

# Code of Practice for the Welfare of

## Cats



States of  
Guernsey

# Understanding the Animal Welfare (Guernsey) Ordinance, 2012 - Introduction to the Code

Owning and caring for a cat can be a source of great enjoyment, but you should be aware that cat ownership is a major responsibility and a huge financial commitment. Typically, cats live for about 14 years, but some live much longer than this. Consequently, you should think carefully about all factors that will affect your ability to care for a cat and whether a cat is suitable for you. Would you be able to provide for all of a cat's needs? You will need to consider the size and location of your property, the financial and time implications of having a cat as a pet. Caring for a cat can be expensive and you should consider whether, for instance, you would be able to afford the cost of both routine and unexpected veterinary treatment, and pet health insurance.

Being able to own a pet is not a human right. If you are a tenant, you must ask permission of your landlord before you take on ownership of a cat. Some landlords require enhanced deposits from pet owners to insure against the increased risk of damage to the property by pets.

Even the best laid plans can go wrong, we are all susceptible to the unexpected, be it loss of a job or family member, a personal illness, an expensive bill, a relationship breakdown or even imprisonment. Changes in an owner's circumstances can impact on their ability to meet their pet's welfare needs. While you cannot plan for every eventuality, it is good to have someone who would be able to step in to help. If you are unable to care for your cat at any time, you must make arrangements for another suitable person to look after it on your behalf. Furthermore, if you are the head of the household of a child under the age of 16 years old, you are responsible for any animal that child looks after or owns. If you own or are responsible for a cat and fail to meet its welfare needs or cause it unnecessary suffering, you may be prosecuted under the Animal Welfare (Guernsey) Ordinance, 2012 (the 'Ordinance').





There is no one “perfect” way to care for all cats because every cat, and every situation, is different, but they all have the same needs. It is up to you to find out what your cat’s precise needs are and how to meet them. Under Section 8 of the Ordinance, the owner or keeper of an animal owes a duty to take such care as, in all circumstances, is reasonable to see that the animal is –



**Free from thirst, hunger and malnutrition, by access to a diet to maintain full health and vigour and free access to water**



**Free from discomfort, by providing an appropriate environment including suitable shelter and a comfortable resting area**



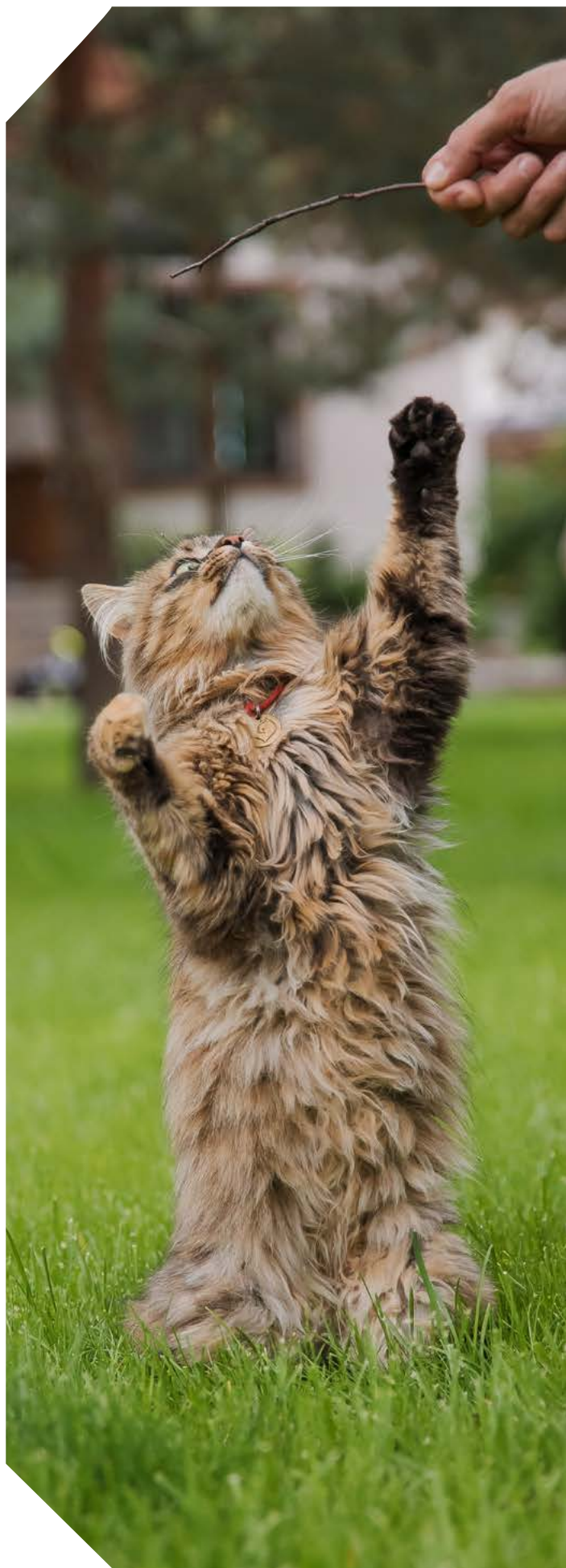
**Free from pain, injury and disease, by prevention or by the provision of timely veterinary diagnosis and treatment**



**Free from fear and distress, by ensuring conditions and treatment to avoid mental suffering, and**



**Free to express normal behaviour patterns, by providing sufficient space, environmental enrichment and companionship, whether that be of the animal’s own kind, a compatible species, and especially in the case of dogs, human company.**





## How to provide a suitable diet for your cat

**Diet includes water, and cats always need access to fresh, clean drinking water to keep them hydrated. Without water to drink, a cat will become distressed and seriously ill, especially during hot weather.**

A cat needs a well-balanced diet to stay fit and healthy, and they all need foodstuffs that can only be derived from meat-based products. Individual dietary needs depend on many factors including age, activity and state of health.

An individual cat's nutritional needs depend on their age, sex, activity, state of health and whether they have been neutered. Some cats, such as those that are pregnant, or nursing kittens, have special dietary needs.

If cats eat more food than they need, they will become overweight and may suffer. If you underfeed your cat, they will lose weight and may become ill. Healthy adult cats should maintain a stable body weight that is neither too thin nor too fat.

Sudden changes in their diet can make your cat ill. Any dietary changes, including treats, should be made gradually over a period of time.

### What you should do:

Provide your cat with clean fresh drinking water at all times, preferably located away from their food source. Keep the water vessel clean and frequently refreshed.

Make sure your cat eats a balanced diet suitable for their individual needs and maintains a stable weight that is neither over nor underweight for their age, level of activity, sex, breed and state of health.

Be aware that any change in the amount your cat eats or drinks may be a sign of ill health. If your cat's eating or drinking habits change, consult your vet.

Read, and be guided by, the feeding instructions relating to any commercial cat foods you buy but adjust how much you feed your cat to make sure they do not become underweight or overweight.

Provide all cats (including kittens) that have special needs with diets that meet their individual requirements.

Position your cat's food and water well away from the litter tray, or things that they find frightening.

Do not change your cat's diet suddenly. Changes should be made gradually over several days.

If you are uncertain about what to do, you should seek advice on feeding your cat from a vet, veterinary nurse, or other reliable source.





## Body Condition Score (BCS) for Cats



Reproduced with kind permission of Dr Ernie Ward of the  
Association for Pet Obesity Prevention





## How to provide a suitable environment for your cat

Your cat needs a safe environment and, whether they live inside or outside, they need protection from hazards. Examples of hazards include open windows and balconies, which may be inadequately protected to prevent your cat from falling from them; household and garden chemicals; and poisonous plants.

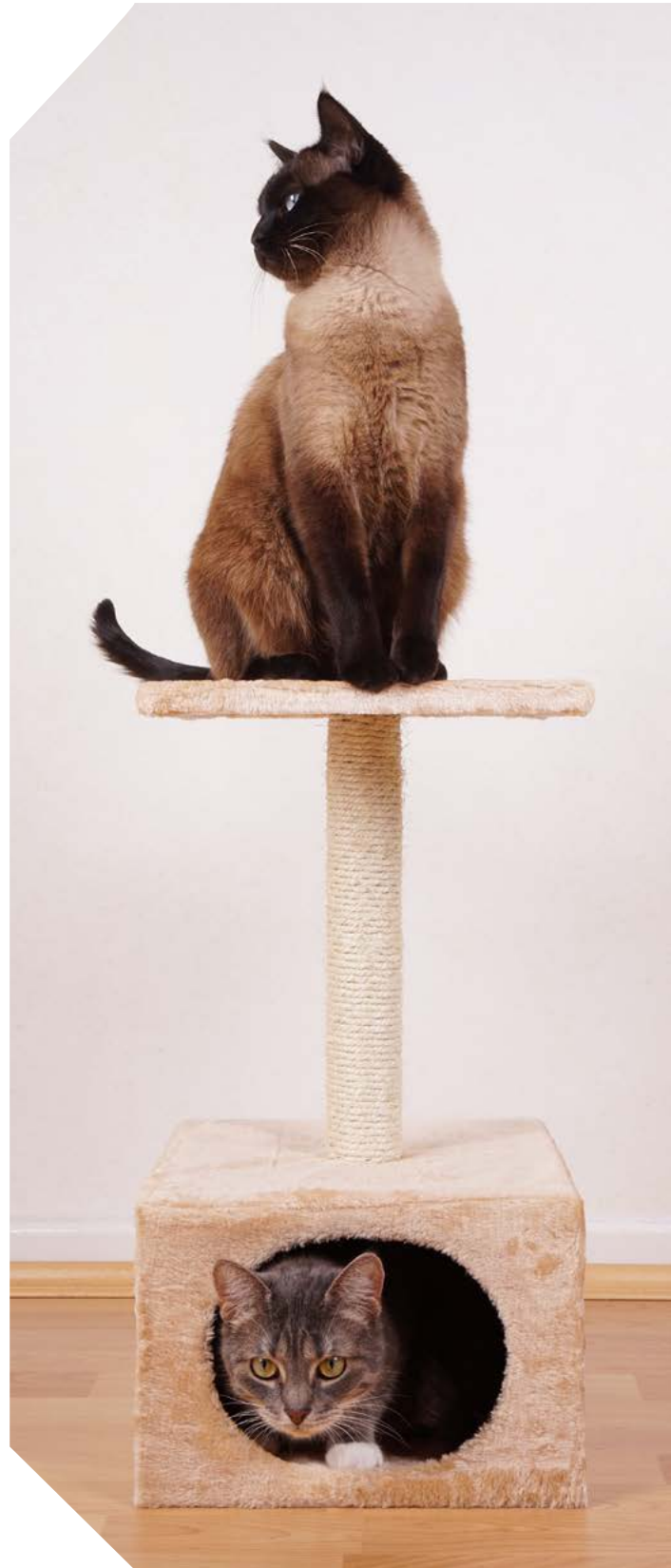
All cats need a safe, comfortable place to rest undisturbed. Cats that live outdoors, need access to a safe shelter and a source of food and water. Living in a cold or wet place, without shelter, can cause a cat to suffer.

A cat must be able to avoid things that frighten them, including other cats, and they all need a place to hide where they feel safe. They often feel safest when high up. If unable to hide and avoid threats, your cat may suffer anxiety and chronic distress, which can lead to illness.

Cats naturally enjoy exploring their environment. They are athletic animals and need opportunities to run, jump and climb especially if they are indoor cats.

Cats are naturally clean animals and need regular, easy access to an appropriate place to go to the toilet. They do not like to use heavily soiled areas. Some cats need to use an indoor toilet area, for example a litter tray, which must be kept clean.

Cats are territorial and become very attached to their own familiar environment. They are naturally cautious in unfamiliar environments, including around new places, smells, other animals and people.





## What you should do:

Provide your cat with a comfortable, safe, clean, dry, quiet, and draught-free environment with appropriate ventilation, temperature control and lighting (either natural or artificial).

To ensure your cat can thrive, you should offer as much space, choice, and enrichment as possible. Cats need ample space to stand up, turn around and stretch. Cats that are unable to perform natural behaviours become stressed, unwell and have a reduced lifespan.

Your cat should be provided with access to a suitable toilet area, away from their resting area, which is quiet, easily accessible and kept clean.

Make sure your cat has constant access to a variety of safe hiding places including elevated resting places, where it can feel safe.

Catios are good for cats who need to be kept indoors. Catios can provide cats with extra space and mental stimulation if they are unable to free roam. Make sure they have essential items such as litter trays and scratch posts, and plenty of opportunities to climb and exercise.

Catios should not be seen as a replacement for giving cats free access to explore. Restricting their outdoor space could cause them to become frustrated and stressed.

If you have more than one cat, make sure you provide enough extra resources. For example, toys, beds, hiding places and water bowls to promote a healthier relationship and minimise conflict.

If you are going away and not taking your cat, make sure they are only ever left with someone who can meet their welfare needs.





## How to ensure your cat is fit and healthy

**Cats do feel pain, but some can hide it very well. Individual cats show that they are in pain and suffering in different ways. Any change in the way a cat behaves can be an early sign that it is ill, or in pain.**

### **They may:**

- stop or reduce eating and lose weight,
- drink water excessively, less, or not at all,
- become withdrawn and unwilling to exercise or play,
- cry when approached or touched,
- show uncharacteristic fear or aggression when approached,
- try to hide,
- spray or not use the litter tray,
- perform high levels of grooming or pulling hair out,

### **They may also show specific signs of ill health such as:**

- discharge from the eyes, ears, or nose,
- excessive salivation, vomiting,
- difficulties passing urine, diarrhoea, or constipation,
- coughing or wheezing,
- excessive scratching and developing skin sores,
- limping or swellings.

This list is for guidance only and is not exhaustive.

Cats are vulnerable to a range of infectious diseases, parasites and other illnesses. Your vet can advise on ways to protect your cat's health and welfare including vaccination, parasite treatment and neutering.

Cats benefit from regular health care. Long-haired cats, or those with specialised coat types need help with grooming to avoid a matted coat.

If you decide to breed from your cat, your vet can advise on the risk of inherited conditions and exaggerated features. Raising kittens is difficult and time-consuming, and the kittens are your responsibility, with the same needs as any cat under the Ordinance.

A cat which can be identified (e.g. by microchip) has the best chance of being reunited with its owner if injured or lost. This will ensure they receive prompt veterinary treatment needed if injured. It is important to ensure the contact details held by any database are kept up to date.

### **What you should do:**

Take sensible precautions to keep your cat safe from injury, fear and distress, including prevention of access to poisonous food, plants, chemicals, medicines, electrical cables and any other hazards. Make sure any collars fit properly with a quick release mechanism and are not harmful. You should always consult your vet if you are concerned that your cat has eaten or come into contact with anything that could be harmful.





Get to know what is normal for your cat. Monitor your cat daily and watch out for changes in behaviour or signs of injury, disease or illness. Make sure someone else does this if you are away.

Ask your vet how often your cat needs a health check, and about the things you can do to protect your cat's health. You should follow the advice you are given.

If you recognise signs and symptoms of disease or suspect that your cat is in pain, ill or injured; contact a vet promptly and follow veterinary advice regarding their treatment. If at any time you have concerns about the health or welfare of your cat, you should seek advice from a vet or registered veterinary nurse.

Carefully check your cat's coat regularly and groom/bath your cat, as necessary, to maintain a healthy coat.

Seek the advice of your vet if you are considering having your cat neutered. They will be able to advise you about the best age and time to have this done.

Seek the advice of a vet before allowing your cat to breed and take all reasonable steps to ensure that you will be able to provide the care required during pregnancy, as well as finding suitable homes for the kittens before your cat is bred.

Use positive reinforcement training to help your cat willingly participate in home husbandry, grooming and vet visits. Seek advice from a qualified trainer who can help you teach cooperative care and management techniques.



## How to **provide the right companionship for your cat**

Cats show variable degrees of sociability. **Cats that are friends generally groom and rub against each other and may sleep next to each other. However, many cats are happier living without other cats and can be reluctant to accept new cats.**

A cat will become stressed if they cannot avoid other cats they do not like, or they are forced to share items such as food bowls or litter trays.

Introducing cats in a patient, careful way can increase their chances of them living together happily. Keeping too many cats together can result in a stressful and unhealthy environment, which may make it difficult for you to meet the individual needs of your animals.

Cats get to know the people with whom they regularly interact and can trust. They can become confused and distressed if the behaviour of people is inconsistent and unpredictable. Positive socialisation with people, and other animals is an essential part of early learning for a kitten. In early life, the more kittens get used to people, noises, objects and other animals, the less likely they are to find these frightening as adults. Unless carefully introduced early in life, cats will usually be scared of other animals such as dogs.

It is never acceptable to frighten a cat, cause pain, injure or encourage them to behave aggressively by teasing or tormenting them.

### **What you should do**

If your cat likes people, provide regular contact with them even when you are away.

Before getting more cats, think carefully how your existing cats will respond to company. Check that you will be able to look after each animal properly and seek advice on the best way to introduce the new cat into the home.

If you have cats that are not friends, make sure they have the opportunity to avoid each other and that they can access everything they need (e.g. food, water, outside space, litter tray, rest area) without having to pass one another too closely.





Do not force your cat to interact with people or animals that they do not like, and make sure they can avoid them.

If more than one cat shares a living space, provide sufficient extra resources (e.g. toys, beds, litter trays and hiding places) and give them enough space so that they can get away from one another if they want to.

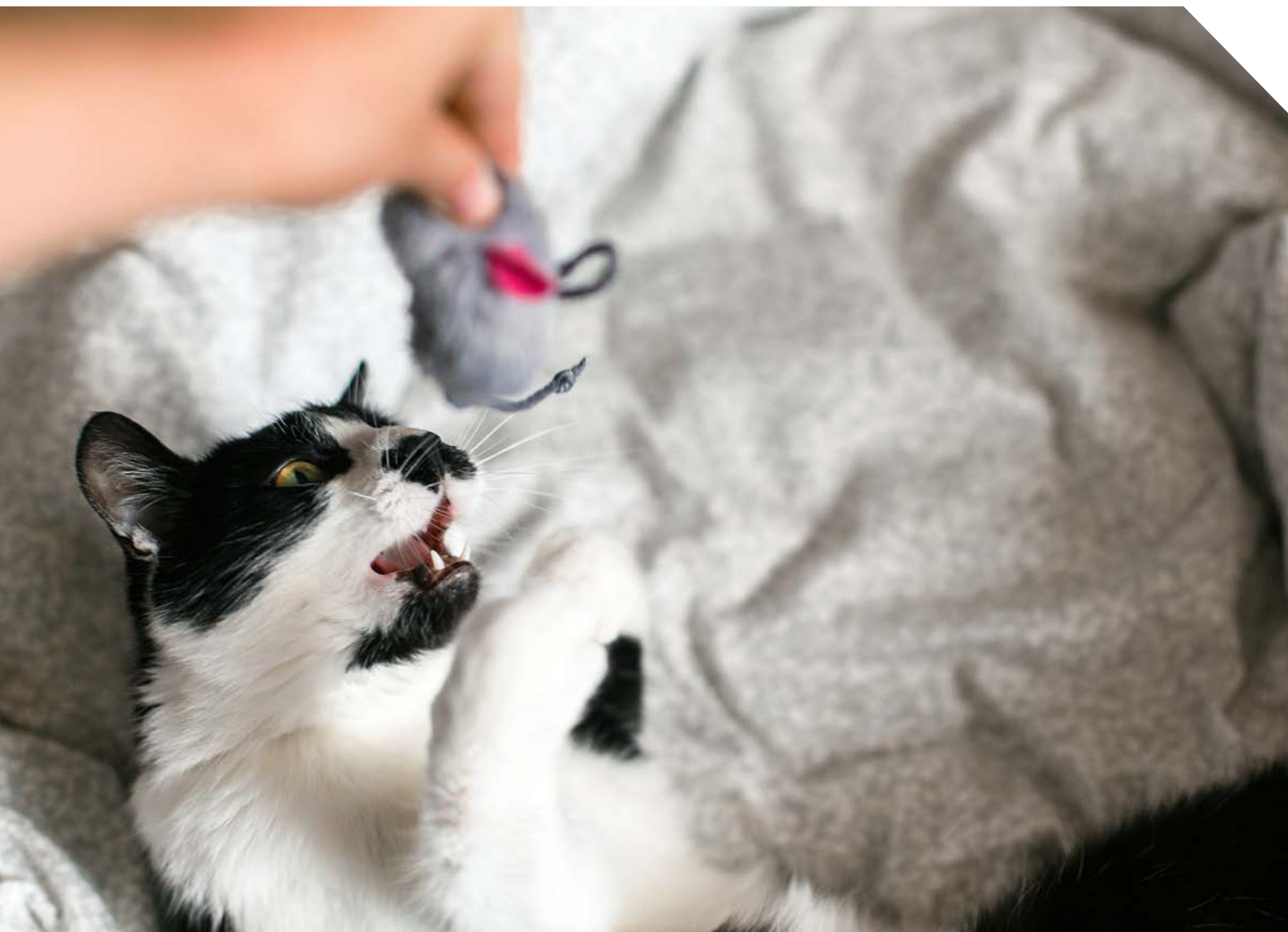
You should ensure that cats in your care are handled properly and are not stressed or endangered by other people or animals, including those who look after your cat for you when you are away from home.

Be consistent, kind, and gentle in the way you, your family, and friends, react to your cat. Never leave your cat unsupervised with

another animal or person who may harm or frighten them, such as young children who may unintentionally do this.

When you are away, make sure your cat is properly cared for by a responsible person. When someone else is looking after your cat they also have a legal responsibility to ensure its welfare, and you should ensure that they understand its needs and any special requirements that it may have.

If your cat shows signs of fear or aggression, calmly remove them from the situation and seek advice from a vet, veterinary nurse, or ethical trainer/behaviourist.







## How to **provide your cat's behavioural needs**

**The way a cat behaves is individual and depends on their age, breed or type, breeding, rearing and past experiences. However, most cats are playful, sociable animals and they enjoy playing together with toys, people, and other familiar cats. They should have regular opportunities for positive interactive playing. Play with people is a valuable source of interaction and fun, although cats will spend some time playing alone with toys.**

Cats are intelligent animals and can suffer from boredom and loneliness. If your cat is not mentally and physically stimulated, they may suffer or engage in stress behaviour e.g. fur pulling. Aggressive displays or changes in behaviour, including vocalisation, hiding or dietary changes, may indicate that something is wrong with the cat's physical and mental health.

All cats display hunting behaviour. Indoor cats do not usually have the opportunity to carry out these behaviours, so there is an additional responsibility to ensure they are mentally and physically stimulated to mimic natural behaviours.

Cats sleep for many hours of the day but when they are awake they need opportunities to exercise and play. Cats enjoy resting in high places where they feel safe. Additionally, all cats need an appropriate scratching place, high enough to allow them to stretch out fully, to scent mark their territory and condition their claws.

Cats experience a range of emotions including contentment, anxiety, and fear. How they behave and their body language can help you understand what they are feeling and whether they are physically and mentally fit and healthy.

### **What you should do:**

You should ensure your cat receives enough mental, social and physical stimulation to satisfy its individual behavioural needs.

If your cat does not go outside, provide suitable indoor activities such as high places to climb, rest and play. Indoor cats can also find mental stimulation in feeding from 'puzzle feeders' that release dried food gradually and toys that involves catching behaviour, such as fishing rod type toys.

Ensure that your cat is able to rest undisturbed and has somewhere to hide when it wants to.

Provide your cat with somewhere to scratch, such as a sturdy scratching post.

Make sure that your cat can reach all the things that it needs (e.g. bed, food, water, litter or outdoors) without having to get too close to things, people or other animals that may scare it.

You should know how your cat behaves when fit, healthy and happy and be able to recognise and interpret your cat's body language.

Never shout at or punish your cat. It will not understand and will just become more nervous or scared. You should only use positive reward-based training.

If your cat's behaviour changes or becomes a problem it could be distressed, bored, ill or injured and you should seek advice from a vet.

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## Understanding cat behaviour

It is important to observe body language in context. Almost all behaviours, when observed on their own, could mean a number of different things in different contexts.

You should know the behaviour of your cat when it is fit and healthy and be able to recognise and understand the signs your cat, and others, use when they are worried, distressed, frightened or feeling unwell.



### Behaviours that may show your cat is happy:

- Relaxed body posture and whiskers
- Relaxed, slow blinking eyes
- Showing affection, cheek rubbing
- Purring, chirpy meow

### Behaviours which may be associated with stress include:

- Making distressed vocalisations (unusual to them)
- Hiding to avoid being touched or feeling vulnerable
- Excessive cleaning or chewing of their feet, flanks and fur pulling
- Changes to their feeding or toileting habits
- Over-drinking or not drinking
- Reluctance to move or a change in movement
- Repetitive movements, such as pacing back and forth
- Displaying more aggressive communication such as biting
- A hunched posture when resting
- An absence of behaviour normal for the individual

If their behaviour changes or becomes a problem they could be distressed, bored, ill or injured and you should seek advice from a vet or other suitably qualified feline care specialist.



## How to **Safely transport your cat**

**A cat needs a safe and secure place within a vehicle that is large enough for it to stand, stretch and turn around comfortably.**

The vehicle must maintain a comfortable temperature in the space where the cat is kept.

Never leave an animal in a vehicle in direct strong sunshine or high temperatures. The temperature inside a car in full sun on a hot day can quickly rise to double the temperature outside, leading rapidly to distress for any animal in the vehicle. Overheating, distress, and suffering is likely when the temperature goes above 25°C for more than a few minutes.

### **What you should do**

Provide a carrier for your cat that is large enough for it to stand, stretch and turn around comfortably.

Don't transport your cat in a way that it could come to harm, e.g. whilst unrestrained in a vehicle with the windows wide open.

Do not leave your cat unattended in situations, or for periods of time that are likely to cause them distress or render them unsafe.

Never leave an animal in a vehicle in direct strong sunshine or high temperatures.





# This Code of Recommendation applies to all cats.

The purpose of the Code is to provide practical guidance to help you to comply with the provisions set out under Section 8 of the Animal Welfare (Guernsey) Ordinance 2012 ([weblink to the Ordinance](#)). It does not tell you precisely how to care for your cat, but it does summarise important things you should know and what to do when making decisions about how best to care for your cat.

A failure to comply with the Code of Recommendations may be relied upon in court as tending to establish liability for failing to meet the duty of care.

If you are unsure about anything to do with the care and welfare of your cat, you should always seek advice from an expert such as a veterinary surgeon or “other suitably qualified” specialists. These are people who hold the qualifications and experience to provide expert advice on feline welfare and behaviour.



