AAPF Position Statement

Positive reinforcement for cats

Positive reinforcement is defined as giving a reward – something that is desirable for the individual – to increase the likelihood of that behavior recurring.\(^1\) Cats learn best through positive reinforcement.\(^1\) Favorite rewards for cats include delicious treats, catnip, interactive play, and petting or grooming. It is important to remember that the reward must be desirable to that individual cat, and may vary between cats.

Rewards must be given immediately (within three seconds) so that we don’t inadvertently reward other behavior that may happen after the desired one. Rewards can be used to train a cat to do a desired behavior or to teach a cat which behavior is wanted. For example, a cat can be taught to sit if rewarded immediately after sitting, and especially if it is done consistently early in training. If we want a cat to scratch on a scratching post, entice it to do so and, when the cat scratches in the desired location, immediately reward. It is important that rewards are not unintentionally given for undesirable behavior. Ignoring or redirecting negative behavior is the best way to eliminate that behavior. For example, if a cat is meowing for food and you ignore the cat while meowing, the cat will likely stop meowing to be fed. Feed the cat when it is not meowing.

Punishment can be deleterious, leading to fear and possible fear aggression, stress and stress-associated health and behavior problems, inhibition of learning the desired new behavior, and breakdown of the human–animal bond. Physical punishment should never be used with cats or other animals.\(^2\) Verbal punishment can also increase fear and possibly fear aggression. Verbal punishment also focuses attention on the undesired behavior of the cat and may inadvertently reward it.

References
Chair: Ilona Rodan. Members: Wendy Simpson, Paula Monroe-Aldridge, Sarah Anderson, Mike Westfall

CFP

Cat Friendly Practices are on the rise in the US

At the time of going to press, just three short months, there were already 91 AAFP Cat Friendly Practices in the USA and another 334 in progress. These Cat Friendly Practices are already using their Marketing Toolkit to promote their practices in print and online!

I think that the primary benefit is that it is a framework that allows you to objectively review your policies with regards to feline patients, and discover ways that you could improve both your facility and your interactions with clients and their cats. Through expanding your awareness of the issues cats and their owners face with respect to veterinary care, you increase the likelihood that owners will present their cats to you for regular visits and hopefully will be able to improve both length and quality of life. I think that is the main benefit – We started this process thinking that if we could get one owner to bring their cat in early so we can institute a preventative wellness program, then the CFP designation has been worth it. We did that in the first week. The designation is a talking point that allows us to open a conversation with owners about what we do and why cat preventative health is so important.

Tatum Point Animal Hospital, Phoenix, AR

What are you waiting for? Do you like unhappy patients, less income and fewer return clients? If not then work on it...they are telling you the keys to success with these patients, it is up to you to take the information and run with it!

Fox Valley Cat Clinic, Menasha, WI

Everyone is more aware of our responsibility to make every visit for every cat as stress free as we possibly can. We have had a lot fewer cats getting stressed to the point of being aggressive, everyone is happier and no one has been scratched by an angry (scared) kitty in a long time.

Adobe Animal Hospital, Petaluma, CA – on what effect has the CFP had on your practice and staff

For more information on Cat Friendly Practice go to www.catvets.com

Snap shots

Boyd Jones, adjunct professor of companion animal medicine at Massey University, New Zealand, received the 2012 BSAVA Blaine Award during the World Small Animal Veterinary Association Congress in Birmingham, UK, for his outstanding contributions to the advancement of small animal surgery. Professor Jones helped launch JFMS in 1999 and was an Associate Editor of the journal for a number of years

Margie Scherk, JFMS North American Editor, takes a well earned rest after completing the Lavaman Triathlon in Hawaii on April 1. She finished the 1.5 km swim, 40 km bike ride and 10 km run in a total time of three hours, 23 mins and 27 seconds, raising $10,220 for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society of Canada in the process