Excerpted from: The Kindness Clinic

Humane Trapping Instructions

These instructions assume that you are using traps from the Tomahawk Live Trap Company. Specifics regarding the traps may be slightly different if you are using another type of trap (e.g. Havahart). Caretakers will also want to bring a large cat carrier to the clinic for the cat to be transferred into after surgery! Tell the vet staff the weight of the trap when you drop off the cat (most Tomahawk 606 models weigh 6#). This makes weighing the trapped cats and determining anesthetic doses much easier and much more accurate for clinic personnel.

Preparation for trapping

Get the cats used to being fed at the same place and time of day. You will want to leave the traps near the food securely wired open (so cats can go in and out) and partially covered with large towels for a few days so the cats can get used to seeing and smelling them.

4 days before trapping: leave traps near feeding area, wired open and covered with a towel.

2 and 3 days before trapping: leave food in the traps, but keep them securely wired open night before surgery: set traps after leaving especially-enticing food **under** each trap (see 'Setting the traps' below - do NOT leave food bowls in the traps!) Sit back and watch. Trapping cats this way is usually VERY easy.

Plan to trap the night before the surgery so that you don't have to keep the cats in traps too long. Don't feed the cats the day/night before you plan to trap so the cats will be hungry. Don't leave too much food for bait. Cats need to have an empty stomach the following morning for surgery. Water should be available if the cat is held in the trap for more than 8 hours after capture (4 hours if in the direct sun).

Be sure to notify others who may feed the cats not to leave food out either and warn neighbors to keep their cats indoors.

Prepare the area where you will be holding the cats before and after the clinic. A garage or other sheltered, warm, protected area is best. Lay down a tarp, and then newspapers, to catch the inevitable stool, urine and food residue. You may want to use pieces of wood to elevate the traps off the newspapers and any underlying cement. This allows the mess to fall through the wire away from the cats. Spraying the area ahead of time with a cat-safe flea spray (like Adams or Ovitrol) will discourage ants, if they're found to be a problem.

Prepare the vehicle you will use to transport them as well. A plastic tarp can be used under the traps as an additional precaution, but remember that you will need to use newspapers or some other absorbent material in addition. (Urine will roll right off of the plastic and that isn't what you want).

Plan your day of trapping carefully. Remember that if you trap an animal and release it for some reason, it is unlikely that you will be able to catch it again they learn very quickly.

If there are young kittens involved, remember that they should not be separated from their mother before 8 weeks of age. If you are trapping a lactating female, you may want to wait until you have located the kittens and they are old enough to wean. If you wish to tame and foster the kittens to adopt out, they should be taken from the mother at 8 weeks of age and allowed contact with a healthy mentor cat (to learn cat-specific lessons hard for humans to teach). A mother cat in a partially covered trap can be used very successfully as "bait" to trap her kittens in other traps (and vice-versa), if the traps are left close together.

Setting the traps

Plan to set traps just before or at the cats' normal feeding time. This is often at night. Dusk is usually the best time to set traps.

Don't trap in the rain or the heat of day without adequate protection for the trap. Cats are vulnerable in the traps and can get sick from getting wet or suffer from heatstroke in the sun. **Use common sense!**

Plan placement of traps on a level surface in the area where the cats usually feed or have been seen. Cats are less likely to enter the trap if it wobbles. If trapping in a public area, try to place traps where they will not be noticed by passersby (who may not understand that you are not trying to harm the cat). Bushes are often places where cats hide and provide good camouflage for the trap. Bicycle locks can be used to lock the traps to trees, etc.

Use smelly food to bait the trap. We find that canned mackerel, sardines, or anything made by Sheba is very effective. **Do NOT put any bowls inside the trap** to hold food since they interfere with the anesthesiologists' ability to gauge the cats' weights.

Spoon a small amount of food onto a four by four inch piece of newspaper and place the trap **on top of** the food so the food is as far back in the trap as possible while still not accessible from outside the trap. (You want the cat to go all the way into the trap to avoid being injured when the trap door closes.) Press the trap down onto the food so that it squishes up through the wire. The idea is to make the food a little hard to get so that the cat has to go into the trap as far as possible and has to work at getting it long enough to trip the trap. (Some cats are very good at getting in and out of traps without getting caught. We don't want to make it too easy for them to get away with that trick. Also, having the food essentially outside of the trap prevents the cat from eating it in the trap before surgery and is less messy.)

After baiting the trap, open the trap door by pushing the top of the door in and pulling the bottom of the door upward. There is a small hook attached to the right side of the trap top. It hooks onto a tiny metal cylinder on the right side of the door. The hook holds the door in an open position that also raises the trip plate. When the cat steps on the plate it will cause the hook to release the door and close the trap.

After setting the trap, cover it with a large towel or piece of towel-sized material. Fold the material at the front end of the trap to expose the opening while still covering the top, sides and back of the trap. The cover will help to camouflage the trap and serve to calm the cat after it is caught.

Just before you are ready to leave the trap for the cat to enter, you may want to push the hook (ever so slightly) a little bit back off the cylinder to create a "hair trigger". (Don't get too carried away with this step or the trap will trip as soon as the cat takes a sniff or the wind blows!)

Waiting for success

Never leave traps unattended in an unprotected area, but don't hang around within sight of the cat (or you will scare it off). The trapped animal is vulnerable. Passersby may release the cat or steal the trap! Wait quietly in an area where you can still see the traps without disturbing the cats, Check traps every 15 minutes or so. You can often hear the traps trip and see the cloth cover droop down slightly over the opening from a distance. As soon as the intended cat is trapped completely cover the trap and remove the trap from the area if other cats are not in sight. You may consider putting another trap in the same spot if it seems to be a "hot" one. Be sure to dispose of the food left on the ground when you pick up the trap. (You don't want to litter or give out any freebies and spoil any appetites!)

When you get the captured cat to a quiet area away from the other traps lift the cover and check for signs that you have the correct animal and not a pet or previously neutered feral. (Most TNVR programs tip the right or left ear of the animals they neuter so they can avoid repeat animals). If you note that you have captured a lactating female check the area for kittens and remember that this female must be reunited (ideally under close supervision) with her kittens 10-12 hours after surgery. Cover the cat back up as soon as possible. Left uncovered, the animal may panic and hurt itself thrashing around in the trap.

Of course, there is always the chance that you will catch some other wild animal attracted to the food or an unintended cat. Simply release the animal quietly as stated in the releasing procedures here.

Holding procedures

Place cats in a prepared protected area away from all other non-trapped cats. Don't feed them. If cats are to remain in the trap more than 8 hrs prior to a clinic, you can place a small jar cap of water in the trap by opening the trap door just one inch and placing the jar top by the trap door. **Don't open the door more than this** or the cat may escape. (Be sure to remove the jar top before transporting the cat to the vet.)

Keep cats covered and check periodically. They will probably be very quiet as long as they are covered. Don't stick fingers in the trap or allow children or pets near the traps. These are undomesticated animals that may scratch and bite. ALL ANIMAL BITES ARE SERIOUS! IF YOU ARE BITTEN SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION AND **DO NOT RELEASE THE CAT**. **IT MUST BE QUARANTINED.** CONTACT YOUR VET FOR QUARANTINE INSTRUCTIONS.

Wash and change clothes before having contact with your own pets as a precaution against spreading any contagious diseases or fleas the cats might carry.

Always get feral kittens checked out by a vet and isolate them from your pets until they are leukemia tested at 13 wks of age. Some deadly diseases can incubate without symptoms. Check with your veterinarian and use common sense.

Releasing the cats

If a cat does not seem to be recovering well from the surgery, have it checked out by a vet **before releasing.** When cats are ready for release, **3 days or more** post-op, return to the area in which they were captured and release them there. Do not relocate the animal to a new area! It will be disoriented and will quite possibly die. In all likelihood, area cats will drive it away.

If the veterinarian has indicated a serious medical problem with the cat which you will not be able to treat, you, with the advice of the vet, must make the decision on whether it is safe to release the animal or kinder to euthanize it. Untreated abscesses, corneal ulcers, respiratory infections, and a number of other conditions, can mean suffering and, sometimes, a slow death.

Make sure the spot you pick for release does not encourage the cat to run into danger (like a busy street) to get away from you. Keep the trap covered until you are ready to release. When ready, simply hold the trap with the door facing **away** from you and open the door. The cat will probably bolt immediately out of the trap. If it is confused, just tilt the trap so the back is slightly up and tap on the back of the trap to encourage it to leave. Never put your hand in the trap! If the animal still will not leave, tie the door open and leave it for a while. A trapped skunk or possum, which is nocturnal, may decide to sleep in the trap all day and not leave the trap until dark.

After releasing the cats, hose off traps and disinfect them with very dilute bleach (1 part bleach to 32 parts water). **Never store traps in the "set" position** (door open and untied)- animals may wander into even unbaited traps and starve to death.

Helpful hints

Bring a flashlight with you if trapping at night. It will come in handy for checking traps from a distance and might help you avoid a twisted ankle in the dark.

Bring a cap for the top of the cat food can. Nothing smells worse than fish juice spilled in the car. Don't forget a spoon!

Females with kittens will be attracted by the sound of their kittens if the previously captured kittens are placed in a covered carrier just behind the trap. Similarly, kittens will be easier to trap if the previously captured mom is in the carrier. Females in heat can be placed in a carrier to attract male cats who have been eluding the traps. Never place the "bait" animal in the trap or anywhere where it may be harmed by the trapped animal. Even moms can hurt their babies if frightened enough. Be careful not to let the "bait" animal escape.

Some kittens can be caught without a trap but are still too wild to be handled easily. Use a thick towel to pick up the kitten to help protect you from scratching and biting and hold them close to calm them. This also helps prevent the kitten from squirming away from you.