



## Harness Training for Your Cat

Some confident kitties may enjoy supervised outdoor time, both for exercise and enrichment. The best way to do this safely and securely is with a harness. Below are some guidelines for feline harness training.

**Choose the right cat.** If your cat is generally fearful around new people and new places, use care when deciding how scary a harness excursion might be. Some cats are confident enough for hiking and biking—for some, even the back garden may be too overwhelming. If you're on the fence, take it SLOW, let the *cat* tell you when they've had enough.

**Choose the right harness.** Choose an H-type harness or a walking jacket (<http://www.catwalkingjacket.com>). Note: Figure-eight type harnesses are not secure.

**Choose the right fit.** Adjust the harness so when it is on the cat you can place two fingers between the cat and the harness. For a larger cat, you may need to buy a harness made for a small dog.

### Getting your cat used to the harness:

**START IN SHORT SESSIONS, 1-2 minutes at first.** Some cats you will want to pair treats with just having the harness around their neck unfastened. Expect some odd behavior when you first put the harness on. It takes time to get used to the feeling of the harness, so you'll want to distract your cat in some way while the harness is on. You can put the harness on him at feeding time and have him wear it for a few minutes while he is eating; play a favorite game with him while he is wearing it or just give him a tasty treat. Take it slow, making each subsequent session with the harness slightly longer. Once the cat is wearing the harness for extended periods of time (five minutes or more) and acting normally, you can add a leash.

- ❖ Don't leave a cat unsupervised while wearing a harness.
- ❖ Remember to associate the harness with good things – play, food or treats.
- ❖ Start out with short sessions – two minutes or 10 treats at the most.
- ❖ Be patient –harness training is a process that can take days for some cats and weeks for others.

### Getting your cat used to the leash:

Your cat should be comfortable wearing a harness for 10 to 15 minutes before starting to work on leash training. Start in a quiet, safe place. Attach a six- to eight-foot, lightweight leash to the harness (never attach a leash to the cat's collar). Wait patiently until there is no tension on the leash, then give your cat a treat. As long as they are not pulling, allow them to move around with the leash on, following them to prevent tension on the leash. If your cat is toy motivated, try moving a toy in the same direction that you are walking to encourage them to follow you.

- ❖ **Choose your locations with care.** For many cats, a garden, alley, or hallway is a good place to start. They will explore higher traffic places more confidently if they start out by gaining confidence in lower traffic ones.
- ❖ **Be aware that walking a cat on a leash is different from walking a dog.** Sometimes you can ask them to follow you using a toy. Other times, you will follow them allowing him to sniff and explore.
- ❖ **Keep your walks short – 10 to 15 minutes.** Make sure your cat can “retreat” back to home base if they become overwhelmed.
- ❖ **Bring treats/toys to keep your kitty engaged and encourage desired behavior.** Some cats may be too distracted by a new environment to eat even their favorite treats, so toys are helpful to have on hand.
- ❖ **Never use your leash to drag your cat.** If needed (such as in an unexpected situation like a dog rounding the corner) calmly pick up your cat and carry them to a safe/secure place.
- ❖ **Make sure your cat is wearing identification** such as a collar with tags in case they escape outdoors.

**Consider incorporating a cat backpack or pet stroller into your outings! Having a “traveling home base” that can offer your cat a safe place to run to if they get scared is a great option for longer outings.**

For more information and behavioral support, contact our behavior department at [www.eastbayspca.org/behaviorhelp](http://www.eastbayspca.org/behaviorhelp)