

CARRIER TRAINING FOR CATS

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pasadenahumane.org/behavior.

Many cat owners have experienced the unpleasant task of wrangling their cats to get them in the carrier for a trip to the vet or groomer. With the right training, you can avoid this scenario and teach your cat to willingly go into the carrier and even enjoy their time there.

If your cat has already developed a fear or aversion to the carrier, you may consider purchasing a new carrier for a fresh start. If this is not an option, this training may take a few weeks or even months. Work on the training below slowly.

Training Steps:

1. Set the carrier out in a part of the house where your cat spends a lot of time. Place a soft blanket or towel inside and toss in a few treats for your cat to find. Leave all of the carrier doors open so your cat is free to enter and exit as they please.
2. Praise your cat and give them a treat any time you catch them inside the carrier. You can also use play as a reward. Toss a toy inside or use a wand style toy (whatever type your cat likes best) to engage your cat in play when they are inside the carrier. We want your cat to learn that they gain access to great things when they go in the carrier!
3. You can start to put this behavior on a verbal cue of “Carrier,” “Inside” or any other word you choose. Say the cue “Carrier” and toss a treat inside. Point to encourage your cat to enter the carrier. Repeat this many times throughout the day so that your cat learns to go inside the carrier on command.
4. Once your cat is regularly going in and out of the carrier on their own (typically after a few days), start feeding your cat part of every meal inside the carrier. Place the food dish inside the carrier so your cat must go inside to eat.
5. After a few days of feeding in this manner, gently close the carrier door once your cat has entered and has started eating. Do this carefully so as not to make any loud noises. Allow your cat to finish eating and notice that the door has been closed. Open the door while your cat is still quiet and allow them to stay or leave as they please.
6. After several sessions of feeding with the door closed, divide up your cat’s meal. Place the first portion in and send your cat into the carrier. Once they are inside, gently close the carrier and pick it up and move it to another room. Place the carrier down and open the door. Repeat this several times with portions of the meal.
7. Your cat should be relaxed and readily entering the carrier. If you notice that your cat appears nervous, reluctant, or fearful, slow things down and work through the training steps in a more gradual manner. As your cat learns to associate good things with the carrier, we expect that they will start spending more time there. Many cats even enjoy relaxing or sleeping there.
8. Gradually work up to extending the time in the carrier to longer periods of time. Work up to taking your cat for a quick walk or ride around the block and returning home.

Make sure that the carrier remains a normal part of the environment where good things occur! Don’t keep it hidden away until it’s time for the vet appointments or you may risk creating a negative association, even after all your training.

We are always here to help! You can find additional behavior and training resources at pasadenahumane.org/behavior.

Adapted from Northeast Animal Shelter



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