



Zorgbeest

## 5. Training of the cats:

- Obedience training can be part of the preparations for AAI cats but is not essential (Coppinger, Coppinger & Skillings, 1998).
- When is decided to train the cats, the following advice could be followed:
  - Each cat has its own personality. Good training is adapted to each individual cat and is respectful of the cat's personality.
  - One single person (e.g. the permanent cat caregiver at the facility) should do the training with the cats.
  - This person should have good knowledge of learning principles in order to train the cats correctly.
  - It is recommended that the permanent cat caregiver and the cats receive training from a specialised organisation (Ng et al., 2015)
  - The chosen organisation must use training methods based on positive reinforcement. This is more efficient and animal friendly (Ng et al., 2015; Hiby et al. 2004) and does not cause aggression- or fear-related problems. Such training methods should be based on the following principles:
    - Reinforcing the desired behaviours instead of focusing on correcting undesired behaviours. This only improves the human-cat relationship.
    - Avoid (as much as possible) punishment.
    - The reward or in exceptional cases punishment, must follow immediately after the behaviour (Holmes John & Mary, 1957).
    - Plan short training sessions in a calm environment with a reward the cat considers as a reward and a good reward schedule (this also includes rewarding cues the cat already knows).
    - Train the cat with stimuli he or she will experience on a regular basis and how he or she should respond, so that he or she is prepared as much as possible and can have more control over the situation.
    - To ensure the cats' welfare during the training, it is extremely important that his or her environment remains predictable and can be controlled at all times.
    - To prevent confusion, each stimulus (cue) must lead to a different reaction (Ödberg & Gombeer, 2010). Thus, use a different cue (visual or audio) for each trained behaviour.
    - The more a specific stimulus is accompanied by other stimuli, the smaller the chance that it will be clearly identified and that the cat will give the expected response (Ödberg & Gombeer, 2010).
    - Do not use contradictory signals.
    - In the case of undesired behaviour, try to turn it into an acceptable form instead of attempting to abolish it, or try to prevent the undesired behaviour by adapting the environment.
    - Turn the undesired behaviour into a stimulus-controlled behaviour (cue) and only encourage it under suitable conditions.
    - Select and reinforce an alternative behaviour that is not compatible with the undesired behaviour.
    - Use a neutral "time out" (without reward or extra punishment) for undesired behaviour that has an affiliative motivation (e.g. attention



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seeking, overly excited during play) (Bradshaw & Ellis, 2016).