



Harness & Leash Training: Safe Exploration

Why indoor-only living saves Alaska lives and how to safely introduce harnesses, strollers, and catios.

Why Alaska Cats Must Live Indoors

Alaska presents severe, life-threatening outdoor hazards for companion cats:

- **Predators:** Bald eagles, great horned owls, coyotes, foxes, and loose dogs routinely hunt domestic cats across Anchorage and the Mat-Su Valley.
- **Sub-Zero Temperatures:** Severe frostbite to ears and paws, hypothermia, and antifreeze poisoning in winter.
- **Vehicular Traffic & Disappearance:** Over 70% of free-roaming cats suffer traumatic vehicle impacts or become permanently lost.

AHS cats are adopted strictly as indoor companions. However, you can satisfy feline curiosity safely!

Selecting the Right Gear

- **Never attach a leash to a regular neck collar:** A cat's neck is delicate and cats can easily back out of a neck collar in a panic.
- **Choose an H-Style or Step-In Vest Harness:** Look for a snug, escape-resistant harness that secures around both the neck/chest and behind the front legs.
- **Bungee Leash:** Use a 4-to-6 foot lightweight bungee leash to absorb sudden movements without jerking.

Step-by-Step Harness Conditioning

1. **Scent & Sight (Days 1–3):** Place the harness near your cat's food dish. Reward interest with treats.
2. **Wearing Unbuckled (Days 4–7):** Lay the harness across your cat's back while feeding wet food. Remove immediately after eating.
3. **Buckled Indoors (Days 8–14):** Buckle the harness and immediately engage with a wand toy or treats. Many cats initially 'freeze and flop' like their legs don't work — distract them with interactive play!
4. **Indoor Leash Walking (Weeks 2–3):** Attach the leash and let them lead you around the house without pulling.
5. **First Outdoor Steps:** Start on a quiet, enclosed deck or secure patio. Carry your cat in a carrier outside before opening the door into the grass. Keep initial sessions under 5 minutes.