



Confidence Building

Cats coming into a new home may be very scared of all the noises, new people, sights, smells, routines, and other animals (if applicable). We can use this protocol to help them ease into their new routine and help them realize that the world isn't as scary as they might think.

Setting up a Safe Haven is also recommended for a fearful cat. You can find the protocol for creating a safe haven included at the end of this protocol.

Notes:

- *CERS (conditioned emotional response) = Blinks, reciprocating blinks, eye contact, meowing, purring, trilling, chirping, and other distance decreasing behaviors such as head bunts, cheek rubbing, etc.*
- *Get 4/5 or more CERS before moving to the next step; Stop the first time the cat moves away or shows any signs of anxiety or arousal.*

Classical Conditioning

This is the first step to the confidence building process. All we're doing is building up a positive association to us and our approach to start.

Teaching the behavior:

1. Approach your cat and drop treats near them.
2. After dropping treats, walk away and out of eyesight of the cat for approximately 10 seconds.
3. Return and repeat the process for a total of 5 times per session.
 - a. If your cat does not eat the treats, end session.
 - b. If your cat does eat the treats, but only after you've walked away, end session and continue with classical conditioning until they do eat in front of you.
4. Once your cat is eating in front of you push to Capturing Social Behaviors.

Troubleshooting:

- Is your cat not eating? Make sure you're using high value treat such as baby food, salmon, chicken, etc. (unless they have medical dietary restrictions). If they are still not eating using these novel treats, then keep trying different treats until you find something they like.
- Be sure to listen to what your cat is telling you. If you try pushing and see fear- or distance-increasing signals increase, then drop back to previous step. Don't push further until you see relaxed and social behavior on each step.

Capturing Social Behaviors

Once the cat begins eating in front of you, you can now work on capturing social behavior. Behaviors like meowing, making soft eye contact, giving slow blinks or stretching their paws out towards you in an affiliative manner all count as social behaviors and can/should be rewarded.

Teaching the behavior:

1. Approach your cat and wait for them to show a social behavior.
2. When the behavior is performed (the cat makes eye contact with you, meows, etc.), click and then reward.
3. Continue doing this until the cat begins coming towards you and/or starts showing social behaviors immediately upon your approach and throughout the session.
4. Once your cat is consistently showing social behavior, move on to Hand Targeting.

Troubleshooting:

- Is your cat not eating? Step back to classical conditioning, or you can bridge the two protocols and reward for your cat performing social behaviors on your approach, walk away and then repeat until they are eating in front of you again.
- Keep sessions short, roughly 2 to 5 minutes per session.

Hand Targeting

Notes:

- Hold your hand with one or two fingers extended.
- Try resting your hand or arm on a sturdy surface such as the edge of the kennel or some bedding.
- Push to the next step when your cat has successfully targeted your hand at the current step's length four out of five or more, hold on three out of five times, and drop on two out of five times or fewer.

Teaching the behavior:

1. Begin with your arm fully extended and slowly present your hand in front of the cat. Mark and reward anytime your cat makes contact with your hand.
2. Reduce how far you're holding your arm by approximately 4 inches.
3. Reduce how far you're holding your arm by approximately 8 inches.
4. At this point you can try petting your cat if they remain soft and relaxed. Stop at the first sign of stress or avoidance behavior.

Petting

Now for the best part: petting! The final step in confidence building, **this** is what all of the previous protocols have led us to.

Notes:

- Be patient.
- Keep interactions short to start (1 to 3 seconds), and then lengthen as your cat continues to solicit attention.
- Be patient.
- Make sure there is plenty of room for your cat to move away and remove themselves if needed.
- Be patient.

Teaching the behavior:

1. Hold your hand out and let your cat sniff and inspect it.
2. Wait for your cat to offer social behaviors and solicit attention from you such as head butting or cheek rubbing.
3. Once your cat starts to solicit attention, pet them for approximately 1 to 3 seconds to begin with, and then disengage.
4. Offer treats after you disengage. Wait for them to finish eating before offering your hand again, or, if they did not eat, offer your hand again and wait for them to solicit attention, repeating the process.
5. As your cat becomes more comfortable, you can lengthen the amount of time you spend petting them by a few seconds each time. Be sure your cat remains soft and relaxed and watch for any signs of arousal such as tail flicking, shifting weight away, distress vocalizations, etc. If stress occurs, then immediately stop petting and drop back to step one. If your cat remains over the threshold, then either drop back to capturing social behaviors, switch to interactive play, or end session.

Safe Haven

A safe haven is an important place for your cat to have within the home. This can be a place to help fearful cats feel more comfortable, give reactive or high arousal cats a temporary place to be removed from triggers, or just a place that your cat can go to during the day when they feel like being alone.

Creating a Safe Haven

Create an area for your cat to go to that enables them to be able to remove themselves and be alone. The area should be somewhere that is quiet and more removed from the rest of the home; should be a very comfortable place to be; and include things such as a bed, pillows, toys, a litterbox, places to hide, and vertical space. You can choose to feed them their meals in this space and give them toys that they can play with exclusively when they are in their safe haven. When introducing them to the new safe haven space, give them lots of treats and feed them incrementally to help build a positive association with the space.

For Fearful Cats

Many fearful cats will benefit from having a safe haven to be able to have space to remove themselves if/when they feel overwhelmed. This could be during a thunderstorm, when there are new and unfamiliar people over, if there's a lot of activity in the home, or any time that the cat is feeling stressed. Follow the guidelines above for making the space comfortable and helping your fearful cat acclimate to their safe haven. Once they have acclimated to this space, keep access to it open for them at all times, and you will see they should start going to it on their own when needed.

For Reactive or High Arousal Cats

Creating a safe haven can also be a key part of a reactive or high arousal cat's management within the home. If your cat is reactive to certain stimuli, it can sometimes be impossible or impractical to avoid their triggers, such as novel people coming to the home, children, people at the door, etc. If/When these triggers occur, lead your cat to their safe haven, ideally before they begin reacting. For example, you might set your cat up in their safe haven before your guests even come over. When in their safe haven, either give your cat their meal, or give them treats via a puzzle toy, or give them toys that they will play with by themselves. You want to set them up to be able to keep themselves entertained and busy the entire time they're in the safe haven, if they do not fall asleep while they are there.