



PAWS[®] CHICAGO

FELINE CARRIER AVERSION

CONGRATULATIONS ON ADOPTING YOUR NEW FAMILY MEMBER!

Most cats aren't thrilled with the prospect of being placed into a carrier, but some cats develop a strong fear or aversion to carriers. Safely placing these cats into carriers for veterinary visits or travel may seem like an impossible task.

Although it takes time, desensitizing your new cat to the presence of a carrier and counterconditioning his response to it from something fearful to positive is possible.

Choosing an Appropriate Carrier

Cats with a known history of carrier aversion often do better with carriers that are both front and top loading. Rather than pushing the cat through the front of his carrier, your cat may do better if gently lifted off the floor before being placed in the carrier through the top.

Use a carrier with a detachable top. The top can be removed with your cat still inside to make exams easier at the vet. You may also be able to coax the cat into the uncovered bottom half with food or treats. Once your cat is focused on food, gently cover the carrier with the top portion and secure it for travel.

Cat Carrier Tips

- Carriers with detachable tops can often make entering and exiting the carrier less stressful for your cat.
- Keeping comfy bedding that smells like home in the carrier at all times can also reduce stress when traveling away from home.
- When transporting your cat in the carrier, try to keep the carrier stable to avoid frightening the cat.
- Some cats feel better if the carrier is covered with a blanket or towel during travel.



Making the Carrier Less Scary

Many cats only see their carrier prior to a stressful event. Being taken from the safety of their home territory can elicit feelings of fear and anxiety in cats who might otherwise be quite confident and secure. Imagine entering your car only before trips to the dentist or prior to taking a difficult test! Just the sight of a car could understandably make you anxious and scared. If your cat only sees his carrier before experiencing something frightening, it makes perfect sense that his first reaction is to flee upon seeing it.

MAKING THE CARRIER FEEL INVITING AND SAFE

From day one, keep your cat's carrier in an area of the home where the family spends a lot of its time, and make it a space that your cat will find inviting and safe. Keep the carrier open, and always keep comfortable bedding inside of it. Toss your cat's favorite treats into it every day. Once the cat becomes more comfortable with the carrier, you can even try feeding his meals inside of it. Show him that entering the carrier yields delicious rewards as often as possible.

USE CLICKER TRAINING TO TEACH YOUR CAT TO GO TO PLACE AND EVENTUALLY THE CARRIER

Clicker training is a great way to train your cat to go to a particular place in a fun and stress-free way! All you'll need is a clicker, a mat or bed, and your cat's favorite treats or food to start.

Training your cat to "go to place"

- Clickers are affordable and can be found online or at most pet supply stores.
- Choose a mat or bed that can be stored when not in use or training.
- Find whatever treats or food your cat finds irresistible to use as a training reward.
- Mat training can also be used to prevent cats from counter-surfing or door-dashing.



The following video from Catschool.com provides a simple and easy-to-follow tutorial on training your cat to go to place: <https://www.catschool.co/clicker-training-cat-blog/2018/4/20/teach-your-cat-to-station-go-to-a-bed-a-mat-or-a-place>

Clicker Training Tips

- Keep training sessions short. 10-15 minutes a day should be sufficient.
- Schedule sessions prior to mealtimes or when you know your cat is hungry.
- Use your cat's favorite treats to reinforce desired behaviors, but remember to break the treats up or use small amounts to avoid overfeeding.
- Take your time and go slow. Once your cat has mastered going to his station or place, it could take time for him to enter the carrier with confidence. Reward him for every step that gets him closer to his goal.

If you are having difficulties helping your cat with carrier aversion, please contact us at adoptions@pawschicago.org or emayes@pawschicago.org. We can direct you to someone who can help.

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