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CAT TRAINING TECHNIQUES FOR CAREGIVERS

Training your cat using positive reinforcement techniques can improve their behavior, reduce stress, and strengthen your bond. These easy-to-follow techniques use positive reinforcement to help cats learn in a way that is comfortable and rewarding for them.

Finding Your Cat's Preferred Reward

- This could be food, treat, a toy, or social praise.
- Keep your cat's favorite treats ready during training so you can reward quickly.
- If social praise is your cat's preferred reward, praise verbally in a soft voice and pet over preferred areas.
- For cats who prefer play, use a favorite toy as the reward.

Shaping

- Shaping breaks a behavior into tiny steps, and a reward is provided at each step.
- It can help your cat learn complex actions gradually.

Example: Teaching a cat to use a cat door

Reward each step when your cat:

1. Looks at the door
2. Moves toward it
3. Stands near it
4. Touches it
5. Puts paw through
6. Puts head through
7. Moves halfway through
8. Walks through

Timing is Everything

- Reward your cat as soon as possible after the behavior.
- If there's a delay, use a conditioned reinforcer (like a click or social praise) to mark the behavior.
- This helps your cat connect the action with the reward.
- Fear reduces a cat's ability to learn. Only train your cat when calm and relaxed.

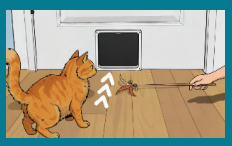
Luring

- Use a treat or toy to guide your cat's movement.
- It can help your cat perform a behavior by following the reward.

Example: Teaching a cat to use a cat door

Place food near the cat door to guide your cat toward it.

Use a toy to lure your cat through the door.



Note: Luring is helpful for starting training, but shaping and capturing are better for teaching complex behaviors.

Conditional Reinforcers

- A clicker, sound, or word (like "Good kitty!") is paired with giving a reward.
- Over time, your cat learns that the sound means a reward is coming.
- Use it to mark the exact moment your cat does the desired behavior.
- It is helpful if you cannot give a preferred reward right away (e.g., training to give a high-five).

TIPS:

- If the click is too loud, wrap the clicker or keep it in your pocket.
- Social praise (like "Good kitty!") can be used instead of a clicker.

Targeting

- Teach your cat to touch an object (like a target stick or chopstick) with their nose.

Steps:

1. Hold the stick near your cat's nose → reward when touched.
2. Move the stick farther away → reward each time the cat touches it.
3. Increase the distance slowly.

TIP: Put soft food or a lickable treat on the stick to encourage touching.

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Capturing

- Capturing is rewarding a behavior your cat does on their own, without being guided or lured.

Example: Teaching a cat to sit before meals

- Reward behaviors you want to teach (like sitting before meals).
- When your cat sits naturally, say "Good job!" and give a treat or toy right after.
- Reinforcing this behavior helps your cat learn to repeat it.

TIP: Watch for moments your cat often does the behavior you want to teach and be ready to reward your cat.

Improving Cat's Welfare

- Training can also support your cat's natural behaviors, which improves their wellbeing and reduces unwanted actions.

Example: Supporting natural behaviors

- Reinforce scratching on a post to prevent furniture damage.
- Train your cat to walk on a harness and leash and/or use a cat door for safe outdoor time (e.g., to access a catio).
- Encourage problem-solving through training to reduce stress and boredom.

TIP: Rewarding behaviors that let cats express themselves naturally helps them feel more confident and content.

Cooperative Care

- Cooperative care means training your cat to voluntarily participate in their own care, like entering a carrier, offering a paw, or staying still for an examination. Remember to only train your cat when healthy, not in pain, and not showing fear or stress.

Why It Matters:

- Reduces the need for physical restraint.
- Minimizes fear-anxiety.
- Helps cats feel more in control.

How It Can Help:

- Targeting – Guide your cat into a carrier or onto a scale.
- Luring – Use a treat or toy to lead your cat into position.
- Capturing and Shaping – Reinforce natural behaviors like stretching or opening the mouth, then build on them gradually.

Putting Behaviors on Cue

- Once your cat does a behavior often, add a word or signal.

Example: Teaching your cat to sit

1. Wait for your cat to sit.
2. Say "Sit" as they sit and immediately reward.
3. Repeat several times.
4. Start saying "Sit" before they sit.
5. Your cat will learn to sit when you say the word!

Key Takeaways

- Finding the Right Reward: Food isn't always the best reward—some cats prefer toys or human interaction.
- Importance of Preferred Rewards: Try different options and watch how your cat responds. What they like can change from day to day.
- Timing is Everything: Give the reward right after the behavior you want to reinforce.
- Training Tools: Use tools like a clicker or social praise to "mark" the behavior when you can't give a reward right away.
- Shaping: Teach a complex behavior by breaking it into small steps and rewarding each one.
- Luring: Use a reward to guide your cat's movement. This works best for simple behaviors.
- Targeting: Train your cat to touch an object, like a stick, which can help guide their actions.
- Capturing: Reward a behavior your cat already does naturally, like sitting.
- Cooperative Care: Train your cat to take part in their own care. This can reduce fear-anxiety and avoid physical restraint.

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Remember: Every cat is different—some may learn quickly, while others take more time.
Be patient and keep training with positive reinforcement techniques! For more information, visit **catfriendly.com/training**