

RESOLVING DISPUTES WITH NEIGHBORS – OUTDOOR CATS

Causes

There may be many reasons why neighbors engage in disputes about neighborhood cats:

- You or your neighbors are feeding a neighborhood cat colony
- You or your neighbor's cats, or, the cats you or your neighbor are feeding:
 - May be attracting unwanted wildlife
 - Are producing too many kittens
 - Are using neighbors' yards as their litter box
 - Are fighting, howling or spraying

Solutions

The best way to keep a Cat Colony – and neighborhood – free of the issues noted above, is to ensure that every member of the Cat Colony is spayed and neutered and returned to the colony via Trap-Neuter-Return programs already established in our community. This practice will help to address new kitten litters, fighting, spraying and howling behaviors and help to mitigate the arrival of new cats to the Colony. In addition to neutering male cats, sufficient and regular feeding helps to minimize or even prevent fighting.

To avoid attracting wild animals, it is recommended to feed cats during the day and immediately pick up any remaining food once the cats are done. One way to resolve neighbors' concerns about cats using their yards as a litter box is for Cat Colony caregivers to place litter boxes in their own yards and even offer to periodically clean the neighbor's yard. In these cases, you may wish to introduce your neighbor(s) to cat deterrents so that they can create an outdoor environment in their back and/or front yards that is not inviting to cats.

Neighborly Communication

- First and foremost, take a moment to put yourself in your neighbor's shoes. In situations like this, whether you are trying to help cats, which has upset your neighbor, or you are the upset neighbor who does not want cats in your yard regardless of your neighbors efforts to help, try to see the issue from your neighbor's perspective so that you can frame your discussion to respond directly to their concerns and move swiftly toward resolution. This will go a long way toward giving you the empathy you need to come to an amenable agreement during any disputes
- It's important to listen intently and empathize with each other's concerns in a way that does not offend either party. Ask for help in solving the concern, but offer concrete solutions that show your neighbor that you want to work toward resolution, whatever your perspective.
- When the conversation begins, listen very carefully to your neighbor's specific concerns. For example, s/he may start the conversation by saying that the cats are "annoying" them but as you continue the discussion, you may find that the real issue is the cat droppings s/he is finding in the newly planted flower garden. This is a situation easily solved by providing her a litter box and offering to clean it regularly or introducing your neighbor to some other humane cat deterrents that will quickly keep cats out of the flower bed.

If you are the neighbor who has simply had enough of outdoor cats in your neighborhood, consider humane cat deterrents for your yard as the fastest way to see results. You might consider approaching your cat-loving neighbor to ask for help in solving the situation, or, at the very least, allow them to explain why properly handling cat colonies is the surest way to eventually reduce or eliminate them.

If the issue is the local Cat Colony for which you are Caregiver, providing context is important. Take the time to explain the overpopulation issues facing our community and how an altered, cared for and actively managed Cat Colony actually helps to reduce overpopulation. You might consider using some of our resource

sheets to prepare packets of information for your neighbors and deliver one to each. Be sure to explain the value of TNR to a community and include our [humane cat deterrent resource sheet](#).

Of course, whatever side of the fence you straddle, all communication between neighbors should be, well, neighborly! Interact calmly and compassionately, remembering that the perspective of others with regard to your neighborhood's Cat Colony may be changed for the better because of neighborly communication! In this way, neighbors educate neighbors and, in the process, you are letting each other know that you are proactive, knowledgeable, sensitive to one another's concerns and responsive in arriving at solutions! Here are a few other communication tips:

- Two heads are better than one! Work WITH your neighbors to arrive at solutions regardless of your personal perspective on outdoor cats!
- All neighbors are typically concerned with fighting, yowling, spraying and endless litters of kittens. Take the time to consider and discuss how TNR eliminates virtually all of these things.
- Explain that trapping animals and bringing them to animal shelters does not solve the problem because more cats – likely unaltered – will repopulate that open space.
- If you are a neighbor who has simply had enough and just wants outdoor cats the heck out of your neighborhood, visit [somanycats.org](#) or [adlaz.org](#) for advice.

Conclusion

Whatever the reason for conflicts among neighbors, it is always best to stay calm, listen closely to what your neighbor is concerned about and then discuss solutions. One key way to keep the peace is to anticipate future concerns your neighbors may have with your efforts *before* they call animal control. How?

- Follow established feeding guidelines, removing uneaten food after 30 minutes and cleaning up promptly, never leaving food out overnight to attract unwanted wildlife.
- Place litter boxes throughout the area in quiet and sheltered places. Avoid conventional litters as they may ruin in wet weather. Instead use sand or peat moss and clean regularly, especially as the temperature rises.
- Keep records of your Colony including vaccination data, health records and photographs. In the event your neighbor contacts animal control, this will illustrate your actions as a responsible Cat Colony Caregiver and it will also help you to quickly note newcomers.
- Use and recommend humane deterrents which are available in abundance and consider offering to apply these alternatives to your neighbor's property, if at all possible, at your expense or pool costs with other caregivers. This illustrates to your neighbors and neighborhood that you are willing to be a responsible neighbor.

Finally, despite all efforts, some neighbors will not want to hear about alternatives. In these cases, if communication becomes too strained where you feel it becomes unsafe to approach your neighbor independently, it may be beneficial to consider researching community mediation services.

For additional information on outdoor cats, visit [somanycats.org](#) or [adlaz.org](#).