

Teaching your cat to love their carrier

Teaching cats to feel comfortable and safe in their carrier is vital to safeguard their wellbeing when they have to travel. Leaving their territory and being in an unfamiliar environment can be incredibly stressful; however, if they have positive associations with their carrier, this should make the experience far less stressful.

Ideally, we should be training kittens to have positive associations their carrier; but often the first-time kittens experience a carrier is when they are transported to their new home. This usually involves being removed from a safe and familiar environment, put into a scary carrier, and a negative association is formed.

To teach cats to love their carrier, we need to create an association with things they enjoy – food, toys, comfort, safety. Once we have built these positive associations, the carrier will elicit the same pleasurable feeling your cat has with food etc.

Begin by having your cat carrier open in a room that you regularly spend time in. If your cat is averse to going near the carrier, it may help to remove the top half of the carrier, if your carrier allows. Put comfortable bedding sprayed with Feliway inside. Scatter treats near the carrier at a distance your cat is comfortable enough retrieving treats from (we don't want them to have to surpass their comfort zone to access treats); also, place their food bowl at the same distance and feed them from there. When your cat is happily eating treats and food, and exploring the area near the carrier, gradually move the food closer and closer, and then into the carrier over a few days. When your cat goes into the carrier on their own without food being there, throw them a small treat to further build positive associations.

Following this, you can re-assemble your carrier and put the carrier in an accessible but private location. Ideally, your cat will go into their carrier to rest and relax.

You can build on this by following the same procedure with the carrier inside of the car to reduce the stress of being transported.