

Understanding your cat's behaviour

Your cat is communicating with you all the time, and knowing how to listen means you can help them remain happy and content.

Cats use their body language to show you when they're feeling calm and relaxed, and when they're feeling stressed or anxious. This training sheet will help you to recognise any signs of stress and anxiety in your cat before it escalates.



When you bring your cat to donate, there are many things that may be unfamiliar to them and have the potential to cause them stress – going in their carrier, travelling in the car, entering a new environment, meeting new people, being handled, and having medical procedures carried out.

Each of these experiences can affect how your cat feels, and when multiple stressors occur close together without enough support or recovery, stress can build over time. This is known as **stress stacking**.

Our aim, with your help, is to prepare your cat ahead of time, recognising early signs of stress, and adjusting our approach when needed, so that we can help your cat feel more comfortable and confident throughout the donation process.

Doing things like working on training your cat to become familiar and happy with being in their carrier significantly helps as it means your cat arrives to the session feeling calm and ready to donate, as opposed to arriving already extremely stressed after their journey.

Using a traffic light system, you can carefully monitor your cat's behaviour and identify signs of stress. If your cat is exhibiting behaviour in the caution zone, this is a sign to step back and bring them back to green. Red means they're too stressed and immediately need space to calm down. This is the same system our team will use when you bring your cat to donate.

The green zone

This is where your cat is calm and feels safe and happy.

- **For training:** This is where you're aiming to keep your cat when working on any training with them. If they progress into the caution zone, it's time to step back and give them time to return to green.
- **For donation:** This is where we aim to keep your cat throughout the donation process.

Sleeping/resting



- EYES: Closed to open
- HEAD: On surface or over body
- TAIL: Extended or loosely wrapped
- EARS: Normal or forward
- SOUNDS: None or purr

Resting



- EYES: Open, relaxed
- BODY: Lying on belly or sitting
- HEAD: On surface or over body
- TAIL: Extended or loosely wrapped
- EARS: Normal or forward
- SOUNDS: None or purr

Perked and interested



- EYES: Looking directly but not intensely
- BODY: Back is horizontal
- HEAD: Head slightly down
- TAIL: Closer to body, may flicker slightly
- EARS: Perked forward
- EYES: Pupils slightly dilated

Exploring



- EYES: Open, staring but not intensely
- BODY: Back is horizontal
- HEAD: Over body
- TAIL: Up and winding or loosely down
- EARS: Normal or perked
- SOUNDS: None or meow

The caution zone

When your cat is in this zone, they are feeling moderately anxious and stressed. This means they are alert and likely uncomfortable in their current environment.

- **For training:** When working on training with your cat, they should be comfortable, relaxed, and actively choosing to participate. Look for signs that your cat is engaged and feeling good about the experience, such as willingly approaching, interacting, and displaying positive body language.

If your cat begins to show signs of stress or hesitation, this is their way of communicating that they need support. Adjust the training by making it easier, slowing down, or taking a break so your cat can return to a calm and comfortable state. The goal of training is to build confidence and create positive experiences, not to have your cat push through stress.

- **For donation:** There may be points during the donation appointment where your cat feels uncertain, especially on their first couple of visits. Our team will carefully monitor your cat's body language and welfare throughout. If your cat begins to exhibit any behaviours from the caution zone, we will adjust our approach or stop to minimise stress and help them remain as comfortable as possible.

Aroused/mildly anxious



- EYES: Wide open, avoiding eye contact
- BODY: Shifted away
- HEAD: Turns head away
- TAIL: Closer to body, may flickerslightly
- EARS: To the side
- EYES: Pupils slightly dilated

Frightened



- EYES: Fully open, pupils dilated
- HEAD: Little or no movement
- TAIL: Tucked, hair standing
- EARS: To the side
- BODY: Flat, tense / tight
- SOUNDS: None

Trying to flee



- EYES: Pupils dilated
- HEAD: Turned toward stimulus
- TAIL: Close to body, hairstanding
- BODY: Poised to flee, backarched
- SOUNDS: None, meow, hissing

The red zone

In this zone, your cat is over their threshold – they are stressed, scared, and may exhibit aggressive behaviour due to this.

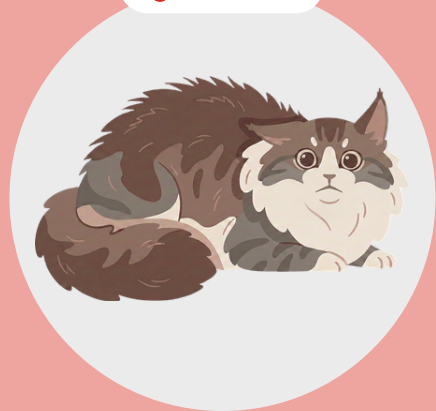
- **For training:** If your cat is in the red zone, this is your sign to immediately stop, remove the trigger, and allow your cat to return to a safe and comfortable space to calm down.
- **For donation:** We will stop immediately if your cat ever enters the red zone. Their welfare is always our priority and by monitoring this throughout their appointment, we hope that your cat will never reach this stage while with us.

Fight/terrified



- EYES: Fully open, pupils dilated
- HEAD: Lower than body
- TAIL: Tucked, hair standing
- EARS: Forward
- BODY: Leaning forward, thrashing
- SOUNDS: Growling, hissing

Fight/terrified



- EYES: Fully open, pupils dilated, staring
- HEAD: Lower than body
- TAIL: Tucked, hair standing
- EARS: Forward, back
- BODY: Pulled back, arched back
- SOUNDS: Growling, hissing

Working together to keep your lifesaver happy

By working on training with your cat and carefully monitoring their behaviour for signs of stress and anxiety, you are helping to ensure the donation process is a calm and safe experience for them.

Stress can quickly escalate in cats so being attuned to their behaviour and what they are communicating means we can keep them happy and relaxed throughout the whole donation experience, from leaving your house to the donation session to getting back home again. Your cat's welfare is always our priority.

