

September 8, 2007

### *Basic taming!*

1) Please confine the girls, we use and recommend 2x2x3' Midwest cages. Right now I don't have any to lend out, but someone might. They're extremely useful as taming cages. Let me know if you don't find any, if you don't presently have one.

The condo cages, both the Midwest ones and more "professional" ones, are not ideal for taming since the cats can get away from you which encourages fussing on both parties' parts.

In 1993 I chose the 2x2x3' size because my arm is about 36" long! and that's proven to be, imo, the best size.

[www.revivalanimal.com](http://www.revivalanimal.com)

is a great source for cages and other stuff (their print catalog is easier to deal with, website is OK but clunky)

### 2) Cage set up

I set up the cage, on top of a card table or Rubbermaid storage bins, with a small carrier w towel in it, small litter box next to the carrier at back end of cage. Quick lok bowls for crunchies & water at front of cage (Revival has great prices on these -- they're good since much harder to knock over).

You have the carrier so that as you look into the cage from the door at one narrow end, the carrier is at the left back, with door opening to the left, prong of door tucked into edge of cage. Litter pan just fits to the right.

### 3) If I'd bought stock in Gerber in 1970.....

Gerber meat baby food. Expensive but very much worth it for taming and rehab feeding.

Open jar in front of cage, they'll get used to the POP and know it means incoming treat.

Start with calming yourself, always. I often do a simple meditation for a minute before starting taming practice.

Hierarchy:

Start by bf on small paper plate, push in to cage, leave so they'll eat it  
(at first they may not eat it, but it is significant that you offer it)

Announce "Baby food!" every time

Then put the plate in, keeping hand always below their chin level, so you present as NOT a predator. Keep hand relaxed, not fingers out straight (that looks like a paw about to attack). Leave

It helps to keep your body turned 3/4 to them -- this is presenting a small cross section, another NOT predator thing. Keep your eyes mild. Be quiet in your motion and speech. I tend to do an ongoing kind of guided meditation patter, while telling them what I'm doing and what I'm about to do.

Put plate in, don't leave (if they'll eat it in front of you yet)(if won't, leave)

Put plate in, near front of cage

Put plate in near front of cage, stay there so to get bf they must approach you

Open cage door, announce bf, they must approach you, you put plate in

Bf on spoon, keep hand below their chin level

Bf on finger

Bf on finger AND you must firmly touch them with other hand, on side

A note on touch -- Be calm, deliberate, not scared (meditate! visualize!).

You want your touch to have the authority of Ur Mom Cat. When you get to the scruffing point, use what I call a wide scruff rather than a pinch scruff -- use your whole hand, spread the scruff out rather than bunching it in one painful point. Do not be tentative. Tentative means, about to attack, testing out the enemy. Always remember to move hand/arm below their chin level, this is quite important. Relaxed, curled hand/fingers.

Bf on finger AND you must firmly touch them, now with both hands  
(then you offer the bf)

Bf, to get it they must let you touch on both sides and LIFT a micron

Same, lift more, bf

Same, lift several inches, bf

Same, lift towards you, set back, bf

Same, lift to your chest, don't look at cat -- too threatening, return, bf

Same, lift to chest, turn, turn back, return, bf

Same, take a few steps, return, bf  
Same, walk around, return, bf

If at any point, or any particular interaction, they greatly fuss, take a step backwards and return to the next lower step in the hierarchy.

Sometimes say a very noisy car might have gone by 10 minutes ago and they're more antic/anxious than usual. Or YOU might be more tense than usual.

4) A good 4 page account of my kind of taming, by Mary Sper who I helped teach, is at  
[www.icraeastbay.org/ICRAKittenSocializing.pdf](http://www.icraeastbay.org/ICRAKittenSocializing.pdf)  
To read pdf files, if your computer doesn't already have it, get Adobe Reader free at  
[www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html](http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html)

I do disagree with her #6 -- I strongly believe that once you bring kittens and teens in for taming, you're committed to it. You've taken them out of "how to be a cat in a colony" school! Also, I strongly believe that this attitude of "nonconditional taming intent" helps the taming process - seriously.

#### 5) Cosmic kitty massage

Yes! I'm an old hippie! Once you can pick up the kib, sit down with towel in your lap, with kib against your chest. Calm yourself. Keep up a constant calm meditative murmur (for ideas, google search for "guided meditation"). Low pitched, slow, flowing, calm. Loving.

You have your head turned away, relaxed, eyes mild.

With kib still against your chest, and NEVER pull your head back and look at the kib, that's very threatening especially so up close, start to FIRMLY massage the scruff area, slow, wide hand, curved fingers, pull the scruff up as if you were Ur Mom Cat washing that kib.

You are listening to your hand, to the kib. This really is what it feels like.

When you were a little tiny kitten, your mama would see you run, run, running to her....She was always so glad to see you and to lick you. She would push up your fur, nuzzling you so thoroughly, and lick you all over very firmly. Push, push, push, she wanted to get to every single place all over you. Here's a place, and here's another

place. Slow, we close our eyes and listen. She'd say that's my puss! and be so happy to see you and to love you. Rub, rub, rub, all the kitty places, all over so fine and loose, pull the way momcat washing face pushes up your kitty face, and back.

You keep doing this, get slower and slower if you can. You'll tend to speed up, that's OK, just remember to slow down. With a little practice this gets much easier and your INTENT becomes more clear. When you've got the knack of it, both you and the kitty will be getting calmer and calmer and more centered and still. Together you are.

You can think of all this stuff as a mutual learning/entraining practice.

You start massaging the scruff, then move over the shoulders, back. Do not be too quick to go to the belly and feet, those shall be last. Firm, deepening strokes/pulls/pushes. As you're doing this, you're slowly laying the kitty down in your lap. When you start doing deep belly massage, you are slow, deep, like a big lap of Ur Mom Cat tongue, again and again.

Continuity of touch -- This is important! You're weaving a cosmic space, and you want to always keep one hand at least firmly on the kitten/cat. If you take both hands off, it's disorienting, it tends to break the spell. If you do, just go back to it, take a step backwards in the massage, go back to that place.

Eventually, you'll be deeply massaging the kitty's belly and entire body. At this point they'll tend to be very limp, extremely relaxed. This is sacred space. You don't want to suddenly stop and say well, time to do my chores! You want to lead off from the deepest point, to kind of bring yourself and the kitty back to more normal space.

Especially with the more timid/traumatized/anxious cats, at the very end of the cosmic kitty massage I'll have a given "this is the end, we are finished" signal -- usually something like 4 gentle & firm pats to the side. This helps them transition and know what's going on.

[Most of this stuff, I learned billions of years ago, at a dorm at Caltech, I set up a massage party thing -- a bunch of students gathered weekly in a place in the dorm, and we all just started massaging each other. Really terrible at it at first! but that's OK, both sides learn, and that's true with cosmic kitty massage also. This process can sound really silly and wacky, but it really can be done, and is very worth learning/practicing. The other week I was over at Jan's, doing this with a teenaged kib, and I looked up and there were a number of cats ranged in front of us, eyes half closed, going along for the ride. That was very sweet!]

Once you've practiced this a bunch of times with a kib, the time from start of massage to deep relaxation becomes much shorter. This works the absolute best with hard stray kittens, but works well with teenagers and adults -- with adults, of course, it takes a lot longer to get to these points!

6) Socialization will often plateau up and down. One day, the kib you've been working with will suddenly NOT let you pick her up. OK, just take a step backward, go back in the hierarchy to what she WILL allow. This up and down is quite normal, you see this in humans as well as cats.

One time I was working with an older teenager, nearly a year old, had been very hard stray. I approached the cage, opened the door to start practice with bf, and she flew out of the cage like a rocket! Whump! On my chest! I thought, OK, you're in for it, duck your head. But it was OK, she wrapped her paws around my neck HARD and was purring! She'd plateaued WAY up! (She was placed in an excellent adoption facility and adopted to doting couple).

And of course, sometimes you DO get wopped, swatted, scratched, etc. If you do, disengage immediately, try to have "no affect" -- no yelling, no screaming, no big drama, just "ok if you do that I leave immediately. With some kibs it's helpful to curl your hand up and with mild eyes, go "owwwwww!" (they'll often look embarrassed). And remember, this means you made a mistake.

7) I've written a lot (my yet-unsocialized book!) in the FILES section of the yahoo group  
[http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/feral\\_cats/](http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/feral_cats/)  
and there's daily discussion of TNR (trap-neuter-return), rescue issues and ethics in general, and taming. (Often lots of clueless new folks there, too).

THANK YOU for working on taming with these kittens!  
Gesine

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Hi Lesley,

I'll mail you the paperwork on the kittens this weekend. Thank you so much for working with them.

My friend Gesine will email you re the kittens that are not taming down quickly enough. She has some taming tricks to share. She wanted to make sure the hissy kittens are being kept in a cage or cages -- preferably not a condo cage but one where they can't get too far away from your hands when you are cleaning. Just the forced proximity helps to tame them.

One thing Gesine uses for taming is meat baby food, letting them lick it off of a spoon while you hold it, and then later letting them lick it directly off of your finger. Massages are also important, getting them to relax and almost fall asleep draped over your leg. It's kind of hard to scruff while massaging the shoulder blades, but it's not impossible.

The rest I'll leave for her.

Jan

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