

# Cat Adoption Denial Policy

### Overview

The application is intended to be a starting point for conversation; not the end-all-be-all of documents. Concerns that you see on an application should be discussed, with an attempt to educate on the issue. The entirety of your conversation is what your decision should be based upon.

Start with coming from a place of “yes” - the adopter is going home with this cat today unless they prove otherwise. It is not our place to be private investigators or judges. We are matchmakers, we are educators, we are guardians of our cats and escort them into the right homes. It is our responsibility to ensure cats go to quality homes, and we will not send a cat to a home where we feel she may be in danger or be neglected. But we do not require perfection as few people, including ourselves, meet the definition of ‘perfect.

### Adoption Denials

Denials are rare at Austin Pets Alive. When going over the questionnaire, please always try to come from a place of education and matchmaking rather than interrogating. Remember to re-educate and steer potential adopters toward a more appropriate cat when possible (ex: already declawed cats, barn cats, older cats, etc).

If someone is visiting us wanting to adopt a shelter pet, it's a reasonable assumption that they are coming from a good place. They may need education on how to care for the pet properly, or which pet is a good match, but our position should always be to educate them, assist them, and help them find a pet who is a good fit. Most people really are good. Assume that they are until they prove otherwise. That said, not everyone is a suitable adopter. No one wants you to send cats home with folks who are truly awful or a risk to the pet!

When denying an adopter becomes necessary for one or more of the reasons below, make sure to stay as polite and professional as possible even if you feel uncomfortable. Potential adopters who are denied should not walk away feeling that they have been judged, discriminated against, condescended to, etc.

If the applicant becomes violent or threatening, ask them to leave and/or call 911.

### Reasons to Deny an Adopter

- Plans to allow kitten under the age of 9 months outdoor access without necessary precautions (leash and harness), *and will not be dissuaded from this through education.*
  - These adopters may be given the option of adopting a cat who is older than 9 months and does not require an indoor-only lifestyle.
- Plans to declaw or will not abandon declawing as a possible option in the future. *Will not be dissuaded.*
  - These adopters may be given the option of adopting a cat who is already declawed.
- Plans to give outdoor access to declawed cat or cat missing a limb/eye/etc who has been marked as “indoor only” in ShelterLuv. *Will not be dissuaded.*
  - These adopters may be given the option of adopting a cat who does not require an indoor-only lifestyle.
- Plans to let current cat outdoors despite history of previous cats disappearing/being eaten/getting run over at that location and will not be dissuaded or has made no modification to the situation to create a safe habitat.

- Refuses to provide reasonable medical care for cat (this does not necessarily include vaccinations or seeking annual wellness exams). We expect that if a cat becomes sick or injured, the adopter will take average measures to care for the cat.
- Wants to adopt an FeLV positive cat but has cats who test FeLV negative at home.
- Intends to give FeLV+ cat loose outdoor access without supervision.
- Has unspayed/unneutered cats at home and refuses to alter them before adopting from APA - such an adopter may not pre-adopt an in-tact cat, but may adopt a cat who is already altered.
- Verbally abusive to counselors/staff/volunteers.
- Under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Lives 100 or miles from Austin, lives out of state or country. This requires manager approval.

## **Unacceptable Reasons for Denial**

- **Counselor disagrees with or dislikes potential adopter**
  - has a "weird feeling", "gives me the creeps", etc.
- **Adopting a single kitten**
  - People are welcome to adopt single kittens. Just because they work 8 hours a day, have small kids, or only want one - this is not a reason to deny. We want to educate adopters that single kittens require lots of additional work, they may experience the behavior issues we list in our handouts, etc. We want to politely explain single kitten behavior (as well as how to prevent those issues) so that the adopter can make an educated decision for themselves.
- **Newly adopted cat is a poor match for current cat(s) at home**
  - Adoption counselors may suggest appropriate cats and explain why certain cats may be mismatched, but they cannot outright deny adopters for choosing to bring home a new cat who may not get along with their resident cat. Provide special counseling for these adopters relevant to whatever issues may come up -- like how to help a kitten coexist peacefully with a senior.
- **Indoor/Outdoor Access**
  - APA! allows indoor/outdoor cats. Kittens should be at least 9 months of age before unsupervised free outdoor access is granted. It is important to EDUCATE on why kittens younger than that are at risk. If the family wants to allow supervised, contained, or leash/harness access prior to 9 months, that's ok. If a family is interested in a 100% outdoor cat, then you should refer them to the barn cat program. History of losing cats who have been let outside ("a coyote ate my last cat so I need another") would be a red flag, obviously, but a normal home in which the family grants outdoor time is not a reason to deny. (Note: FeLV+ cats are not to be outside. FIV+ cats can be outside.)
- **An adopter must simply have CONSENT of everyone in the home to adopt**
  - Other residents do not need to come meet the cat, and we will accept their word that they have consent if they appear to be quality adopters
  - If you have an adopter who appears to be good and there are no other concerns, you do not need to call the spouse/partner/roommate. If you have some mild concerns about the applicant, you can call the other resident/s and get consent. The website lists the requirement that "all members of the family must meet the pet" so that counselors may use this as a way to "talk folks out of the door," so to speak.
- **Financial Constraints**
  - Lots of folks put on their app that they might only spend \$500-\$1000 (or less) for a sick pet. So many people honestly don't understand that a UTI will run them \$500 so they just picked a random figure and put that down on their app. For people who put down small financial abilities, talk to them about average vet care costs because they probably don't know, tell them to strongly consider pet insurance, and also make sure they know about the resources in Austin who help in these cases - Emancipet, etc. Also, APA! will always take back our cats in case of medical emergency if owner cannot provide. How many of us do not have \$5,000 sitting around just in case our cat gets sick? That doesn't mean you're a bad adopter.

- **Has over 5 animals in the home**
  - Having 5 or more animals at home does not necessarily make someone a hoarder! Ask a Cat Manager on Duty for approval if this comes up.
- **Housing/Apartment Restrictions**
  - If an adopter says they are allowed to have the cat where they live and have paid their pet deposit, we believe them unless we coincidentally know they are lying or there are other red flags on the application. The adopter is the one taking all the risk in this situation, not APA. It is the adopter's responsibility to ensure they may have a pet and any deposits are reasonable for them to meet. We do not call landlords for approval or need documentation.
- **Other Pets Not Current on Vaccinations**
  - Other pets in the home are not required to be current on vaccinations or tested for FIV/FelV. This is a decision made privately between a pet owner and his or her veterinarian. There are many valid reasons a pet may not be current on vaccines, including holistic veterinary care or medical issues which prevent vaccines. As long as you believe an adopted pet would receive adequate medical attention, vaccine status of other pets in the home is not our concern.
- **Has outdoor or in-tact dogs**
  - The Cat Program does not deny applications just because an adopter has an outdoor and/or in-tact dog.

### **Denial of Adoption to Foster/Volunteer/Donor**

- Any denial of an adoption to a foster, volunteer, or donor must be approved by both the Director of Lifesaving Programs and the Executive Director of Austin Pets Alive!
- Any denial of an adoption to a foster, volunteer, or donor must have a minimum of 48 hour wait period so that the Executive Director has time to confer, investigate, and discuss the denial.
- Any foster who has fostered an animal for six (6) months or more is automatically approved to adopt their foster, unless extenuating circumstances approved by Executive Director are present.
- All fosters, volunteers, and/or donors falling under this protocol will be told that their application is being forwarded to the Director of Lifesaving Programs and Executive Director if there are any questions regarding the adoption. The foster, volunteer, and/or donor will not be told they are being denied. They will be told their application is being forwarded on for processing. The Director of Lifesaving Programs and/or the Executive Director will inform the potential adopter of the issues, if any exist.

### **"Do Not Adopt" List Protocol**

If you encounter a potential adopter that you believe needs to be added to the Do-Not-Adopt List, the following steps should be taken:

1. Email the Cat Manager on Duty with a run-down of the incident, the person's name and information if you have it, their description, and why you feel we should not adopt to them.
2. The Cat Manager on Duty will assess the information provided by you and add them to the official list if necessary.
3. *Note: Adoption Counselors are not to flag a visitor as "DNA" in ShelterLuv.*