

TIP SHEET: Responsible cat ownership

Key tips from the Responsible Cat Ownership Messaging Guide, as well as a summary of words to replace and embrace.

Tips

1. A JOURNEY: Bear in mind we are taking cat owners on a journey, from thinking it’s alright or even necessary to let cats roam, to always keeping them at home where they are happiest and healthiest. We are asking owners to change how they think of their cat, their cat’s role in the home, and setting up their house and yard to accommodate the cat. This is likely to take some time.

We can foster goodwill by acknowledging owners’ love for their cats and framing responsible cat ownership as something that benefits everyone (cats, owners, neighbours and wildlife).

2. VALUES: Engage audiences’ values of caring for their cat as members of the family at home, caring for neighbours and wildlife, and being creative problem-solvers who rise to the challenge of making a great home for cats.

3. SHOW WHAT YOU WANT, NOT WHAT YOU DON’T: Choose images and words that show cats happy and entertained at home, not roaming, fighting or hunting. Normalise responsible behaviour by telling the story that many owners already do the right thing by providing a safe and enriching environment for their cats at home.

4. THE MESSENGER MATTERS: Veterinarians and fellow cat owners are likely to be trusted messengers, although currently not all vets recommend keeping cats at home. To reinforce the idea that responsible cat ownership applies to all, invite a diverse range of cat owners to tell their stories.

Our story

A ‘**Vision – Barrier – Action**’ structure helps us focus our story on the *positive outcomes we seek*, rather than *problems we face*. The following is an overarching story about responsible cat ownership that can be adapted to suit the messenger and audience.

VISION	Cats are important companions who are happiest and healthiest at home with plenty of love and entertainment. When our cats lead rich, satisfied lives at home, we help create harmonious neighbourhoods and allow our unique and special native animals to thrive.
BARRIER	But if we let out our cats to roam, they can cause trouble for themselves, other pets, neighbours and our native wildlife.
ACTION	When we welcome a cat into our lives, we take on the responsibility of caring for it. As responsible cat owners, we can provide everything they need for a full and happy life at home, so that our cats, neighbours and wildlife can enjoy their lives and thrive. Find out how at your local vet, SPCA adoption centre or Council.

Words to replace and embrace

REPLACE	EMBRACE
"We're not anti-cat"	"We love animals. We want the best for cats and native animals." "Many of our members own cats."
"Confined", "contained"	"At home" (which could mean both inside and outside the house, on-property)
"To reduce capture of prey, while leaving your cat free-to-roam" "Don't leave your cat free to roam at night"	"Your cat is happiest and healthiest at home" "Provide your cat with everything they need for a full and happy life at home"
"Cats roam", "cats hunt"	"Cats are happiest and healthiest at home" " <i>If we let out our cats to roam...</i> " ¹
"Only some cats hunt"	"If we let out our cats to roam, they can cause trouble for themselves, other pets, neighbours and wildlife." "If we let them out to roam, even well fed cats can hunt, maim and kill our native animals."
"House cats", "home cats"	"Cats" (the default is cats at home, the exception is roaming cats, not the other way around)

¹ Note the subtle but important difference between "if our cats roam" or "if we let our cats roam" (it's something they want to do but we're holding them back), and "if we *let out* our cats to roam" (they normally stay at home, emphasis is on the owner's behaviour of letting them out).