Animal Protection League of NEW JERSEY

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Guideline for Dis-location
When you have no option but to move cats to a new location

Please be sure to read The Philosophy of TNR — and why RETURN is a vital key of success before considering removing cats from where they are currently at and placing them elsewhere.

If you are left with no other options than to move cats, the guide will outline

- Finding Suitable Placements
- Protocols for best chance of success

Finding Suitable Placements

It is ALWAYS preferable to move cats to a large enough but enclosed outdoor space where possible.
You should also be looking for a location that is not already at, or close to being at the maximum number of cats the environment can support. One way you can estimate this is to allocate ¾ of an acre per cat as a comfortable ratio of resources to cats. In a catio situation where you can also have vertical climbing options for space, you can allocate 300 sq ft for 1 – 4 cats. For example, if you are moving cats to a horse farm that is 15 acres, and they already have 6 cats, you could potentially add 14 more cats comfortably if they will be free roaming. Of course, every situation is different, and is dependent on resources available in the area, but if you are looking at bring cats to a 15-acre farm that already has 50 cats you should know this is not a great option.

You also need to identify a willing and dedicated caregiver for the cats and be sure they will have access to food, water and shelter daily.

And you will need to be sure the new caregiver is completely on board with following the dis-location protocol for best chance of success, which does require some effort for about 4 weeks.

The best way to find suitable options is to first look at the existing feeder, then their family members, and then local neighborhood. Is there any way the existing feeder can take the cats? What about their family members? With the option of a catio almost anyone with their own property could add a catio and take the cats. Without a catio or known options to explore, the best way to search for options in your community is typically on social

media. There are many different groups on Facebook for example dedicated to barn cats, feral cats and finding homes for cats. Post on the NextDoor for your area or for an area that is more rural with lots of barns. Ask your friends to share your posts. Try to keep the cats from one location together, at the very least try to place them in pairs or quads together. When you have an offer of a placement, ask questions and make sure they know what is involved. Visit *in person* any location that you are considering moving cats to. Online photos or videos should not be what you base your decision on.

ALWAYS make sure cats are up to date on vaccinations and of course spayed/neutered before you move them somewhere else.

If you would like an idea of what questions to ask to screen a potential new caregiver, feel free to ask us. Most often the person requesting the placement will provide all of the supplies for the cats at least for the first few months. This will include a large dog crate per 2 cats, litter boxes, food and water bowls.

Most places of refuge do not really advertise their facilities openly, probably because they are very quickly filled to capacity when they offer to accept cats. We do not think the word "sanctuary" accurately describes these places because sanctuary indicates safe and peaceful for the rest of their lives whereas refuge offers a safe landing spot. You should expect the refuge to require cats to be spayed/neutered, up to date on shots and also to have tested negative for feline aids and leukemia, or if they are positive for feline aids or leukemia, they should only go to a refuge that has separate facilities for these cats. The average surrender fee is upwards of $350/cat. For more than a couple of cats this financial outlay may be difficult for most.

Note: APLNJ unfortunately cannot endorse any particular refuge to move cats to.

Once you have found a placement willing to accept responsibility for the cats, you will need to make sure they will agree to the containment protocols for at least 3 to no more than 6 weeks if cats will be free roaming and not in any kind of enclosure.

Please also keep in mind that for any medical needs in the future, it is also much easier to care for feral cats if they are in some kind of enclosure and there is not a huge population of cats. It is not going to be easy to administer up to date rabies vaccinations, for example, if you deliver a feral cat to a place that has 300 cats all free roaming.

Protocols for best chance at success

For places where the cat will be free-roaming after containment, if you follow these protocols you can expect a 25% chance of success. The more social/friendly a cat is, the higher the chance of success. You may find a higher success rate for the initial few months, but after 6 months you can expect a 25% success rate.

Wherever the new outdoor home is going to be, you need to have a place to confine the cat. This means a place the cat is not able to escape from. It cannot be a barn that has nooks and crannies to escape out from. It can be a large dog crate used for dis-location purposes.

The crate or fully enclosed space should have carriers or feral cat dens inside for the cat to hide in and to make cleaning and moving the cat easier. The crate should be covered with blankets or sheets to make it dark on all sides, but the door. Something dark and covered they can hide in. The enclosed space will need a litter box and food and water dishes. For more instructions on how to care for a feral cat in a dog crate see our website under community cat advocacy - resources – doing TNR – Caring for cats in crates.

It is preferable to have the confinement space very close to where the permanent feeding station is located. If there are other cats here, the new cats should be able to see the existing cats come to eat. Once they are released, they should know this is where they come back to eat. If your holding space is not within a few feet of the feeding station, the chances of successful placement will be lower.

The length of time you have to confine the cat will depend on his level of socialization. Friendly cats need around two weeks as they more easily bond to you in their new home. Feral cats, however, need around 4 weeks. If you aim for longer than 6 weeks, the plan can backfire and the cats do not decide to stay – every cat is different of course, but for the majority the most success is found with a time frame between 3-6 weeks.

During the confinement period, you want to get the cat used to you as his new caregiver. Get him used to your voice, pet him if he's friendly, and bring him yummy food on a schedule you plan to feed him once he is released. You also want to be sure the cat can see and smell his new home. If you're moving more than one cat from the same place at a time – confine them in pairs if using crates, and line crates up next to each other so that all of them can see each other and smell each other.

Make sure the new caregiver is willing and knows what to do to bond with these new cats during the confinement period. Ways to bond with cats:

1. Let them hear your voice. Talk to them. Make eye contact while talking to them. Lower your head and slowly close your eyes as you do so to let the cat know you are not a threat.
2. Feed yummy wet food, treats and stick to a feeding schedule so the cat knows when it is dinner time. Two times a day is optimal. Stick to this routine within an hour whenever possible.
3. Play with them. Play is a huge bonding exercise, though this might not work with some feral cats. A wand toy is ideal as it lets you interact with the kitty without putting your hands in danger of scratches. Do not continue with anything that makes them look stressed out, but if they look curious that's a great sign.

4. Petting and touch. Never try to touch a feral or scared cat without thick gloves on. Use the wand from your wand toy or a back scratcher. Place it down low so that they can smell it first. Slowly move it around and watch their eyes – if they look terrified, stop. While eating a treat you may be able to try to touch the top of their head with the wand/scratcher. Start with having them see the wand move slowly around before you try to touch them with it. Do not do anything that will risk the cat escaping prematurely or yourself being scratched or bitten. If they enjoy the touch this will help with bonding but don't push it if it is too stressful for them.
5. Yes, you can bond with feral cats even if you can never touch them. The more they understand you will not hurt them and are a source of food, the more likely they will decide to stay in this new environment.

After the confinement period is over, you will want to open the confinement areas and allow the cat to come out on her own. Do this as quietly and calmly as possible while the cats are learning to explore the new area. Leave the crate open as a kind of 'safe spot' for the cat to retreat to if he feels threatened or too scared.

Do NOT:

- Force the cat out of her cage or confinement area.
- Do not shut the door to the cage or confinement area after the cat has left.
- Run loud machines or release cats into large activity areas.

Leave the area exactly like it is for the cats to have room to hide in there until all the cats are adjusted to the new home. This can take a few days or a few weeks. If feral, they may avoid you except for feeding, but once the cats aren't running scared back to their 'safe spot' and are found sleeping or relaxing in other areas, they have adjusted.

Moving cats is not always successful. Remember this is only an option when the alternatives are far worse – in other words, certain death. Do the best you can to get the cat used to the area with confinement and a slow-release.

Food, water, warm shelters and medical care as needed are required for the rest of their lives.

We know you have not taken this decision to dis-locate lightly, so we wish you and the cats success and thank you for caring for these cats and for trying to give them a chance to live.