

Cat Behavior/Body Language Lesson



Character Concepts Taught: Responsibility and Caring

Grade Level: Any

Prerequisite: None

Time: 30 minutes

Number of Participants: Full group

Number of Educators/Assistants: 1/1

Prep: None

Materials:

- White board and dry erase markers

Cognitive Objectives: Students will understand that it is a privilege to be allowed to visit cats, and in order to have that privilege they must be responsible and follow the rules. Students will learn these rules through the ANIMAL acronym.

Procedure:

Introduction:

- ♥ Do you remember your first day of school or day care? How did you feel?
- ♥ Often cats feel those same emotions (nervous, scared, shy) when they enter our shelter. They are in an unfamiliar, maybe overwhelming, environment that they are not used to, and there are no familiar faces, just like on the first day of school.

Body:

1. We are going to go over the ANIMAL acronym specifically for cats! Ask students if they remember what ANIMAL stands for? (If they haven't gone through the ANIMAL lesson yet explain to them that it is an acronym (a remembering tool) to help us remember the rules of interacting with animals at the ARL or any animal you meet!) We are going to use these rules to work with cats!
 - **A: Ask permission** – When meeting a cat for the first time, find a spot away from the cat and sit down, calming your body. Wait for the cat(s) to come to you. We can slowly hold out a fist and invite the cat to come over and bump our hand with their face. That means you've been given permission to pet them gently on the cheek or head.

- **N: Notice what they're telling you** - How do cats communicate with us what they want and how they are feeling? Body language! What are some things they do to communicate that they are happy? What about scared or agitated?
 - i. Rubbing their face on you: loving you! Glad you're there.
 - ii. Walking away: wants a break.
 - iii. Tail-swishing: upset. Wants a break. If a cat's tail increases in swishing be sure to stop petting them and give her time space and time.
 - iv. Head turn/watching as you touch them: scared, irritated, or worked up. Wants some space and a break from petting.
 - v. Ears forward: happy!
 - vi. Ears flat: scared or angry! Give them a break.
 - vii. Swatting or scratching: scared, irritated, or worked up. Needs a break.
 - viii. Hissing, growling: upset. Wants a break.
 - ix. Fur puffed up: ready to attack. Wants a break.
 - x. What do you do if a cat shows you his/her belly? Take it as a sign that the cat trusts you but **do not pet their belly**. It is often like a Venus fly trap where as soon as you touch their belly their arms will close around you. Some cats like belly rubs but we do not know these cats well enough to risk it. Cats only show their bellies to each other as a sign of trust- if you reach out and break their trust, they might feel threatened enough to scratch you and bite you.

Where do you think the best place is to pet a cat? Under their chin, on their cheek, generally in the head area. Some cats do not like to be pet near their tail, so avoid that area.

- **I: Invite them to make choices** – Let the cats choose what they want to do. Maybe they're shy and want to watch you and listen to you whisper with your partner. Maybe your cats will want to snuggle for a long time. Maybe they will want to play. Maybe eat! Maybe pee! Let them walk where they like without being chased. **If you're petting/cuddling with a cat, keep the play toys hidden from sight.** Once you start with playtime, stop petting the cat.

Why is this important? Cats may bite or swat at a person if they are worked up from playtime. By keeping playtime/petting time separate, we are teaching cats that hands are not playthings, which helps them get adopted!

- **M: Make them feel safe and comfortable** – voices should be quiet, bodies should be still and stay in one spot, and we should never grab at them or chase them.

- **A: Act calmly and move slowly** – Rushing at cats can scare them! Cool your jets. The calmer you are, the more the cats will want to hang out! You should be sitting down, glued to one spot.
- **L: Learn from them and teach others** – Now you know so much about cat body language! When you meet cats you can watch them play! You can tell others about the awesome things cats do, and what you have learned about cats!

If you get scratched or bit, which is not likely if you follow the rules, you should let an adult know right away.

IF you are respectful to the cats, they should not feel scared and threatened, and therefore not scratch or bite you.

Speak Up

- ♥ *Make sure you share what you have learned about cat body language and behavior with your friends and family to keep themselves and the cats safe and comfortable!*