxiety, stress (FAS), and frustration—and increase their enrichment opportunities.



The Fear Free Shelter Program provides training suitable for all of the individuals involved in the care and oversight of shelter and rescue animals—from medical and behavioral staff to intake, reception, cattery, and cattery staff to animal control officers, adoption counselors, foster caregivers, and shelter volunteers.

**Scan this code to get started and see Jason for certification letter**

