



Understanding Feline FAS: Fear, Anxiety & Stress

Recognizing subtle body language, stress triggers, and applying the 3-3-3 Decompression Rule.

The Feline Stress Spectrum

Cats are both predators and prey animals in nature. When placed in unfamiliar environments, their primary survival strategy is hypervigilance and retreat. Recognizing early stress cues prevents behavioral escalation:

- **Mild Stress / Alert:** Dilated pupils, ears turned slightly to the side (airplane ears), tail twitching at tip, body crouched tightly with paws tucked in.
- **Moderate Stress / Anxiety:** Lip licking, swallowing, grooming in a single repetitive spot, heavy shedding, panting, refusing high-value treats.
- **Severe Stress / Fear:** Flattened ears pressed against skull, tail tucked against belly, growling, hissing, freezing in place (immobility), or lunging if cornered.

The 3-3-3 Decompression Protocol

Every cat transitioning from shelter to home experiences a psychological adjustment period:

- **First 3 Days:** Decompression phase. The cat may hide under beds, eat very little, and observe quietly. Keep them in a dedicated, low-stimulus Sanctuary Room. Do not force interaction.
- **First 3 Weeks:** Establishing comfort. The cat begins learning household routines, comes out to eat regularly, and recognizes family voices and feeding times.
- **First 3 Months:** Full trust and integration. The cat feels secure, claims favorite spots, expresses playful antics, and displays their authentic loving personality.

Interacting with Shy & Fearful Cats

- **Side-Body Approach:** Never walk directly toward a shy cat face-to-face. Turn your body sideways, sit on the floor, and avoid prolonged direct eye contact (use slow blinks).
- **Soft Voice & Predictability:** Talk in quiet, calm tones. Announce your arrival gently before entering the room.
- **Let Them Initiate:** Extend a soft finger at nose level. Let the cat choose whether to approach and rub against you. If they pull away, respect their boundary!