



STRAY CAT

MEDIATION GUIDELINES



For Digital Version

INTRODUCTION

Mediation refers to a process by which people resolve cat-related issues using human approaches, in lieu of removal, relocation, or culling (Cat Welfare Society, 2017). Humane solutions to cat-related issues are detailed in the educational leaflet, *Living with Stray Cats in Your Community*.

Removal, relocation, and culling are not humane strategies for population control, as they do not stop the problem at its source – the reproduction of stray cats. Moreover, removal, relocation, and culling cause a well-documented concept in biology called the Vacuum Effect. The Vacuum Effect creates a temporary dip in populations, because once emptied, the resource rich habitat inevitably attracts other members of the same species from neighboring areas. Before long, the area fills back to capacity again (The Vacuum Effect, n.d.).

This guideline aims to help mediators, members of the public, businesses, and anyone working towards improving the welfare of stray cats in Abu Dhabi, to work with communities to find humane and effective solutions to cat-related issues. Sustainable management of the stray cat population is dependent upon community members practising responsible behaviors towards stray and pet cats (McDonald, J. L., & Clements, J., 2019).

STEPS TO RESOLVING CAT-RELATED ISSUES

01

Understand the Problem

While cat-related issues may be very emotive, it is important to stay calm and avoid making judgements. The goal of mediation is to educate and engage members of the community, de-escalate the issue, understand the problem, and come to a humane resolution.



Below is an example of how an exchange between a mediator and community member might go:

Mediator

I understand you're having issues with stray cats in your community. Can you tell me a little bit about what's happening?

Community Member



There are too many cats around my villa, and I don't like them. I want to remove them.

Mediator

I understand that not everyone likes cats. Is there a specific reason you don't like having them around your villa?

Community Member



The cats are so loud at night. All I can hear in the evenings are the cats fighting. I don't want to deal with it anymore.

Mediator

I'm so sorry, that is very frustrating. We definitely need to find a solution to this issue. One reason you may be hearing cats fighting outside is because the cats are not neutered. Male cats that have not been neutered tend to fight over territory and mates and this can be very loud.

Manage yourself during a mediation by being an active listener, staying objective, being thoughtful about what you say and do, and keeping an open mind. It can be challenging to stay collected during a difficult conversation, but it will help you come to a resolution and engage members of the community in a positive way (Resolving Conflicts Over Community Cats, 2019).

02

Awareness & Solutions

While cat-related issues may be very emotive, it is important to stay calm and avoid making judgements. The goal of mediation is to educate and engage members of the community, de-escalate the issue, understand the problem, and come to a humane resolution.



Below is an example of how an exchange between a mediator and community member might go:

Compassion

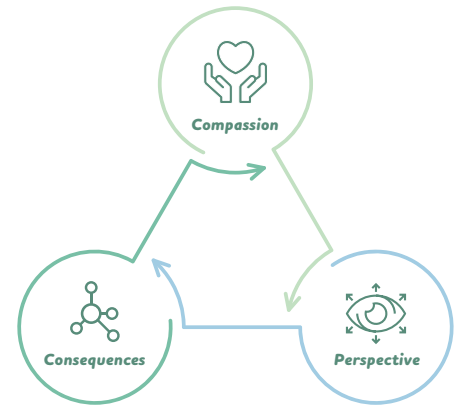
Appealing to feelings and emotions can help community members connect to the issue in a different way, especially if their preferred solution is not in the best interest of the cats' welfare. Building empathy helps individuals to better understand others' struggles and support compassionate solutions. **Below are some ideas that may be helpful:**

Animal Sentience

Stray cats are sentient. Sentient means being able to feel a range of emotions (RSPCA, 2023). Since stray cats are sentient and can feel a range of emotions, we need to make decisions about their welfare which reflects their sentience and ability to feel.

Stray Cat Colony Caretakers

There may be people in the community who care for stray cats and their quality of life. These caretakers are invested in looking after the welfare of the stray cats in the community and will be deeply affected if actions are taken to harm their welfare.



Consequences

While community members may all have certain ideas about the best course of action to resolve the cat-related issues in their community, it is important to use effective, yet humane methods which uphold animal welfare principles. Taking action without first understanding the consequences of those actions may be harmful in a number of ways. **Helping the community member to understand consequences may be done by discussing the following:**



Nuisance Persists

The preferred solution of most community members in Abu Dhabi is to remove cats. It is important to help these individuals understand that if stray cats are removed, the problem will persist. Removal, culling, and relocation are temporary solutions because they do not address the root of the problem, reproduction.

According to research done by Dr. John D. Boone (2019) and his colleagues, high-intensity TNVR is the only effective solution to prevent stray cat overpopulation and mortalities, including kitten mortalities.



Community Conflict

Solutions which have not taken into consideration the welfare of the stray cats may cause conflict within and beyond the community. Choosing and understanding humane, kind solutions is beneficial to all



Vacuum Effect

The Vacuum Effect occurs when animals are permanently removed from their territory. The result is a short-term drop in numbers, which eventually fills back up to capacity again due to the availability of space and resources (The Vacuum Effect, n.d.). The outcome is a repetition of the same nuisances.

A survey done in Brisbane, Australia demonstrated that 79% of residents preferred humane management strategies, while only 18% preferred lethal management strategies (Rand et al., 2019).



Public Health

Vaccinating stray cats is part of a TNVR program (Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate, Return) and offers protection from contracting and transmitting contagious diseases between people and animals, such as rabies. The immunity that develops after a cat receives a rabies vaccination can last multiple years (Just the Facts: TNVR and Vaccinations, 2023).

Perspective

The capacity to view issues from different perspectives may encourage community members to be aware of how their thoughts and preferred actions impact others. Considering different points of view is also a form of awareness that helps to build empathy and compassion. **These are some different points of view to consider:**

Stray cats experience many welfare issues, including lack of access to food and water, lack of access to veterinary care, and increased chances of injury and disease. Any care we can provide stray animals helps them live a happier and more comfortable lives.

According to research, animal shelter employees experience significant mental health problems, due to having to euthanize animals under their care. Stray cats, due to lack of homes, may be euthanized to make space for new animals.

Colony caretakers provide care to cat colonies to the best of their knowledge and capacity.

03

Agreement & Implementation

Once you and the community member arrive at an agreement to resolve the cat-related issue, record the agreed upon solution in writing where it can later be referred to.



04

Follow Up

After implementing the agreed upon solution, it is important to follow up with the community members to ensure the issue has been resolved, to the best of everyone's abilities. While the community member may not be completely satisfied with the outcome, continue to appeal to feelings and emotions, explain the consequences of their preferred course of action, and maintain that there are certain actions which cannot be taken as per Abu Dhabi regulations and guidelines around animal welfare. Moreover, keep the focus on all the positive things which have been done for the community (Resolving Conflicts Over Community Cats, 2019). Following up with community members will also give the mediator an opportunity to provide ongoing support and alternate solutions, if needed.



Below is an example of how an exchange between a mediator and community member might go:

Community Member



There is less fighting and less noise from the cats, but there are still too many of them. I don't want so many around my villa, my wife and daughter are scared of them.

Mediator



How have things been since we spoke last? In your opinion, have cat-related issues improved? Have they been resolved?

Mediator



I hear you and I'm sorry you're still experiencing some issues. The number of cats around your villa will decrease over time. Remember, these cats did not ask to be here, and unfortunately, at this time, there is nowhere for them to go. As we spoke about previously, removing them is not a viable option. Let's take a walk around the property to see if there are any humane deterrents you can use, or if there are any other reasons there are so many cats congregating here. I'd like to help you as much as possible, while still respecting the cats' welfare.

Community Member



I'd still prefer for the cats to be removed from around my villa.

Mediator



I understand what you're saying, but we can't accommodate that request, as we already discussed. Let's see if there are any other measures, we can take to resolve your concerns.