



OAR Adoption Program

Returns Philosophy

Updated 10/3/22

OAR supports a no-fault return policy in which adopters are welcomed to bring back their cat and give us the chance to find a better match. This approach is followed by the country's top adoption programs and humane organizations (see Resources section below). It turns mismatches into opportunities.

The former adopter can serve the same role as a foster home. By learning more about the returned cat, we can make a stronger match next time. And when our cats spend time in homes, we are given the space to pull additional cats from our county shelter partners and help find live outcomes for more cats.

The ASPCA looked at statistics in a few shelters that switched to this no-fault return policy. They found that more visitors decided to adopt with a satisfaction guarantee in place than without. In some shelters, returns did not increase. However, when returns did increase (possibly because adopters felt more comfortable returning), they were still outpaced by an increase in adoptions. In other words, satisfaction guarantees led to more happy endings overall. — **Adopters Welcome Manual**

Our adoption contract asks adopters to return OAR cats directly to us if the need arises. When an adopter inquires about the return process, we always ask if we can help keep the cat in the home through counseling. We are keen to share our knowledge and experience. Our operations director, Nathan Schneider, and our adoption coordinator, Jessica Pool, regularly educate adopters on a variety of issues including litterbox avoidance, play aggression and other behavioral concerns, gradual pet introductions, veterinary recommendations, and more. Adopters are almost always receptive to our assistance.

But even with the additional guidance and support, not everyone is in a position to cope with significant medical and behavioral issues. And, as we can all empathize with, life happens. Every day, people find themselves in situations they cannot control and we are not here to judge them or tell them they are making poor choices. Reasons for returns that people cannot control include moving, injury, illness, job loss, mental health, allergies, death, and more.

Returning a pet is never someone's ideal choice, but they are making a difficult decision that is best for the cat and their family.

We welcome and appreciate adopters who bring back OAR cats. We cherish the chance to help these cats in the next stage of their life. This is why we prefer the terms *loving home* and *adoptive home* rather than *forever home*. We want to foster an environment and culture that does not stigmatize returns.

Shame or embarrassment surrounding returns does not help anyone and it can have negative consequences. Fear of judgment about returning a cat may result in people being less likely to adopt from OAR in the first place, more likely to rehome a cat adopted from us in a less advantageous way, or more likely to hold onto a cat we could be helping (possibly making a behavioral or medical issue more severe and difficult to address).

Day to day events can make it seem otherwise, but our return rate is fairly steady year to year. And, in almost every case, cats brought back to us are readopted. Check out the Data Table below for details.

We are happy that adopters trust OAR enough to bring cats back to us. They know our volunteers and staff will take great care of them until we find their next adoptive home. This is something we can take pride in. Returning a cat is often a selfless act that demonstrates love and compassion.

Data Table

Year	Adopted ¹	Returned ²	Readopted ³
2015	488	9.2%	95.5% (43/45)
2016	578	11.2%	100% (65/65)
2017	665	8.7%	96.5% (56/58)
2018	773	8.9%	98.5% (68/69)
2019	1466	10.9%	99.4% (160/161)
2020	1903	9.9%	97.8% (185/189)
2021	1684	7.3%	94.3% (116/123)

2022 ⁴	1026	4.7%	79.6% (39/49)
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¹ Non-barn home

² Subject to change at any time as cats are welcomed back

³ Currently adopted as of 10/3/22. Subject to change at anytime as cats are adopted again

⁴ Through 9/31/22

Resources

The Humane Society: [Adopters Welcome Manual](#)

The Humane Society: ['Return' is not a dirty word](#)

Million Cat Challenge: [Removing Barriers to Adoption](#)

People Are Animals Too (podcast): [Removing Barriers to Pet Adoptions with Best Friends Animal Society](#)

American Pets Alive!: [Open Adoptions Protocol](#)

Austin Pets Alive!: [Cat Program Adoption Philosophy](#)