

How to Truly Rescue a Cat

Many well meaning folks "rescue" socialized cats and kittens every year. Unfortunately they may be setting up the cat, it's future offspring, or other cats exposed to them to some future pain, suffering and even death. Some rescuers will refrain from taking the cat/kitten to the shelter or humane society for fear it will be euthanized because "their facility is full". However, taking a socialized stray out of the middle of the highway may save its life today, but dropping an unaltered cat off at a friend's barn or some pet stores may be a death sentence tomorrow. Just feeding stray cats is not a "True Rescue".

Many "rescuers" do not test for FeLV/FIV first, neuter the cat before adoption or screen new adoptive homes. To truly rescue the cat/kittens and not unknowingly add to the overpopulation problem, it will take some financial resources, and patience. Getting several concerned people (neighbors, vets, friends and local animal welfare organizations) to help you with the rescue will not put the total burden on you. Once you have chosen to truly *rescue* and find a home, the following steps will help you provide a safer future for your rescued cat.

1. **Isolate** cat/kitten immediately until he/she has been tested for FeLV/FIV. Cats that are infected do not always appear sick and could be "carriers" of the viruses, which in turn could infect exposed and even vaccinated healthy cats. Educate yourself re: these viruses and the limitations of the tests. If the cat tests positive, there are several options. (Look for a loving indoor home with an owner who can and will responsibly manage the illness properly or euthanize the cat due to the risk of infecting others). Many professionals and welfare organizations have different opinions regarding the FeLV/FIV tests and euthanizing positive cats. You **should not**, however release a cat/kitten that has tested positive (or unaltered) back outside into the community. Once your kitty appears healthy (physically as well as in behavior) you should be able to proceed to the next step quickly.
2. **Neuter!** *Please have all cats/kittens neutered before adopting him/her out.* Studies show that many of unaltered cats/kittens adopted out never get neutered, only contributing to the present cat overpopulation crisis. Kittens can be neutered as young as 10 to 16 weeks. Find a veterinarian who has experience and routinely performs early ("juvenile") neuters/spays. You may also choose to vaccinate. This will help the cat/kitten build up its immune system while you search for a new loving home. Unvaccinated cats, especially kittens, are highly vulnerable to upper respiratory illness. A sick animal is not easily adopted.
3. **Be Patient.** Adopt to loving indoor homes. Wait for that adopter who will care for that lucky cat as much as you have. There are Adoption Guidelines with tips on how to screen for good adoptive homes and sample adoption contracts at bestfriends.org in their resource library.
4. **Support** local pet stores who **assist animal rescue organizations with their adoptions.** Other pet stores may take in stray/homeless cats/kittens for free, give them basic vaccinations that cost them very little, only to turn around and charge the new owner \$40-50. Many of these cats have no records of being tested or neutered nor does the store follow adoption guidelines. This only fills their pockets with profits and does nothing to ensure the cat's future nor helps the community cat overpopulation problem.

If you find you are not able to follow through with this plan or find a contact who is a seasoned rescuer, an animal shelter or animal welfare organization would be the best placement. Finding adoptive homes can be very exhausting, but very rewarding once this has been accomplished. Thanks to all those who take that extra effort to **truly rescue** and find cats/kittens "forever homes". At times, it feels overwhelming, but you are making a difference, one kitty at a time.