

Your Guide to a Successful DIY Trap/Neuter/Return (TNR) Program

Thank you for caring about the stray/feral cats in your community. Your willingness to help these cats will benefit them, your neighborhood, and all local shelters by reducing the number of stray cats and kittens being taken to shelters. This guide will give you step-by-step instructions for each phase of TNR process and local contacts who can answer questions.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

- Humane Traps: groups often loan traps to people using their certificates or they can be purchased on Amazon or from local pet supply stores. You could also post on Next Door or other social media to see if any neighbors could loan you a trap.
- Food to bait trap: the smellier the better – salmon, tuna, sardines, wet cat food with strong smell
- Trap Covers: torn sheets or large towels
- Cinder blocks, bricks or similar items: Hold traps off ground during holding and recovery time
- Newspapers or puppy pads

BEFORE YOU TRAP

- Read through this entire set of instructions and understand the process completely. This is essential. Being prepared helps you anticipate potential problems and plan solutions ahead of time.
- Understand what ear tipping is and why it's important. Ear tipping is a widely used and understood sign that a cat has already been spayed or neutered if it is trapped. A small portion of the cats ear tip is removed while it is under anesthesia. You are **REQUIRED** to have ear tipping done when using a voucher from The Hundred Cat Foundation and Centre County PAWS but it a good idea to have this done regardless as it prevents already altered cats from being taken in for surgery. It is critical that your vet be informed of this before the surgery. When trapping cats, be sure to examine them to see if any are ear tipped and should be released.
- Find out if neighbors are also feeding cats you are planning on trapping. This will be critical when you are preparing to trap and need to withhold food. It is also good to talk about your plans to TNR, educate about the process, and coordinate efforts with anyone interacting with the cats.
- Feed the cats on a strict schedule. Establish a routine time and place for feeding cats every day for at least 2 weeks prior to trapping (this is when talking to your neighbors is important). Consider only feeding in the morning so trapping can be done during daylight hours. This also cuts down on wildlife accidentally being trapped as they are mostly nocturnal feeders. Get the cats used to eating in a 30-minute period and **DO NOT** leave food out all the time. Cats will quickly adapt to a feeding schedule and come at the same time each day. This will make trapping much easier and more successful. During this time, you will want to get cats used to seeing and entering traps by placing food inside **UNSET** traps. Remember to coordinate with others caring for the cats to coordinate feeding efforts.
- If you trap any wildlife while attempting to trap cats, you are legally required to release the animal in the same location as it was trapped. If the wildlife is visibly injured, contact a certified wildlife rehab facility for instructions on what to do.
- Assess the cats in the colony – List each cat/kitten you see (color, size, approximate age, temperament, gender). This will help you determine the number of appointments and traps you will need. It can also help you identify any potential friendly cats that may be candidates for placement in a home or shelter or any kittens you may need to care for if they are too young for surgery. This information is also good for on-going colony care and to determine if any new cats have joined that may need to be trapped.
- Contact local organizations that provide spay/neuter services or vouchers and request assistance for your colony.

- Determine which vet practices will work with feral/stray cats, prices, and who takes vouchers from local groups. Confirm with the office that they have experience working with feral cats and ask about their policies if you cannot keep an appointment due to not being able to trap. Understanding this in advance helps prevent cancellation fees or hard feelings with the office.
- Schedule appointments BEFORE you trap. You do not want to successfully trap cats and then have no place to take them. Plan your trapping sessions as close to your appointments as possible for the safety and wellbeing of the cat. When scheduling, be sure to mention if you are using vouchers from local groups to confirm if they are taken BEFORE your appointment.
- Have a holding location set before trapping. This is where you will hold trapped cats before their vet appointment and after while they recover. It should be an indoor location that is dry, temperature controlled, quiet, and safe. Cats are very vulnerable in traps and cannot defend themselves against other animals or escape dangerous situations.
- Plan for “Out of the Ordinary” situations ahead of time. What will you do if you trap a severely injured or sick cat or a nursing mom cat? Do you have a practice to take an injured cat to and are you prepared for any financial costs? Are you prepared to make a euthanasia decision if the vet feels there is no other option? Can you get a mom cat spayed quickly and back with her kittens? Thinking through these scenarios ahead of time and having a plan in place is much better than being in a stressful situation and having to make decisions on the fly.
- Consider having help the day of trapping. Trapping (especially the first time) can be overwhelming and exhausting. Another set or two of hands can help. If you are trapping at night or in an unfamiliar area, having a companion is a good safety precaution.
- Have all your equipment on hand and make sure it is in working order. Having an extra trap or two is a good idea if one malfunctions or additional cats show up. PRACTICE setting traps ahead of time – be comfortable with setting and opening traps if you need to release an ear tipped cat or wildlife.
- Wear protective clothing and gloves and NEVER try to touch or pick up a feral/stray cat or wildlife. If you get bitten, you will either need to quarantine and care for the animal for up to 2 weeks or the animal will need to be euthanized and tested for rabies.
- Pay attention to the weather forecast and do not trap in extreme heat or cold or during times of severe storms. You can safely trap in the winter with proper precautions in place.
- Withhold food 24 hours before trapping to ensure the cats are hungry enough to enter the traps. Continue to provide fresh drinking water. Cats should not be fed/watered in the 12 hours leading up to surgery. The small amount of food eaten when trapped is OK but let the vet know the approximate time this happened so they can schedule later in the day if needed.

TRAPPING

- Prepare the traps away from the trap site to prevent loud noises and commotion that could scare the cats away. Test each trap to make sure it is working properly.
- Bait the traps. Place about 1 tablespoon of food (strong smelling wet cat food, tuna, sardines) at the very back of the trap so the cat will step on the trigger plate while attempting to reach the food. A very small pinch can be placed in the entrance of the trap and on the trip plate. If you put the food in a container, be sure it does not have sharp edges that could injure an agitated cat.
- Place the traps in a level area not on an incline. Put the traps where you have a clear line of sight for monitoring them without having to enter the area to check them (binoculars can be helpful). If you are placing multiple traps, stagger them and have them facing in different directions. Try to place traps where they will attract the cats but can be camouflaged such as near a bush. Move quietly and slowly when placing traps and leave the area. Cats are unlikely to enter the traps with you nearby. Wait about 30 minutes before returning to check and do so from a distance.
- Traps should NEVER be left unattended for long periods of time. Leaving a cat uncovered in a trap too long will increase stress and could lead to injury since they will likely thrash in the trap. You can place a sheet or towel over the back part of the cage when placing it so you can quickly

cover the trap once you have a cat. This may also encourage a cat to enter the cage more easily. Just be sure to leave enough of the trap exposed so you can see when there is a cat in it. If you trap an already ear-tipped cat, it may be best to hold the cat in a covered trap until you are done trapping the other cats in the colony.

- After a cat is trapped, cover the entire trap with a towel or sheet before moving it. Covering the trap will help keep the cat calm. Move the cat away to a quiet safe area to avoid scaring any of the remaining un-trapped cats. It is normal for trapped cats to thrash and make noise. You may be tempted to release the cat because you are afraid of them hurting themselves, but the cat will calm down once the trap is covered. Remember that you are trapping for their benefit. If you let them go, they will continue to breed, and you may not be able to trap them again. Most injuries from traps are very minor – a bloody nose or scratched paw pads.
- During a quiet moment or when no other cats are investigating set trap, you can move the trapped cats to your final holding area IF it is close by. If you are trapping away from your holding area, **do not** leave to take trapped cats back unless you remove or un-set the traps.
- When you are done for the day, transport all trapped cats either to your veterinary office (if appointment is same day) or to your indoor, temperature-controlled holding area. Keep the traps covered at all times. Do not trap more than 1 day in advance of your scheduled vet appointment if possible.
- Never move trapped cats in the trunk of a car or open bed of a pickup truck. It is dangerous and terrifying for the cats. If traps must be stacked inside a vehicle, secure them tightly with a bungee cord or rope and place puppy pads or thick newspaper between the traps. It is VERY important that traps be firmly secured. An unsecured trap could tip and release the cat in your vehicle. Don't take that chance!
- When dropping off, confirm that all cats will be ear-tipped, rabies vaccinated, and that dissolvable sutures will be used to eliminate follow-up visits. If you have vouchers, present them at drop off so that clinic staff area aware of this. Some clinics have different procedures and billing codes for voucher surgeries so it's best to bring this up before the surgery.

POST- SURGERY

- After surgery, allow cats to recover in the same trap or a cage/carrier that they are returned in. If using a trap, place it on top of cinder blocks or bricks with newspapers/puppy pads underneath to catch waste. Traps/cages should be in your pre-determined holding area – dry, temperature controlled, safe, and quiet. Cats recovering from anesthesia are unable to regulate body temperature, so it is important that the area is neither too hot nor too cold. A basement or bathroom is ideal. Do not place the trap or cage directly on cement.
- Keep the traps covered. Do not open the trap doors, put your fingers through the bars or attempt to handle the cats. Remember if you get bitten, the cat will need to be either held for up to 2 weeks by YOU or euthanized to be tested for rabies.
- Monitor the cats frequently. Keep an eye out for bleeding, infection, illness, and lack of appetite. Some bleeding/oozing from the ear tip is expected and should stop overnight. If you observe vomiting, bleeding, labored breathing, or not waking up, get veterinary assistance immediately. Be sure you know how to reach your vet after hours or what your local emergency vet contact info is. If the cat is vomiting while still unconscious, the head should be turned to avoid choking. This can be achieved by gently tipping the trap no more than 30 degrees to change the cat's position. Be careful not to jostle the cat too much.
- After cats are awake and it's about 8 hours post-surgery, you can provide water and food. Kittens should be fed shortly after waking from surgery. When feeding the cats, lift the BACK door of the trap very slowly and allow a tiny gap (1 inch at most) to open. Slide a plastic lid or paper plate with a small amount of food through the gap without placing your fingers inside the trap. A heavy pair of gloves can provide extra protection. Be sure the trap is securely locked after

feeding. If you do not feel comfortable sliding the food into the trap without the cat trying to escape, do not feed them.

- Hold cats until they are recovered. Most cats will be fully awake 24 hours after surgery and can be released at that time. Cats should be fully conscious, clear-eyed and alert before release. There should be no active bleeding. All cats should be returned to their original trap site for release. **If you have a nursing mom but not the kittens, return to where trapped once she has fully regained consciousness and are showing no signs of complications like bleeding or vomiting.** Try not to release cats if you are having extreme heat or cold or severe storms as they will be less able to cope with extremes post-surgery.
- To release the cats, return to the same place you trapped them. Open the front door of the trap and pull back the cover. If the trap has a rear door, pull the cover away from the back door, pull the door up and off, then completely remove the cover and walk away. If the release point is near any dangers (like a road) try to place the trap pointing toward an open field, barn, bushes or open field so that the cat will not run into traffic. It is common for cats to disappear for a few days after release, but they will return eventually. Resume your feeding schedule and continue to provide food and water – they may eat when you are not around.
- Thoroughly clean the traps with a non-toxic disinfectant. Even traps that appear clean should be disinfected. The scent of a previously trapped cat may deter other cats from entering.
- If you have additional cats in the colony to trap, take a short break of 1-2 weeks to allow the colony to settle down.

LOCAL TNR RESOURCES

- **The Hundred Cat Foundation** (<https://hundredcats.org/>) – Centre Hall based non-profit organization that provide access to low cost spay/neuter vouchers (centre county only), assists people caring for colonies, provides nutritious food, and provides outreach and education on feral and stray cat management. Has traps to loan for DIY TNR projects for people using their vouchers. Contact for information/advice on trapping or trap loans at cats@hundredcats.org
- **Centre County PAWS** (<https://www.centrecountypaws.org/help/spay-neuter-assistance/vouchers>) State College based animal shelter that provides no cost spay/neuter certificates for feral cats to residents of Centre County. Have traps to loan (deposit required)
- **Pets Come First** (<https://petscomefirst.net/>) – Centre Hall based animal shelter. Provide access to low cost spay/neuter services.
- **Hope's Dream Rescue** (<https://hopedreamers.wixsite.com/hopedreamrescue>) – Howard based animal rescue group – provides assistance with trapping and transport of cats for people requiring TNR assistance.
- **Happy Paws, Happy Homes (Huntingdon/Tyrone PA):** Provide spay/neuter services; vouchers for spay/neuter services; www.happypawshappyhomes.org
- **The Nobody's Cat Foundation:** Provides low cost feral/unowned cat spay/neuter services for areas surrounding Centre County: Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Lancaster, Lebanon, Mifflin, Northumberland, Perry, Schuylkill, Snyder, and York counties - www.nobodyscats.org/ or contact@nobodyscat.org