



Bringing Your Working Whiskers Cat Home

Congratulations on your adoption, and thank you for being a part of this life saving program! Follow the instructions and tips below to help your Working Whiskers cat successfully adjust to his new home.

The adjustment period

Your new Working Whiskers cat needs time to adjust to his new environment. To help him adjust safely and make sure he doesn't flee, he must be confined in a secure space for 3-4 weeks and provided with daily food, water, litter box cleaning, and bonding time with you. This process significantly increases the likelihood that he will stay in the area once he is released. If he flees, he may easily become lost and he will be exposed to many dangers—such as extreme weather, predators, cars and starvation. Longer confinement periods are most successful. While confined, your cat may seem panicked, try to escape, and initially be very messy for a few days. This is normal, and so he should settle once he realizes he is safe.

Recommendations for a safe, successful adjustment:

- Choose a secure space for confinement such as a tack room or an extra large dog crate. The OHS can provide a suitable crate if needed (a refundable loan deposit will apply).
- If using a crate, cover part of it with a sheet so that your cat can feel more hidden.
- If using a room, check for areas your cat may go into that are not safe (i.e. vents) and block access. If a cat's face fits, their body will follow—and cats are good climbers!
- Make sure the confinement space is safe from predators and protected from the elements. Consider the time of year the adjustment process is occurring. There should be shade and proper ventilation in summer months, and warmth and adequate insulation in winter months.
- Place a box for hiding inside the confinement area, with the opening facing away from the crate or room door. Place food and water dishes closer to the back and litter closer to the front.
- Provide fresh food and water at the same time daily, so your cat learns that there is a reliable food source.
- Clean the litter box and any messes in the confinement area daily.
- Once a day spend at least 10 to 15 minutes with your Working Whiskers cat. Offer treats or canned food and talk to him so that he learns the sound of your voice. Treats will help gain your cat's trust and develop a special recall (e.g. "here kitty, kitty") can help get him to come back to you once he is released from confinement. If your cat shows interest, offer the treats from your hand, but don't force it! How your cat responds

will depend on your cat's socialization level. Less socialized cats may not respond to you. The more trust you are able to build with your cat, the more likely he will be to stay.

- If your cat is interested in play, place toys such as ping pong balls or toy mice in the confinement area. Dangle a cat wand if possible. Toys can also help build confidence and increase the bond between you and your Working Whiskers cat.

After three weeks, we will contact you to see how your cat is adjusting and whether it is safe to end the confinement. **Do not let your cat out until we advise it is safe to do so.** Do not release your cat for the first time if it is raining/likely to rain, as he uses scent to find his way home, and his scent will wash away with rain.

At the end of the adjustment period, casually leave the door open to your cat's crate or room. Evening is the best time to do this as your cat is more likely to come out and explore at night. Leave the confinement area set up just as it is and continue to feed and clean on the same schedule. Let your cat explore at his own pace. If you used a crate for confinement, remove it after 10 days of your cat consistently leaving to explore then returning to eat. Keep the hiding box and feeding station in the same area if possible. The litter box can be moved outside of the building.

What about other animals?

If there are other owned animals at your location, introduce everyone slowly to prevent upset. For example, if other cats or dogs are present, they and your Working Whiskers cat need to become familiar with each other's scent before meeting face-to-face. Let resident dogs and cats sniff the outside of the confinement area during the adjustment period (keep dogs on a leash!). Don't let your Working Whiskers cat and resident animals see each other during this process. If there are horses present, your cat will likely coexist well with them once he adjusts to the horses' size.

To keep your cat safe from predators while he's confined, make sure he has access to a structure with several small openings that he can run into for safety. A fenced area also adds security.

Care requirements

As a cat owner, it is important that you provide your Working Whiskers cat with all the necessary care required to keep him happy and healthy.

Key care requirements include:

- Fresh food and water daily. A cat cannot live on rodents alone and will look elsewhere if his needs are not being met. Your cat will still hunt rodents even if cat food is available.
- Veterinary care as needed, including routine vaccinations and care if your cat appears sick or injured.

- Places to get away from people, noise and activity—especially if he is less socialized—as these can be very frightening for him.
- Shelter from the weather at all times, with insulation and heat provided during the cold months. Check to make sure shelters don't get blocked by snow in the winter.
- Updates on your Working Whiskers cat as requested to the OHS, so that we can continue to do our best work for you and all our Working Whiskers cats!

A few special tips!

- Create extra shelters for your cat using Styrofoam boxes or coolers. Simply cut a 6 inch doorway a few inches from the bottom and closer to the side of the wall rather than centered as this will provide a wind break. Use duct tape to attach the lid to the box and place something heavy on top if needed to prevent the shelter from blowing over.
- Use straw instead of hay for bedding: it's softer, warmer, and less likely to mold than hay.
- Buy a heated pet bowl for use in the winter, to keep your cat's drinking water from freezing.

What to do if your Working Whiskers cat is lost

When your cat is released from confinement, he may wander for a couple of days – this is normal. Continue putting out fresh food and water at the same time each day if this happens. Remove any barriers that might prevent him from getting back home. Keep necessary doors open and place food close to them. If you've adopted a less socialized cat, you may not see obvious signs of him. Look for clues that he has been present, such as indents in his bedding. If your cat escapes during the confinement period, set out food and water and sprinkle used cat litter around your location. **If your cat has been missing for 3 or more days please contact the OHS at 613-725-3166 ext. 223 to file a lost report.**

Thank you for giving this cat a second chance! If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us! You can reach the OHS Feline Services Coordinator at 613-725-3166 ext 287 or felineservices@ottawahumane.ca.