

# Being in TTouch with your Cat

by Deirdre Chitwood

*“The Cheshire cat only grinned when it saw Alice. It looked good-natured she thought: still it had very long claws and a great many teeth, so she felt it ought to be treated with respect.”*

*Lewis Carroll*

Living with five cats and volunteering at a local no-kill cat shelter offers me plenty of opportunity to practise my Tellington TTouch® skills and to learn about the many idiosyncrasies particular to feline creatures. Whilst the TTouch bodywork is the same for all animals, including humans, there are some subtle differences when working with different species, plus there are many tools and techniques that we use that are specific to cats.

Volunteering in the shelter affords me the benefit of working with a large range of different issues and ailments as well as a spectrum of ages from day-old kittens to end-of-life cats. I am fortunate they have a facility which offers a cage-free environment and has special enclosures for Feline Aides (FIV) positive cats, and also provides hospice care to sick and dying cats.

TTouch can be beneficial to all these cats because it offers a “quality of touch” which means that spending just 15 minutes with one of these little creatures can make a big difference in both their health and well-being. It can also give the cat a concentrated dose of human connection which all animals, and particularly shelter animals, desperately need. One of the most powerful aspects of the TTouch method, and the main reason why I became a TTouch practitioner, is that it builds and enhances the bond between people and animals.

This is achieved by many facets of the work, including the philosophy which is based in building trust and having respect and kindness for animals at all times. The TTouch Golden Rule is “Treat your animal as you would like to be treated”. We try to put ourselves in our pets’ “paws”. This helps us to realize many things about the way we deal with animals, including that we often expect more from our pets than we do from ourselves.



Another aspect of this work that builds this bond is being “mindful” of how we touch an animal and how we move around them. This is, I think, one of the most important aspects of the TTouch method. So what does being mindful mean? Well, it means slowing down and clearing a space in one’s mind – not thinking of a conversation you had yesterday or the meal you will prepare tonight, not being on the phone or watching a video. It means focusing and being present with your animal when you are with them and touching them. It is only then that you can connect with them at a deeper level. It is a bit like a meditation and is a far cry from the multi-tasking we are taught we need to be doing in our fast-paced world. I think this is partially why the TTouch promotes well-being in both the animal or person receiving it, and the person doing it.

All animals are very sensitive but especially cats, and it is necessary to always use a light touch or pressure and to be aware of your body language, as well as the cat’s body language at all times. For example, a wagging tail is not a sign of happiness as it can be in a dog, it is a signal that the cat is getting over-loaded. Cats get over stimulated very quickly – as you know, when your cat suddenly strikes out when you are petting him – so we find it

particularly helpful to give cats breaks to process the work. Also cats do not like to be restrained so where possible we let them choose to be touched by us by being invitational in our approach and touches.

I find sitting on the floor or being at the same level as the animal I am working with very important as it shows that I am meeting them on an equal footing and does not make them feel overpowered. I then approach with the back of my hand and touch them with the back of my fingers. I can do this with a light stroke, and after this a little circle with the back of my fingers if the cat is settled with my contact. This is what we call the “Llama Touch”\* which we find is far less invasive than a whole front-hand approach. I usually find with cats it is best to touch them on their shoulders or the top of their heads initially. Once the cat has become acquainted with the feel of my hand, I can then begin to use any one of the many TTouches depending on the cat and the issues.

Altogether there are about 24 different TTouches all using different parts of the fingers and hands, and they are divided into the circular TTouches, lifts and strokes. There are also TTouches for different parts of the body such as the ears, tail, paws and mouth. The method is always evolving so new TTouches and tools are constantly being developed.

The “Noah’s March” TTouch is one that is often used to start and finish a session and is done with the intention of integrating the body of our pet. Using the entire hand – fingers and palm – begin at the head or neck area, making long strokes in the direction of the hair. If possible, cover all the body, including the tail and all the way down the legs to the paws. This is a great TTouch to use with your pet every day to check out their physical condition – is the fur dry in one area, is there a hot spot or an unusual lump or bump, does the animal twitch or ripple their skin when you touch them in a particular place? This simple technique is a great way to determine any changes in your pet’s health. Of course, it needs to be done in a slow, gentle and mindful way. Gradually you will find your hands become more sensitive and you will pick up any slight changes.

Another TTouch I find particularly beneficial with long-haired cats, although it can be used for short-haired cats as well, is a “Hair Slide”. This TTouch is useful for cats that resist brushing either because they are very sensitive or they have been brushed too firmly or quickly in the past. It is also helpful for cats that are unwilling to sit on your lap or suffer from a neurological disturbance, and for calming highly-strung or hyperactive cats. “Hair Slides” also deepen the trust between you and the animal, and have a relaxing effect which is equally beneficial to the person and the cat. To do this TTouch, take a small bunch of fur gently between your thumb and index finger and slide up the hair from the roots to the tips. This is done by going against the lay of the fur and sliding up the hair at approximately a 90-degree angle to the roots.

However, even touching a cat sometimes can be a challenge, especially in a shelter where they may be fearful and hide or strike out. In situations such as this, and in any circumstance where I want to calm a cat down, I use what we call “blinking”.



You may have observed that when your cat is scared or alert they do not blink, but when they are content or trying to slow down they blink and partially close their eyes. If you respond by closing your eyes slowly it seems to acknowledge and accept their efforts to connect. Often they will blink again and a shift seems to happen and they will now look at you with softer eyes. These signals will relax both the cat and yourself. I find thinking loving thoughts while you do this helps the process tremendously and sometimes glancing away after the blink can be useful too. This technique is especially beneficial when working with feral cats.

Cats are very textural and so as well as our hands we use lots of different fabrics – such as sheepskin, towels or a soft cloth – to diffuse our contact, as well as feathers, brushes, pointed paintbrushes or make-up brushes to give the cat a different experience of being touched. We also often use treats or play with a cat to make friends and initiate a session. One tool I find particularly useful when I want to touch a cat I have not touched before is a feather on a stick. I very gently stroke the cat on the shoulders with the feathers. This calms the cat down and initiates contact whilst keeping both parties feeling and being safe. If appropriate to the cat, I may use another feather on a stick to play with the cat and keep him a little preoccupied whilst I begin touching him either with the back of my hand or with another feather on a stick, depending on the cat.

One simple way to increase the trust between you and your cat (or small dog) is by paying particular attention to how you pick them up and put them down. A cat must be ready to be picked up even if they know you, which means not coming up quickly and at pressure from behind, or lifting them in the air at speed. Cats like to have their paws on the ground or on a surface and you take away their security when you lift them up. I always come up slowly to a cat, bend down and begin to touch them with the “Llama” TTouch or “Noah’s March” before gently and slowly picking them up. I then carry them next to my body to help them feel more secure, often resting their back paws on my arm. If they don’t want to be picked up then don’t, unless you have to, otherwise you may both regret it. When I put the cat down, again I do it very slowly and then hold my hands around its body for a few seconds when it is on the ground which helps it feel more secure.

So the TTouch can help cats to become gentle and affectionate companions who take pleasure in closeness with humans. I hope some of these techniques will further deepen your relationship with your feline friends.

*\*All the TTouces have animal names or associations which makes them fun and easy to learn.*

For further information go to [www.ttouch.com](http://www.ttouch.com).

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