

Animal Talk Rescue Volunteer Handbook

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Volunteer Website: www.shiftboard.com/animaltalk

Welcome to Animal Talk Rescue! First, allow me to give you a brief history of the Rescue. Animal Talk Pet Shop was opened in the year 1990 by Michelle “Missy” Young, and she hadn’t been there long before people started to leave kittens on her doorstep. Animal Talk Rescue (ATR) became an official 501(c)(3) nonprofit in March 2000, and the rescue has continued to grow since then. In 2007, we adopted out around 1150 cats and kittens. The pet shop and the Rescue are two separate entities, but they work together in a close partnership. The store provides Missy with an income so that she can be there to run the Rescue six or seven days a week. The store and Rescue also share the utilities, and the store also provides a discount to the adoptive homes and volunteers of the Rescue.

Animal Talk Rescue is a “no-kill” rescue. This means that we do not euthanize an animal unless a veterinarian deems it necessary for medical reasons. We take in cats primarily from over full “kill” shelters, feral colonies and individual owners who can no longer care for them. We provide free spay/neuter surgeries for feral cats that cannot be socialized and have designated feeding stations for colonies cared for by dedicated volunteers.

The Rescue uses an online program called Shiftboard for scheduling our volunteers. You will find a link on our main website at www.shiftboard.com/animaltalk, where you can register for the online scheduler and link to download a Getting Started Guide to help you use it. This system allows for greater and easier communication with our volunteers. All volunteers must use Shiftboard, unless you absolutely have no access to the internet. If this is the case, you must call the volunteer coordinator to set up your volunteer schedule. Support is available if you are not tech savvy, including phone support and in-person support at Animal Talk Rescue.

Our Best Foot Forward

Once you’ve spent a little time working at Animal Talk Rescue, you may not be as quick to notice a little bit of litter on the floor or dust on the shelf. However, this is one of the first things that someone new will notice. We want Animal Talk Rescue to feel as clean and sanitary as possible, so clean up after yourself as you go. Here are a few other guidelines to keep us at our best:

- Periodically sweep the floor in the back and vacuum up front.
- Avoid vacuuming or making loud noises while someone is holding a cat (even across the building).
- Avoid discussing upsetting business in the presence of the general public, such as the health of an animal. Keep in mind we take in animals from other shelters that are about to be euthanized because they are *already sick*.

- Try not to describe how disgusting a litter box or crate is while you're cleaning it.
- Remember that sound travels throughout the building; someone at the front can hear what you are discussing in the back.

Dress Code

The rule of thumb is: dress as if you are volunteering to finger paint with kindergartners.

- Wear clothes that can get dirty, we use a lot of bleach.
- Dress appropriately (no mid drift shirts, etc).
- No facial *rings*, studs are OK (nothing a cat could rip off your face).

General Rules

- No kitty treats without Missy's permission.
- Always check the cage cards for medicine or special diets. If you don't feel comfortable with or don't know how to follow an instruction, ask someone else to do it! It still needs to get done.
- Tell Missy or a lead volunteer if you cannot clean a particular cage, such as a feral or fungal cage. If a cage is labeled "Missy Only" do not open the cage, but please remind her that it needs to be done.
- Please do not leave your personal belongings at the Rescue when you are not there.
- Respect your fellow volunteers.
- Volunteering for Animal Talk Rescue does not give you special privileges to get a cat into the Rescue. You must respect the system just as if you are a general member of the public, this includes respecting appointments for cat intakes. If you do get a cat into the rescue, you MUST bring it in at the arranged time.

Time Commitment

We know that you are volunteering your time, and we are extremely grateful that you do. At the same time, we ask that you give the same level of respect to the Rescue that you would to a paying job. No-show volunteers cause great strain on the volunteers that do show up and have to pick up the slack. We understand that things do come up, we're only asking you to do your best to follow through so we can make sure all the animals are properly cared for every day.

- Respect the commitment you make when you schedule yourself to work.
- Please do not cancel less than 3 days before the shift, excepting emergencies.
- You can cancel a shift online up to 3 days before it, after that you must call or email.

Sanitation Protocols

It is *very* important to follow strict sanitation procedures when cleaning cages, this really is a matter of life or death for the cats in the Rescue. If a deadly virus comes in on one cat, strict sanitation can prevent a shelter-wide outbreak. New volunteers will learn the procedure for cleaning a cage at orientation, but to get you started, here are the most important rules:

- *Never* put a litter box down anywhere but the work table (not the floor, not the top of the crate).
- *Always* wash your hands between every crate or window. Hand sanitizer isn't sufficient.
- Bleach the counter before *and* after you use it.
- Always sanitize dust pans before they go back on the wall or before using them if they are dirty.
- Treat every cat as if he has a deadly disease that you don't want to pass to the next cat.

Checking General Health

An important part of cleaning cages is doing a general on-the-spot evaluation of the cat's health. Here is a list of behaviors and symptoms to watch for. If you see any of these, unless you know it's already been noted (such as on the cage card) report it to Missy.

- Lack of appetite
- Lethargy
- Yellow skin
- Diarrhea
- Dehydration
- Drooling
- Vomiting
- Congested nose
- Goopy eye(s)
- Weight loss
- Any behavior that you believe is out of character for that cat

Cat Rooms

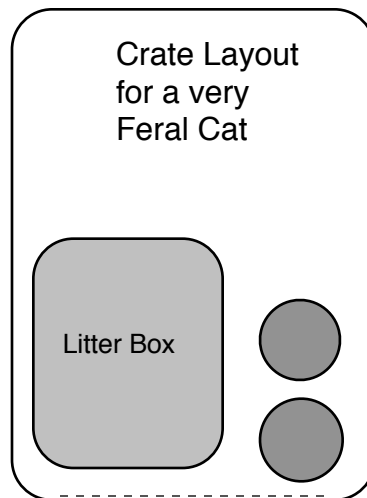
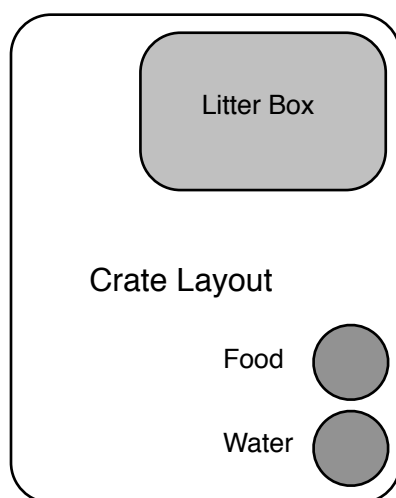
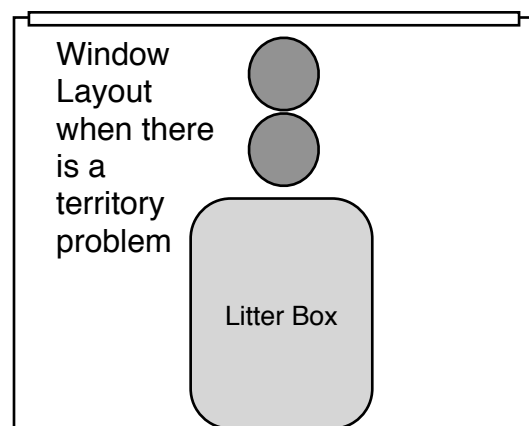
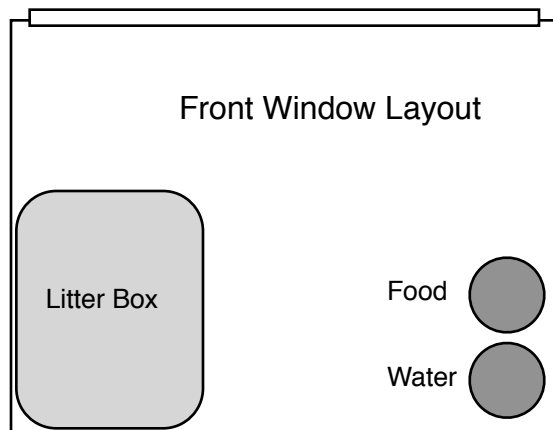
The group cat rooms are one of Animal Talk Rescue's newest features. They have more than doubled the number of adult cats we adopt out in one year. Because one room holds 10 to 12 cats, they represent some unique challenges for keeping the room clean and the cats healthy. Again, more training is available to volunteers who want to work with the group cat rooms, but here are the basic rules:

- The general public is not allowed in the cat rooms, volunteers only.
- *No* shoes allowed, even if you bleach them. You must use the clean clogs provided, take the clogs off when you leave the room to keep them sanitary.
- Lay out a towel in front of the room while you work so you have a sanitary place to set things.

- No shoes on the towel (except for the clogs).
- Make sure to use the correct bucket and put it away when you are done.
- Always clean room two last (this room is all cats who have had ringworm).
- Check the board in each room for any medical instructions. If you do not feel comfortable following the instructions, you must ask another volunteer to do it.
- Count the number of bios or tags on the window and count the number of cats in the room. Make sure the number matches and make sure every cat is responding normally.

Cage Set Up

It is important to arrange a cage or window so that the cat can get to the front and be social. In a crate, put food and water bowls to one side, and except for very feral cats, always put the litter box at the back off the cage. In a window, put the food and water bowls against one side and the litter box against the other side, closest to the door (you don't want the litter box to be the most visible thing to a customer).



Adoption Requirements

Animal Talk Rescue does not use an adoption application before meeting cats and kittens, but there are certain requirements for adoption, and there is an adoption contract to be filled out. ATR requires indoor homes only, a 15-20 year commitment, a house or apartment that allows cats, and no known allergies (with some exceptions where someone has done an 'allergy test'). Indoor homes are particularly important, as the risks from cars, dogs, disease and coyotes (even in the city) are steadily increasing. It is illegal for your animals to leave your property without restraint/supervision, and this is not to mention the detrimental effects domestic cats have on our natural ecology.

- Only pre-adoption trained volunteers may show a cat to a perspective adopter.
- Visitors must use hand sanitizer between each crate or window of *adoptable* cats.
- Ringworm cats must be shown *last* so as not to spread the fungus to other rescue cats.
- Indoor homes only is nonnegotiable.
- We do not send kittens under five months of age home alone, there must be another *playful* cat or dog in the home.
- Sometimes the five month rule will be extended to older kittens or cats, depending on the temperament of the individual kitten.
- Holds are usually only allowed 24 hours for kittens, 48 hours for adults
- Missy's permission is required for a hold on a cat or kitten that isn't ready.
- *Never* show a cat or kitten that is in the back, unless you know they are ready, *especially* unaltered kittens.

About Feral Cats

The Rescue works with many feral cats, at different stages of socialization. A feral cat is a domestic cat that was born a stray without human contact. They see people as a threat and they react accordingly. Young feral kittens socialize quickly, older cats take more time. New volunteers won't be asked to work with aggressive feral cats, but you will interact with recovering feral cats that are more passive. Feral cats at the Rescue are in different stages of social development, some may just be shy while some can be aggressive. Any cat that we feel is too dangerous or quick for general volunteers to work with will have a "Missy Only" tag, but if there is any cat that you don't feel comfortable working with, ask another volunteer or lead to help. You will not be assigned to take care of feral cats unless you have been trained.

General Rules for Working with Feral Cats:

- Do not say "Shhh" to quiet the cat, that sounds like hissing to them.

- Always use caution to avoid an escape, re-trapping a loose feral cat can take weeks.
- If a cat hits or tries to hit you, say, “no” in a drawn out deep voice.
- Use backscratchers to pull things out of the back of the cage.

Common Medications

There are certain medications that we use more often than others, and whether or not you feel ready to administer them, you should be familiar with them. Never start a cat on a new medication without checking with Missy first.

Albon - Used to treat coccidia, the general dose is once per day, 0.25 cc per pound of cat. It is administered orally, it's a bright canary yellow liquid, thick and smells sweet.

Pyrantel - A dewormer, pale yellow liquid, dosed 0.2 cc per lb, given once every two weeks.

Panacur - A dewormer, white and milky liquid, dosed 0.25 cc per lb, given once a day for five days.

Amoxi - A slightly milder antibiotic than Clavamox, often given to young kittens.

Clavamox - A stronger antibiotic than Amoxi, most often used to treat a URI.

Terramycin - Eye ointment given 2 or 3 times a day for eye infections.

Gentamycin - Eye drops for eye infections, 1 drop per eye, twice a day.

Some Common Medical Issues

There are certain medical issues that we see more often than others, here are a few examples.

Ringworm – Ringworm is not a worm but rather a fungus that is very common in kids, cats, gardeners, and wrestlers. Ringworm is not life threatening for a healthy cat, but it can spread from cats to other animals and humans. Ringworm is often identified when a cat is losing patches of fur or has a flaky patch of skin. Animal Talk Rescue works with a lot of Ringworm cats that would otherwise be euthanized at other shelters. There are usually no animals with active Ringworm spots in the building, but we often have cats that have previously had the fungus and may still carry a spore that could pass to other animals, including people. These cages are marked with a tag that says “Previous Fungal” or “Previous Ringworm”. We ask that all Ringworm cages be cleaned last to prevent spread to other animals. **If you ever suspect that you have contracted Ringworm, please let us know!** It is contagious to the cats in the Rescue that have not had it.

Feline Upper Respiratory infection (URI) – A URI is a “kitty cold”. It has similar symptoms to human colds and, although highly communicable between cats, will not affect other animals or humans. Several different microorganisms can cause a URI but only three can result in more severe symptoms that may require treatment. These are Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus and Bordetella. They are transmitted via secretions from the cat's mouth, nose, and eyes. The

irritation to these moist membranes causes characteristic sneezing and discharge from the eyes and nose. This discharge is usually light but occasionally the discharge is thick, the cat has a fever, and loses its appetite. The symptoms usually last from 7-10 days but can last for several weeks. Some cats become carriers of URIs and have mild recurrences when under stress. Most kittens and cats in the building are vaccinated against these diseases, unless they are too young or unhealthy to be vaccinated.

Dehydration – Dehydration will occur when the cat is either not taking in enough water (like with the loss of appetite) or losing too much water (through frequent urination, diarrhea, or fever). Dehydration can be identified by lifting the loose skin over the lower back. If a cat is hydrated, the skin should snap down quickly when released. If the skin remains lifted when released or slowly settles down over the body, the cat is probably dehydrated. **If you suspect a cat is dehydrated, report it to Missy.**

Feline infectious peritonitis (FIP) - “Feline infectious peritonitis (FIP) is a viral disease that occurs worldwide in wild and domestic cats. It is caused by a type of virus called a coronavirus, which tends to attack the cells of the intestinal wall. FIP is fatal in more than 95 percent of cases... Fortunately, the disease is very uncommon. In households containing only one or two cats, the FIP mortality rate is around one in 5,000.” (www.aspca.org)

You may see a cat or kitten at the rescue labeled “FIP risk.” This means that a litter mate of that cat was diagnosed with FIP, telling us that the whole litter is genetically predisposed to the disease. Because you can’t screen for it before symptoms develop, there is no way to be sure if the litter mates will develop FIP or not. These cats are available for adoption, but prospective adopters must be warned of the risks. We discourage homes with children from adoption an FIP risk cat or kitten, in the hope of sparing children potential heartbreak. The older the cat gets, the better the chances he won’t get FIP. Most, though not all, FIP cases surface before 18 months of age.

ATR separates FIP risk kittens and cats from any cats that are not known FIP risks. It is still not clear whether the disease can (in rare cases) be transmitted through feces, but we would rather be safe than sorry and prefer not to adopt these cats out to homes with other cats that are not at risk.

Thank you for signing up to volunteer and taking the time to read this document. There are more resources available if you want to continue to expand your knowledge and training. If you haven’t already signed up for our scheduling site, you can do that now at www.shiftboard.com/animaltalk. We hope to see you soon!