

# How Being Cat Friendly Has Made a Difference in Our Practice

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Sarah Dawson started work in veterinary practice in 2005 and at present is the Head Nurse and Cat Advocate for Walton Vale Vets4Pets in Liverpool, UK. She recently completed the ISFM Certificate in Feline Friendly Nursing with Distinction. Sarah was integral in implementing the Cat Friendly Clinic scheme in her practice, which was awarded silver, and she is working hard to change this to gold.

Opening a new clinic provides a great opportunity to make facilities cat friendly. A cat-only waiting room, consulting room, and ward were created at the author's clinic in Liverpool, UK. The waiting room provides opportunities to cover cat baskets and place them in an elevated position, and the consulting room contains a high-sided basket in which to examine and treat nervous cats. Hospitalized cats stay in the cat-only ward, and inpatients are given opportunities to hide in disposable boxes. Staff and owners have noticed great differences, with previously aggressive cats now handleable and clients more willing to bring their cats for examination, encouraging preventive healthcare and early diagnosis of disease. Being cat friendly has definitely benefited cats and clients visiting this practice, as well as the staff caring for stress-free feline patients.

The stress of the journey in the car, the noisy waiting area, topped off with the struggle of luring our frightened friends out of the pet carrier are enough to discourage any cat owner from making regular trips to the vet. In the past few years, the stress many cats go through

on their trip to the vet has been increasingly brought to light by organizations such as the International Society for Feline Medicine. In response, many veterinary practices are stepping up and creating a welcoming cat-friendly environment to help tackle this issue.

## OUR CLINIC

Walton Vale Vets4Pets opened in November 2013 in a busy suburb of Liverpool, UK. The practice was designed to create a welcoming cat-friendly environment for cat owners and hopefully make trips to the vet more enjoyable for them. Being cat lovers and taking a huge interest in feline welfare and behavior over the past few years, my colleagues and I set about creating a carefully planned cat section of the practice. Since doing so, we have noticed a great difference in the behavior of even our most nervous patients visiting the practice.

## CAT-FRIENDLY FACILITIES

Our cat-only consulting room is located adjacent to the cat waiting area, which leads onto the cat hospital ward. Making

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these in proximity and keeping these sections of the practice specifically for cats have allowed us to reduce the sights, smells, and sounds cats are exposed to on their visits.

### Waiting Room

The cat waiting area (**FIGURE 1**) has towels available for owners to cover their pet carriers, restricting what their pets can see while waiting. Owners are also encouraged to use our cat tree, where they can place their cats on an elevated surface to hopefully decrease stress levels (on the right in **FIGURE 1**). These small differences have helped reduce stress levels for many cats before they enter the consulting room for examination. Client information is displayed in the waiting area, encouraging clients to take advantage of these extra features and explaining why they reduce stress levels. Educating clients is one of the most important things a nurse, veterinarian, or receptionist can do in practice regarding feline stress and welfare. We also offer information leaflets for clients to take away and read at home regarding trips to the vet and reinforcing what is

## • TECHPOINT •

Small changes can make a big difference to cats. For example, covering cat baskets and placing them in an elevated position in the waiting room can reduce stress.

discussed in the consultation, which is very popular and helps ensure everything discussed is not forgotten when the client leaves.

### Consulting Room

The cat-only examination room has been kept exclusively for cats visiting the practice. An examination table

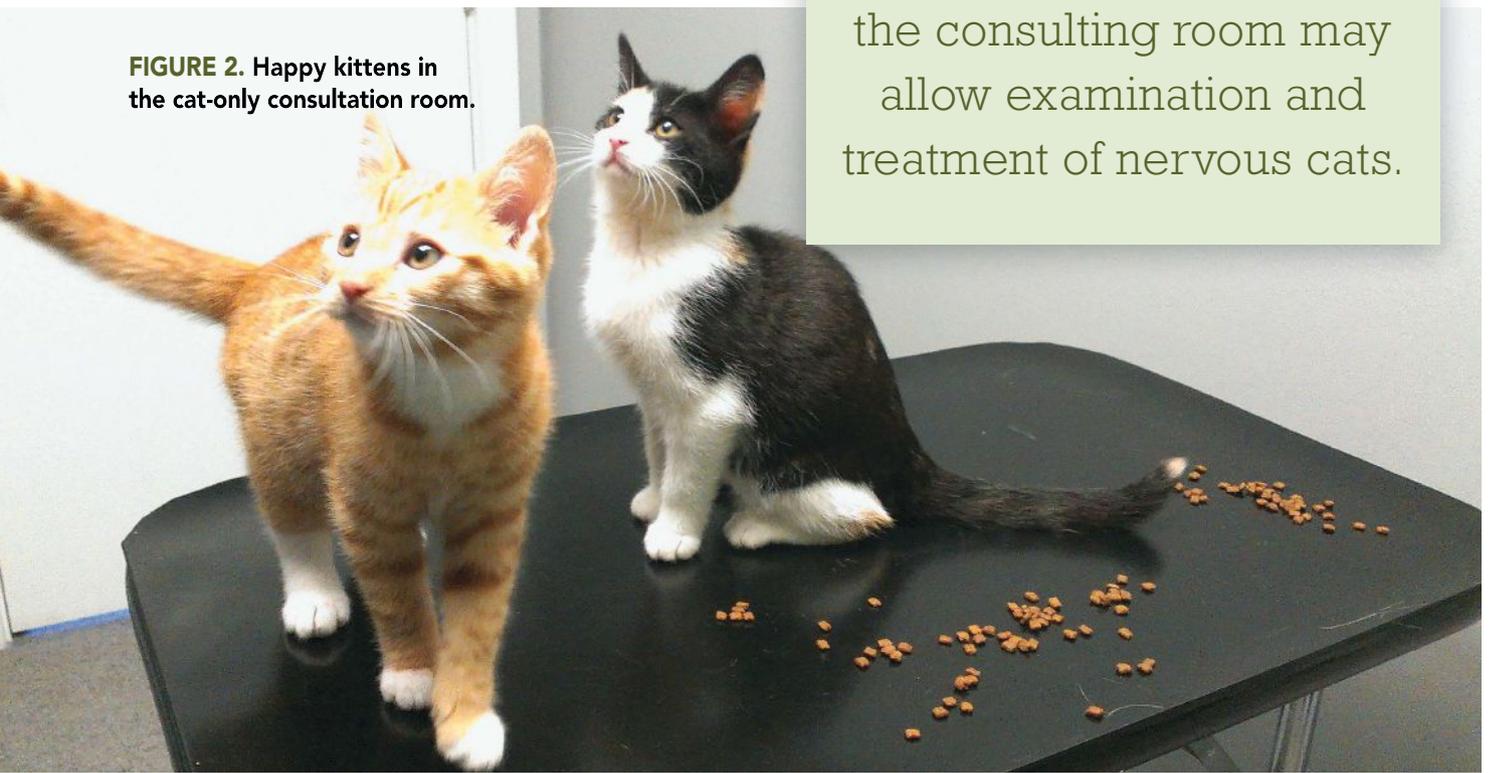


**FIGURE 1.** The cat-only waiting room, complete with a “tree” to ensure baskets are elevated off the floor (right) and leaflets on cat topics for owners to read or take home.

• **TECHPOINT** •

A high-sided basket in the consulting room may allow examination and treatment of nervous cats.

**FIGURE 2.** Happy kittens in the cat-only consultation room.



(FIGURE 2) covered with a blanket to create a warm surface, cat scales, and a high-sided basket for more nervous cats to hide inside if they choose to leave the safety of the pet carrier are all featured in this room. Separate equipment is kept in this room to reduce smells cats will be exposed to, along with toys to encourage play

or distract nervous animals. We encourage owners to keep their pets in carriers until we have discussed what the visit is about to reduce handling time and reduce stress. Where possible, we like to allow the cats to remain in their pet carriers and remove the lids for examination; this allows them to remain in the safety of the carriers with their own comforts, such as blankets and toys with familiar smells. We also have the option of a high-sided basket lined with a blanket (FIGURE 3), which has proved very popular with more nervous cats that choose to venture out of the carrier. This simple feature has made a noticeable difference in patient compliance when being



**FIGURE 3.** A cat having its nails clipped in the high-sided basket available in the consulting room. This cat previously had to be sedated to clip its nails but now happily sits in the basket for the procedure.



**FIGURE 4.** A hospitalized cat with a bed to hide in.

## ● TECHPOINT ●

Cats are taken to the veterinary clinic less frequently than dogs, but being cat friendly can encourage regular checkups to detect disease early and encourage preventive healthcare.

handled by staff. The basket has been used for nail clips and routine examination and is sprayed with Feliway spray (Ceva; [feliway.com](http://feliway.com)) every few hours.

### The Cat Ward

The cat hospital ward had been diverged in the same way. This ward is exclusively for cats, keeping cat-only blankets, boxes, and equipment separated from those used for other species (FIGURE 4). Disposable hiding spots made from cardboard boxes are used and discarded after use. A pheromone diffuser is permanently switched on, and kennels are lined along one wall to avoid cats being able to see each other (FIGURE 5). The kennels of other cats are covered to avoid direct eye contact if a cat needs to be removed from a cage.

### THE DIFFERENCE BEING CAT FRIENDLY MAKES

Since introducing cat-only facilities, my colleagues and I have noticed an unbelievable difference in even the most



FIGURE 5. The cat ward.



FIGURE 6. Being cat friendly benefits cats, clients, and staff.

anxious of cats. Cats that have previously been known for displaying aggressive or frustrated behavior have been handled and examined without any issues. Patient compliance for nail clips and blood sampling has improved massively, and this has also been noticed by owners. Cats previously sedated for basic procedures such as nail clips have been handled without a problem. Seeing these changes in our feline patients is something we are all extremely proud of. Being more feline focused has made such a difference to us, our patients, and owners. A positive stress-free trip to the vet is a key feature when encouraging clients to return for more frequent checkups (FIGURE 6).

With statistics showing our dog owners bring their pets to the vet much more than our cat owners, it is our duty to try and resolve this and gives owners an experience that will encourage them to come back. Frequent checkups allow us to detect health problems earlier, issue regular parasite control, monitor weight, and provide annual vaccinations, which overall are in the best interest of the animal. ■

### Cat Friendly Clinic

The Cat Friendly Clinic program is run by the International Society of Feline Medicine, in collaboration with several different partners across the world. In the United States, it is known as the Cat Friendly Practice program, run by the American Association of Feline Practitioners. The program is designed to help create more cat-friendly veterinary clinics, reducing stress for the cat as well as both the owner and veterinary staff treating the cat.

For more information, go to [catfriendlyclinic.org](http://catfriendlyclinic.org) or [catvets.com](http://catvets.com).

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