

How to Train Your Cat to Love the Carrier

Carriers are important to transport your cat, but how can you make it enjoyable for your cat and not so stressful?

In order to transport your cat safely he must be comfortable being confined to a carrier. The problem is most cats only see their carrier when it is time to visit the veterinarian, or go to the boarding kennel. These unpleasant experiences can create a negative association with the carrier, and many cats begin running away each time the carrier is brought out of the closet. Rather than fight with your cat, or avoiding taking him into the veterinarian we can train him to be comfortable in his carrier.

Begin by leaving the carrier in a neutral location in your house.

If the carrier is out more frequently your cat will habituate to its presence. If your carrier has a door, take it off. You can hide toys, or special treats in the carrier to encourage your cat to explore inside. We want the carrier to become a “room” where your cat feels secure going in and out. Periodically feeding your cat, or offering a small amount of canned cat food on a dish in the back of the carrier will also encourage him to go in. The initial goal is to change the association your cat has with the carrier and allow him to go in and out at will.

Once you see your cat going in and out of the carrier comfortably, maybe even relaxing in the carrier, you can replace the door. Begin offering your cat a small amount of canned cat food on a dish inside the carrier once or twice a day. Close the door once your cat is inside the carrier and allow him to eat. If your cat will not walk inside the carrier by himself, you can try to gently place him in the kennel, but do not force the issue. He may need more time at step one. Open the door when he has finished his snack. As your cat continues to go in willingly to eat his snack, you can begin leaving him in the carrier for brief periods of time after he is through eating. You will also want to begin picking the carrier up, walking around the house, then placing the kennel back on the floor to release your cat.

It's not a difficult process to carrier train our cats, but it does take planning. The goal is to use the carrier more like the cats room where he eats, plays with toys, and has snacks vs. the scary box he is placed in when it is time for a visit to the veterinarian.

