

DOS AND DON'TS OF STRESS REDUCTION (FOR CATS AND FOR TRAPPERS)



Stress affects both cats and trappers, and can complicate or even sabotage a TNR project. The best way to reduce your own stress and to minimize the cats' fear and confusion is to anticipate and prepare for every possibility. This requires careful planning, adequate equipment, and common sense.

LOWER YOUR STRESS LEVEL

1. Prepare yourself. Even if trapping is second nature to you, you must still take care *never* to overlook elements such as safety and organization. Always be prepared for both routine and unexpected events.

- What do you really know about feral cats—their nature, their behavior? Do you fully understand the trapping process? Prepare yourself for any eventuality by reading books and factsheets, watching ACA's TNR videos, and talking to experienced trappers. (See resources section, below.)
- Equip yourself. You never want to discover mid-trapping that you have forgotten a crucial item. ACA's trapping equipment list ranges from the obvious (humane box traps) to those specialized items discovered through experience (WD40). (See "Humane Trapping Instructions for Feral Cats.")

2. Make and execute a *written* plan that includes every tool you need and step you must complete throughout the TNR process. Write everything down, no matter how small, in the approximate order you will need or should complete it, and you will eliminate worry about forgetting a vital component that will, inevitably, be needed at the busiest time.

- Remember that many tasks must be completed before trapping can start. You must negotiate services, timing, and price with the veterinary clinic; establish access to the trapping site; arrange to use a safe, fully enclosed vehicle to move the traps. What else?
- During the cats' recovery from surgery and before return to their outdoor homes, they need a warm, indoor area where you can monitor their condition and take action, should it be necessary.
- Think about sharing responsibilities with someone. Trapping can go faster when you work with one or more other people, but *be certain that the person(s) you work with are calm and know what to do*. If not, you're better off alone. It's more work alone, but that is better than chaos.

3. Safety always comes first. Be organized and prepared so that you can *calmly* and *safely* concentrate on the task and on the welfare of the cats.

- Gather and practice using your equipment. Handle, set, and spring a humane box trap several times before you go to the trapping location.
- Think about how to behave around trapped cats. For example, *do not ever touch a conscious trapped feral cat*, even if you can touch that cat under normal feeding circumstances. Trapping is not a normal circumstance and the cat *will* react aggressively.

4. Stay calm. At every stage of TNR, avoid transmitting your stress to the cat(s).

- Take a few deep breaths as often as necessary when things get tense. Avoid sudden, jerky, or violent movements. Speak in a moderate tone of voice.
- Prepare yourself for the cats' reactions. When a trap springs, the cat inside is likely to thrash about. Keep your wits about you. Cover the trap immediately to help the cat calm himself.

LOWER THE CATS' STRESS LEVELS

1. Look at the situation from a cat's point of view. A trapped cat loses control over his environment and loses his ability to flee from perceived or real threats. This can produce intense stress that can affect a cat's health, prolong his recovery from surgery, and compromise his return to an outdoor home.

- The cats' conduits to the world are sight, sound, and smell. Assess what they can see, hear, and smell and remove anything that may be a threat.
- Accept that no matter what your normal relationship with the cat is, a trapped cat will not be consoled by your talking to him. The best thing you can do is keep the trap covered and leave the cat alone.

2. Safety always comes first.

- Some states mandate a *six-month quarantine or euthanasia* of any outdoor cat that has a wound of unknown origin. The law stems from concern about rabies. Find out if your state has a law about wounds of unknown origin. *Take every possible precaution to keep cats from injuring themselves during trapping.*
- Arrange to use a safe, fully enclosed vehicle to move the traps. Never move trapped cats in the trunk of a car or the open bed of a pickup truck—this is unsafe and it terrifies the cats. Secure the traps in the vehicle with bungee cords or other restraints. If an unsecured trap tips sideways or upside down (from the cat's or the vehicle's motion), it can open and release the cat.

A good rule of thumb on safety is: *If it seems precarious, it won't work. Don't take the risk.*

3. Provide a clean, controlled environment.

- Clean and disinfect traps for each trapping session and for the cats' recovery from surgery to eliminate other cats' smells. Always keep a trap covered when a cat is in it.
- Avoid holding trapped cats around loud or vibrating machinery or in too hot or cold an area. Cats react to vibration as well as to excess noise. Do not play a radio. *Quiet* is the best environment for the cats.

4. Transmit calm to the cat(s). Unsettling things happen during TNR. Remember how easily you project your tension toward the cats. Take steps not to.

- Get a grip. Consider how *your* mental state and actions may affect the cats. Avoid sudden, jerky, or violent moves. Speak in a calm, moderate voice, but remember that trapped cats will not be consoled by your talking to them. The most comforting thing you can do is to keep the traps covered and leave the cats alone.
- The cats' conduits to the world are sight, sound, and smell. Assess what they can see, hear, and smell and remove anything that they may find threatening.
- When you do make eye contact, blink at the cats to let them know you are not the enemy.

Resources available online (www.alleycat.org) or by mail from Alley Cat Allies:

"Humane Trapping Instructions for Feral Cats" (factsheet)

"Surgery Recovery Instructions" (factsheet)

"ABCs of TNR" (factsheet)

Trap-Neuter-Return: A Humane Approach to Feral Cat Control (ACA video, 24:00, \$13.00)

The Humane Solution: Reducing Feral Cat Populations with Trap-Neuter-Return (ACA video, 9:56, \$13.00)

The Stray Cat Handbook, by Tamara Kreuz (books, \$10.00)