

Stress Reduction Protocol for Cats

The shelter environment is very stressful for the cats and efforts should be made to reduce stress whenever possible.

Upon intake – cats should be provided with a hiding box or a towel should be hung on the cage door. Hiding is the best coping mechanism cats have to deal with stress. A day or two with a place to hide will help the new cats adjust to the shelter environment.

Feliway – a synthetic feline facial pheromone that comes in a plug-in diffuser or a spray. Feliway has been shown to reduce anxiety in cats. A plug-in diffuser should be used in each cat room. Additionally, the spray can be used to help individual cats who continue to exhibit signs of stress. To use the spray properly, spray the cat's bedding when the cat is not in the cage or spray a washcloth and place it in the cage with the cat.

Each cat should be provided with soft bedding in their cage.

Efforts should be made to make the morning cleaning process as quiet as possible. This is a hectic time made worse by slamming doors, loud music or yelling.

Routine – cats feel better with a routine. Try to make sure the daily maintenance is performed roughly the same time each day.

Familiarity – cats feel better in familiar settings. Do not move the cats to new cages each day. Also, do not remove everything from the cage daily – rather spot clean when you can. If the entire cage must be cleaned – leave at least one thing in the cage that smells familiar.

Cats are very sensitive to vibrations. Never place a radio on top of a bank of metal cages as the vibrations will be felt by every cat housed there.

Cats feel more comfortable being up high. Provide the caged cats with a platform (sturdy box to hide in or sit on top of) or a hanging hammock.

Soft music should be played in the cat rooms during the day. Music has been shown to reduce stress in animals. The music should be turned off at night as cats need dark and quiet to sleep properly.

Time out of the cage is important for stress reduction. Each cat should be allowed at least 15 minutes out of the cage every other day.