

PRACTICE PLANS

Implementation Plans to Discontinue Elective Declawing at your Practice

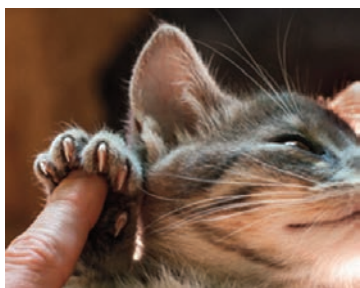
Below are two sample plans to discontinue elective declawing, which provide steps and ideas that you can customize to fit your practice.

Now is the Time to Discontinue Declawing: Immediate Roll Out

Congratulations! You've made the important decision for your veterinary practice to immediately stop declawing! Here are some steps regarding making the announcement and rolling out this change.

1. Share this good news with your team members.

- Share with them why you made this decision so they understand why this is important to you, the practice, clients, and patients. (e.g., Currently, we only perform a few declawing procedures a year. So, there isn't a high demand and more importantly, it is an outdated practice that can harm cats and permanently leave them in pain.)



- Listen to any questions, concerns, and praise from your team members. Then provide them the facts and information that support your decision. This Claw Friendly Educational Toolkit can be a great resource to help educate the entire team.
- Train all team members on answering client questions consistently about why your practice is no longer performing declawing procedures. If a client presses the issue, provide your team with scripts and key messages they can use (find samples under the Claw Friendly Educational Toolkit sections "Phone Counseling" and "FAQs").
 - Provide clients with the Client Resources in the toolkit: Alternatives to Declawing Brochure, It's Natural to Scratch Flyer, the AAFP's Position Statement, Living with a Clawed Cat Flyer, and a link to the AAFP's Living with a Clawed Cat website page (catfriendly.com/scratch) which has information on why cats have claws, why cats scratch inanimate objects, best practices for living with a clawed cat, ideal scratching surfaces, inappropriate scratching tips, and training your cat to scratch on certain approved items.

- You can also provide your team with the literature review and summaries so they are prepared to answer specific questions about behavior and long-term pain.
- Train your team members on how to educate your clients on why cats scratch, ways to re-direct scratching that is problematic for caregivers, benefits of pheromones, how to live happily with a clawed cat, and how declawing is harmful to cats. This Toolkit can be a great resource to provide your team with information to help educate clients.
- Explain to your team members that if a client asks about declawing, the policy is to educate about cat's natural behavior to scratch and what declawing entails. Remind them your practice does not recommend other clinics for a specific declaw procedure.
- Review and consider updating your practice's complaint policy as needed. Consider having a destination and procedure for any client who has a complaint that the practice has stopped declawing (i.e., all complaints should be in writing and sent to concerns@_____.com).
- Share the AAFP's front office phone counseling script provided in the Claw Friendly Educational Toolkit.

2. Review and update your website to remove any reference to declawing procedures. We recommend doing a keyword search using the words "declaw" and "onychectomy" within your website.

- Review all forms, policies, and resources in order to remove any content about declawing procedures. Update them with information about offering complimentary nail trims using Cat Friendly Handling and/or providing Claw Counseling to clients.
- Send out a press release and/or an email/newsletter announcement celebrating the news to your current and former clients. Be proud and make it a BIG DEAL!
- Post text on your website and/or social media channels

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*Implementation Plans to Discontinue Elective Declawing at your Practice***Gradual Plan: Soft Launch Over a Couple Months**

Congratulations! You've made the ultimate decision to announce that your practice will stop declawing. Here are some steps to take in order to prepare your team members and phase in this change in philosophy.

Month 1: Plan a series of team meetings (to present the idea

and plan, review the scientific literature, allow your staff to share concerns and praise in a safe space, create plans to address concerns, create key messaging for team members to use with clients, etc.). Space out the meetings over 1-3 months as needed.

- **Meeting #1:** Discuss this change with your entire team. Explain that this will be a gradual plan in order to implement new procedures, educate staff and clients, and launch the announcement. Determine your goal date to completely and officially stop all declawing procedures.
 - Relay the reasons you decided to stop offering any declawing procedures.
 - Provide your team members with this AAFP Claw Friendly Educational Toolkit and review the scientific literature abstracts, scratching education resources, FAQs, practice experiences, and client resources. Ask staff to read through all of the materials before the next meeting and to prepare/submit their questions and/or concerns so they can be discussed at the next meeting.
- **Meeting #2:** Relay progress, review additional information, and brainstorm solutions.
 - Review the Claw Counseling: Helping Clients Live Alongside Cats with Claws article and answer any questions.
 - Review the “FAQs” section of the Claw Friendly Educational Toolkit and go over sample phone counseling scripts for clients and additional responses to clients.
 - Discuss your team member’s questions and concerns. Encourage team members to identify and develop positive solutions. Consider offering complimentary nail trims using Cat Friendly Handling.

- Consider asking team members to watch AAFP’s two free webinars which include Claw Counseling: Living in Harmony with Clawed Cats and Feline Onychectomy: What We Know and What We Don’t Know.

- **Meeting #3:** Discuss progress of processes and the status of the roll out announcement to clients.
 - Provide training sessions on complimentary nail trims using Cat Friendly Handling so cats and clients have a positive experience.
 - Discuss your process and approach to providing a claw counseling session to any client who asks about declawing.
- **Meeting #4:** Practice!
 - Have the team role-play using the phone script, explaining that declawing is no longer offered at your practice, responding to a client who wants to have their cat declawed, etc.
 - Ask veterinarians and technicians to practice providing a Claw Counseling session.
- If your team members are not on board with the plan or are struggling, schedule additional meetings either as a team or individually.

Month 2:

- Review and update your website to remove any reference to declawing procedures. We recommend doing a keyword search using the words “declaw” and “onychectomy” within your website.
- Draft your policy changes and customize the AAFP sample phone counseling scripts and FAQ responses for your staff. Be sure to include that the practice does not refer clients to other clinics for declaw procedure.
- Create your plan for phone and in-person complaints about discontinuing declawing procedures at your practice. Will you follow your current complaint policy? Consider having a destination and procedure for declawing complaints (i.e. all complaints should be in writing and sent to concerns@_____.com).
- Review the AAFP’s Client Resources in the Claw Friendly Educational Toolkit. Determine what educational materials you will provide to clients.



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*Implementation Plans to Discontinue
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continued

Month 3: Update your website to include AAFP Client Resources like Living with a Clawed Cat Flyer, It's Natural to Scratch Flyer, and link to the AAFP's Living with a Clawed Cat website page (catfriendly.com/scratch) which has information on why cats have claws, why cats scratch inanimate objects, best practices for living with a clawed cat, ideal scratching surfaces, tips on how to stop inappropriate scratching, training your cat to scratch on certain approved items. If you have a newsletter for clients include these educational materials as well.

- Set a deadline and inform clients.
- Update all forms and resources to remove any content about declawing procedures. Add policies about complimentary nail trims and/or providing Claw Counseling to clients.

Months 4-6:

- Begin offering Claw Counseling sessions to any client who requests information about declawing. Utilize this time to educate clients about declawing (why the practice has stopped, what the surgery includes, what it can do long-term, etc.), and how to live with their clawed cat.
- STOP DECLAWING!
- On your goal date, send out a press release and/or an email/newsletter announcement celebrating the news to your current and former clients. Be proud and make it a BIG DEAL!
- Post text on your website and/or social media channels.

Sample Announcement Text

As a designated Cat Friendly Practice®, we demonstrate a unique ability to treat and handle feline patients gently and with respect. It is our mission to implement the highest standards of care, and stay ahead with offering the best practices in feline medicine.

As we continue to provide you and your cat with the best possible care, [Practice Name] is proud to announce we will no longer be offering declawing procedures (onychectomy)!

Feline declawing is an elective and ethically controversial procedure that entails the amputation of a cat's third phalanx [P3], or third 'toe bone.' Recent scientific studies have shown that even when done correctly, and with excellent pain management, declawing can cause life-long pain and increased behavior problems in cats.

Declawing is not medically necessary in most instances, and the vast majority of "undesirable" scratching behaviors can be eradicated through regular claw trimming, meeting cat's environmental needs, and training.

It is our responsibility to aid our valued clients in making an informed medical decision in the best interest of their cats. This includes providing the latest scientific information to cat owners and providing them with accessible and easy-to-implement declawing alternatives.

Scratching is a completely normal and natural feline behavior with an inherent function. The primary reason cats scratch is to maintain the necessary claw motion used in hunting and climbing. Cats also scratch as a means of visual and olfactory (scent) communication, to stretch their body, and remove old nail growth.

Ending elective declawing procedures is a crucial decision and commitment for [Practice Name], and we're here to guide you through decisions regarding your cat's health. Please contact us to discuss your questions and concerns at [Practice Contact Email or Phone Number].

You can also access a number of helpful resources, including educational brochures, flyers, scratching post/pad recommendations, and more at www.catfriendly.com/scratching.

Thank you for your support - we are proud in our decision of putting the health and welfare of your cat first!



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*Implementation Plans to Discontinue
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You may not know what declawing entails. Don't worry, the team at *[Practice Name]* are here to answer all your questions and provide the best care for your cat. Please ask us about our new declawing policy and schedule an appointment with us to find out more about normal scratching behaviors and claw trimmings.

The American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP), which has designated *[Practice Name]* as a Cat Friendly Practice®, strongly opposes declawing as an elective procedure. In keeping with our cat friendly mission, we are ending all declawing surgeries. Scratching is a normal feline behavior. It allows cats to stretch and release stress, but they can't scratch without claws. Declawing entails the amputation of a cat's third phalanx [P3], or third 'toe bone.' Unlike human nails, cats' claws are attached to the last bone in their toes. A comparison would be cutting off a person's finger at the last joint of each finger.

We have many educational resources about normal scratching behaviors for your cat and you can also find out more information at www.catfriendly.com/scratching. *[Practice Name]* feels strongly about our position. We are happy to discuss strategies to help you and your cat find solutions to unwanted scratching. Please contact our office at (practice contact email or phone number) with your questions and concerns.

Announcement of Upcoming Deadline Sample Text

As a designated Cat Friendly Practice®, we demonstrate a unique ability to treat and handle feline patients gently and with respect. It is our mission to implement the highest standards of care, and stay ahead with offering the best practices in feline medicine.

As we continue to provide you and your cat with the best possible care, *[Practice Name]* is proud to announce we will be ending all declawing procedures (onychectomy) as of *[X Date]*.

Feline declawing is an elective and ethically controversial procedure that entails the amputation of a cat's third phalanx [P3], or third 'toe bone.' Recent scientific studies have shown that even when done correctly, and with excellent pain management, declawing can cause lifelong pain and increased behavior problems in cats.

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