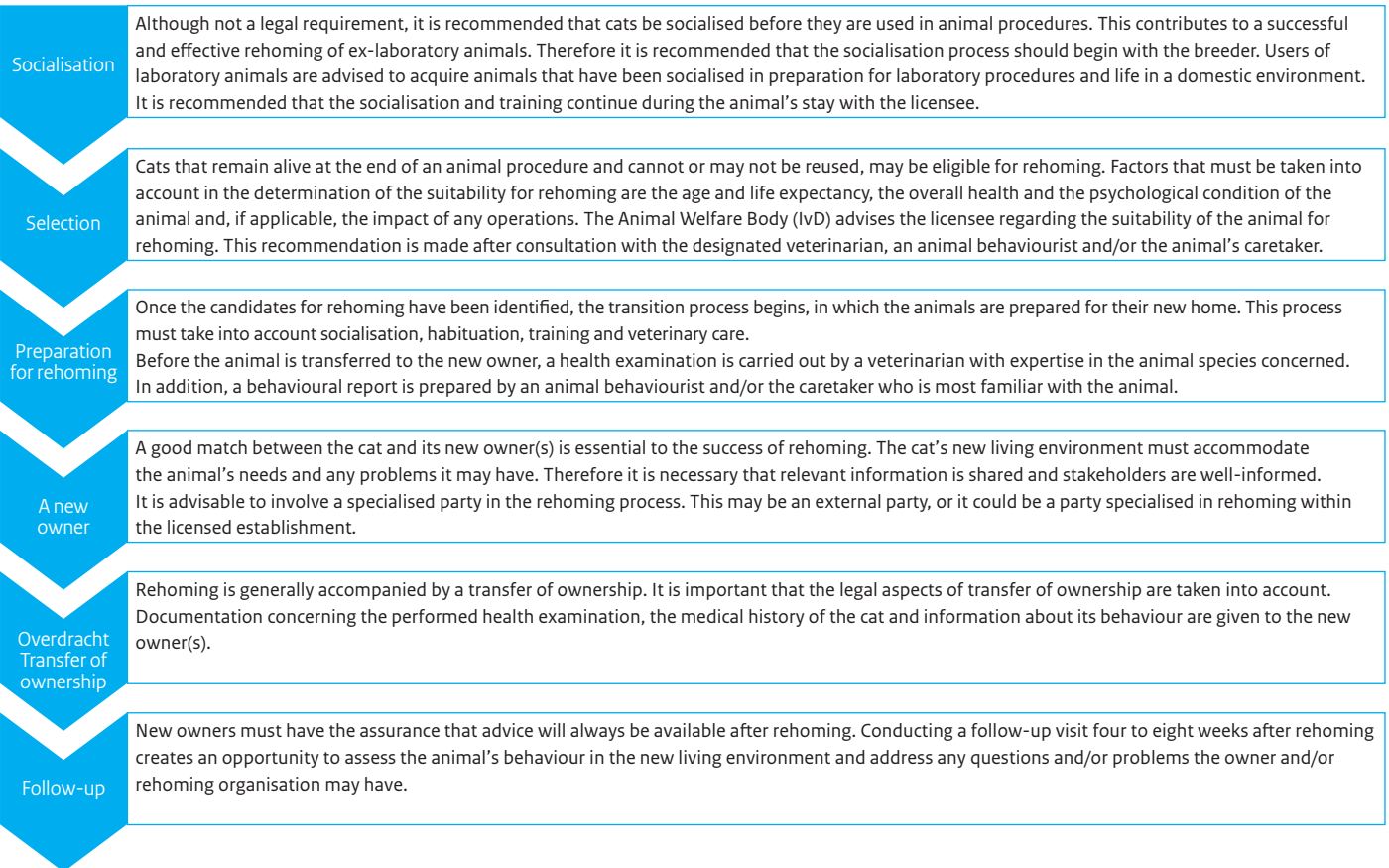


# Code of Practice Cats

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## Code of Practice | Cats



## Introduction

The purpose of this Code of Practice is to ensure the quality of life of former laboratory cats that remain alive at the end of an animal procedure and are eligible for rehoming.

### I. The internal process Socialisation and training

Although not a legal requirement, it is recommended that cats be socialised before they are used in animal procedures, to improve the chance of a successful and effective rehoming. Early socialisation also contributes to the proper functioning of the cats in a laboratory environment. It is recommended that users of laboratory animals acquire animals that have been socialised for animal procedures and who are familiar with the stimuli and situations that former laboratory animals are confronted with in a domestic environment. Breeders should therefore have a complete socialisation programme, which continues during the animal's stay with the licensee.

Training of the cats is intended to ensure that they:

1. can function in a laboratory environment
2. can participate in animal testing without exhibiting behaviour indicative of anxiety or distress
3. can function well in a domestic environment after rehoming

Each licensee must determine which combination of skills the cats must learn, depending on the routine with which the animals are confronted. The skills needed to participate in testing will vary greatly

between licensees. All animals must be trained so that they are familiar with the procedures to which they are subjected during testing.

During the stay at the licensed establishment skills must be developed that are needed within a domestic environment. The training should be based on positive reinforcement. No use should be made of punishments, referring to aversive techniques such as water spray bottles, 'corrective' collars amongst others.

Cats that are accustomed to people will experience less stress than cats that are not. The probability of a successful rehoming increases when the cat has interaction with as many different people as possible so that it develops confidence in dealing with people.

The training plan must be based both on teaching the cat skills needed to carry out biotech procedures and preparing the cat for transfer to a domestic environment. This Code of Practice includes an example of a socialisation process plus a variety of exercises that can be incorporated into a training plan.

The effectiveness of the training should be evaluated regularly, and any necessary changes can be made to achieve optimum training and ensure the desired final result. The cat's development must be monitored during the socialisation process and the training. This encompasses more than just assessment of the cat's performance during the specific training exercises; the animal's character and behaviour must also be assessed so that the caretaker can determine whether they have improved or worsened.

## Eligibility criteria for rehoming

Under Article 13d of the Experiments on Animals Act (Wod) an animal can only be released for rehoming if (a) the state of health of the animal allows it; (b) there is no danger to public health, animal health or the environment, and (c) appropriate measures have been taken to ensure the welfare of the animal.

The quality of life is crucial in the assessment of the suitability of an animal. A former laboratory cat can only become a pet if it can function in a domestic environment. It is therefore necessary to consider the quality of life, not the chance of survival, when assessing the suitability for rehoming. The following aspects of the animal must be included in the assessment:

- the animal's age and life expectancy
- the animal's general health
- the animal's psychological condition
- if applicable, the impact of any operations that will precede rehoming

The animal must be in good, yet not necessarily optimum, health. The new owner will need to be able to deal with a potential disorder. Even if the animal has a medical condition it can still be very suitable for rehoming, provided that a realistic and reasonable treatment plan is available so that the long-term prognosis is good. Also in this regard, the emphasis should be on ensuring the animal's quality of life.

Health reports will be made available, and advice will be given with respect to any zoonotic diseases. A virus status is not, in itself, reason not to proceed with rehoming.

If the decision is taken to release an animal for rehoming, the animal is operated if necessary, to remove implanted instruments for example. There are no legal objections for such operations. The purpose of such an operation is to minimise further suffering. The veterinarian decides whether or not to operate on the basis of an assessment of the expected impact of the operation, the expected quality of life in the long term and the balance between the two.

## Selection process

The final decision as to whether or not to rehome an animal rests with the licensee. The licensee is advised by the Animal Welfare Body (IvD). The IvD issue their recommendation after consultation with the designated veterinarian, an animal behaviourist (expert with formal qualifications in the field of normal and abnormal behaviour of an animal species and behaviour management and change) and/or the animal caretaker who is responsible for the daily care of the animal.

- The designated veterinarian contributes to the assessment of the health of the animal. He or she evaluates the options, considering only the animal's quality of life.
- An animal behaviourist and/or the caretaker who is most familiar with the animal or animal species must assess the animal's behaviour and suitability for rehoming. Information can be obtained from other sources, such as the designated veterinarian or, if applicable, the animal's caretaker. Veterinarians and animal caretakers who perform this type of assessment should have a good understanding of species-specific behaviours, including undesirable or abnormal behaviour, behaviour management and change and establishing a prognosis of possible undesirable or abnormal behaviour.

## II. The transition process

The process is coordinated by a rehoming organisation. This may be an external organisation – not a private person but rather, for example, an independent organisation with experience in the rehoming of animals (including laboratory animals) – but it may also be part of the licensed establishment that releases animals for rehoming.

It is important that throughout the process the applicable policy and legal frameworks are considered, such as the Animal Holders Decree (Besluit houders van dieren) and the policy rules quality rehoming animals (Beleidsregels kwaliteit opvang dieren).

### Preparation for rehoming

Once it is clear which animals will be released for rehoming, they are further prepared for their new home. In preparing the animals, attention must be given to the following aspects:

#### *Socialisation, habituation and training*

Under Article 13e of the Experiments on Animals Act (WoD)<sup>8</sup> a rehoming procedure must be followed that includes socialisation of the animals to be released. The importance of socialisation has been highlighted in a preceding section. Sensory stimuli should be part of

the training. As part of the normal habituation process it is advisable to expose animals in the laboratory to as many different visual, tactile and aural stimuli as possible. Ideally, all laboratory cats should gain experience with people of both sexes and varying appearance. Men with beards, people wearing glasses, people wearing a variety of clothing and people carrying large objects all provide valuable stimuli for laboratory animals. Animals may also have difficulty adapting to children and animals of a different species. Animal welfare organisations report that this is the most common reason for the failure of rehoming. Tactile stimuli are also important. Consider, for example, different surfaces such as grass or carpet.

#### *Veterinary care*

Stringent oversight of the health of laboratory animals is already a prerequisite for their care and use, but additional, specific assessment by a veterinarian and confirmation of vaccination and certification are essential. The animals are dewormed and a suitable form of contraception is considered.

#### **Documentation**

A cat is accompanied by a single report, containing relevant information on:

- the health
- the behaviour (including in relation to a domestic environment)
- the welfare
- the medical condition
- the medical history
- medical advice

<sup>8</sup> **Article 13e of the Experiments on Animals Act (WoD):** When the breeder, supplier or user proceeds to release for rehoming of animals that have been used or were intended for use in an animal procedure, they employ a rehoming procedure that includes the socialisation of the animals released for rehoming. In the case of wild animals, they undergo a reintegration programme, if necessary, before they are returned to their habitat.

Before the animal is transferred to the new owner, a health examination must be performed by a veterinarian with expertise in the animal species concerned. The veterinarian determines whether the animal is healthy or has a medical condition for which the long-term prognosis is good with a realistic treatment plan. The health report is given to the new owner(s) of the cat. The cat's welfare log, containing information about previous accommodation and the cat's character, is attached. The animal's medical history must be well documented, and accompanied with appropriate advice in the case of any zoonotic diseases.

In addition, a behavioural report is prepared by an animal behaviourist and/or the caretaker who is most familiar with the animal. The cat's behavioural profile describes the imprinted character traits, the interaction with other pets and people, the behaviour in a new or unfamiliar environment and any anxieties, undesirable behaviours or behavioural problems the cat may have. Any cases of aggression must also be included in the report.

### Finding a new owner

To prevent laboratory cats from being bought on an emotional whim, only well-informed, trained people should qualify as a potential new owner. The selection of potential new owners can be based on the following criteria:

- motivation
- willingness to seek professional advice when necessary
- the personal/family situation and the area around the house

It is important that expectations are aligned at the beginning of the process and that potential new owners are told what they can expect, also in connection with future home visits.

### Characteristics of new owner

- Potential owners must be knowledgeable about keeping and caring for cats. This includes (1) knowledge of cats' general needs, particularly with regard to physical exercise, social needs and preventive veterinary care (vaccinations, worming, etc.). Potential owners should also have an understanding of cats' body language and behaviour. In addition, they must demonstrate that they have (2) the financial resources and time needed to care for a cat. Finally, potential owners must (3) understand the specific needs of the particular cat they want to adopt. This includes the animal's specific behaviours and veterinary/medical needs.
- With a view to points 1 and 2 mentioned above, the rehoming organisation must only place cats with potential owners who have demonstrable knowledge of keeping and caring for cats and have the time and financial resources necessary to do so.

Workshops and training sessions can be arranged to provide potential owners with good information and advice on how to deal with any problems. In order to prevent these animals from being sold for breeding purposes (commercial or otherwise), sterilisation can be considered.

It is the responsibility of the Animal Welfare Body (IvD) and/or the rehoming organisation to carefully assess the cat for any undesirable behaviour that may affect the suitability as a pet. Problems that often occur in former laboratory cats are: anxiety-related behavioural disorders, such as fear of people, objects or animals that are uncommon in a laboratory environment, urinating or defecating in undesirable places, separation-related issues, etc.

#### *Medical file and advice*

It is the responsibility of the Animal Welfare Body (IvD) and/or rehoming organisation to inform the potential owner of the cat's medical history. Special emphasis must be placed on existing medical conditions and related care as well as breed-specific medical problems that may arise as the cat gets older. For a successful rehoming it is essential that this information be tailored to the individual cat that is being rehomed.

#### **Transfer of ownership**

The rehoming is usually accompanied by a transfer of ownership. It is important to take into account the legal aspects of transfer of ownership.

#### **Costs**

The establishment licensee must take into account that there are costs associated with the rehoming of former laboratory animals. Costs are incurred for the internal process, for aspects such as socialisation, training, transportation, and, if applicable, operations, and for the external process, for aspects such as adaptation of the

temporary accommodation to make it suitable for the animal, medical costs, etc. All costs must be taken into consideration.

### **III. The external process**

#### **New environment**

The suitability of the new home environment is crucial to the success of rehoming. For a good match between cat and new owner it is important to take into account the personal situation of the new owner and the area surrounding his/her home.

#### **Follow-up and aftercare**

New owners need to be assured that they can always ask for advice. Advice can be provided by skilled and competent people, for example, a person designated by the establishment licensee, a specially designated local veterinarian or, if a rehoming organisation is involved, an employee of that organisation. If necessary, specialist advice may be sought from an animal behaviourist or veterinarian. Conducting a follow-up visit one to two months after rehoming creates an opportunity to assess the animal's behaviour in the new living environment and address any questions and/or problems the owner and/or rehoming organisation may have.

Every animal responds differently to the rehoming in a new environment. When an animal does not adjust to its new home, other arrangements must be made. In such situations it is possible that the animal will be returned to the rehoming organisation. In that case an assessment is conducted to determine why the animal could not adjust and whether the animal is suitable for a life as a pet. If the

animal is considered suitable, then every reasonable effort must be made to ensure that the next attempt is successful. Possibilities include engaging an animal behaviourist or other specialist to assess the suitability of the animal and the future owner and to supervise the facilitation and management of the pet's behavioural change in the new environment.

## IV. Annexes

### Annex 1: The socialisation and training of cats

#### Kittens 0-8 weeks old -> Stay in the care department

Cats undergo an imprinting stage when they are three to eight weeks old (first socialisation period). During this period cats must be given attention every day. They need to be picked up each day and held for a while, preferably by different people. This way the animals can get used to people and being picked up, which will benefit their development. From the age of six weeks a cat must be played with. Kittens are particularly interested in chasing and catching prey. It is important that hands and feet are not used for this type of play, otherwise the animals may come to regard them as playthings. Prey can be simulated with strings and dangling objects. Kittens must also practice climbing. In addition, it is important to let cats get used to different types of sounds. Background music from the radio is suitable for this, and it is also important to talk to the animals regularly. From the age of seven weeks they will be more inclined to draw back when confronted with a new object. It is therefore important to provide them with new toys regularly.

#### Kittens 8-16 weeks old -> Stay at the research institute

Cats' second socialisation stage begins when they are between eight and nine weeks old and lasts until they are sixteen weeks. During this period the cat learns how to behave in social situations and how to deal with aggression. Inadequate socialisation increases the risk of later behavioural problems. Young cats must be played with regularly so they can grow accustomed to their caretakers. Kittens are most playful when they are between nine and fourteen weeks old. Young cats must receive personal attention every day, from different people. It is important that the cats get used to this change of caretakers.

#### Cats > 16 weeks

Cats older than sixteen weeks (four months) of age have completed the imprinting stage and the second socialisation stage, although that does not mean that they no longer need attention or socialisation exercises: even older cats can still learn a lot. You can play with the cats during the daily contact, for example by allowing them to chase a dangling string in the animal room. A laser pointer can be used to project a dot of light on the floor and walls that they can follow, or ping pong balls can be scattered on the floor. Empty feed bags or boxes are also suitable as toys. Keep in mind that cats quickly become bored with a toy. It is therefore important to replace toys regularly (preferably daily).



## Training exercises

### Petting and picking up

Sit quietly on the floor in the animal room. Some cats approach on their own to be petted; others must be enticed. To allow cats to get used to the caretaker's hands, an attempt can be made to get the cat to eat out of his or her hand (make sure not to fill the food bowls until after this exercise!). Try to draw in a cat that does not want to be petted with a piece of string on a stick, where the stick is used as an extension of the arm. The purpose of this exercise is to teach the cat that being petted is nothing to be afraid of. Once the cat is petted, it should be picked up. Do this as gently as possible. If a cat is anxious or uncertain, it can be good to play with it a bit first so the animal gets used to the presence of the caretaker in the animal room.

### Restraining on an examination table

Once the cat accepts being petted and picked up, it is time for the second step. See how the cat responds to having its flanks touched as it is being lifted. Once the cat accepts this, the next step is restraining the cat for the various tests, such as taking blood or administering an intramuscular or subcutaneous injection. Remember that this is an exercise: the cat should not be afraid or uneasy. Intensify the exercises gradually so that the cat develops positive associations.

### Electric razor

Once the previous exercises have been completed with success the cat can be made familiar with the electric razor. Make sure that the shaver is initially switched off. Rub it gently over the cats neck and both front

legs. Once the cat accepts this the shaver can be switched on so the cat can get used to the sound. Then gently rub the back side of the razor over the cat's neck and both front legs.

### Practising with transport cage

Put a transport cage in the animal room for several days so the cat can get used to it. This gives the cats the opportunity to investigate the cage and smell it.

At the same time the cage takes on the smell of the cats. Once the cats are used to the cage try to put a cat in the cage and close the door. Once the cat accepts this lift the cage and carry it around for a bit. Then open the door again. Repeat this exercise every day, gradually leaving the cat in the cage for longer periods of time.

### Training results and determining the character

The results of each training exercise are noted on the training form. A separate form is used for each animal, with space for training data from several sessions. This makes it easy to see the results of the previous session and determine what requires additional attention. A score of 1 to 3 is granted, with 1 for a very poor training result, 2 for a poor result and 3 for a good result. An indication of the character is also noted on this form so the caretaker can see whether the character of the cat has improved or worsened.