

How to Talk TNR

HOW-TO



“TNR (Trap/Neuter/Return) is not intuitive,” says Jesse Oldham, Senior Administrative Director for Community Outreach at the ASPCA. Whether you’re dealing with cat lovers who think TNR is cruel, or people who just want cats around at all, you should be prepared to tackle all types of TNR objections.

Although being a TNR cheerleader can be tricky, these four tips can help you win over new fans:

1: Understand the Program

In order to be an effective advocate, you need to understand what TNR means for your community. Since it is done differently depending on the locale, you should be familiar with the particulars of your own program as well as those of others in your area. In general, most programs involve humanely trapping free-roaming cats, transporting them to a facility for spay and neuter, ear tipping, possible rabies and other vaccines; and then returning them to their colony.

2: Understand the Benefits to People

Regardless of the nuances of individual programs, they all have benefits for the community.

- **Fewer cats:** According to [Alley Cat Allies](#), over time TNR reduces the size of feral cat colonies anywhere from 16% to 66%. Additionally, if you remove friendly kittens from a feral colony and put them up for adoption, the reduction in the number of cats will be immediate.
- **Less smell:** Neutered male cats will mark their territory less, thus cutting down on the smell in the community. And, of course, with fewer cats there will be less smell overall.
- **Less noise:** Neutered cats make less noise and fight less. In fact, some research indicates that animal control receives fewer feral cat complaints when TNR is implemented in a community.
- **Rodent control:** Although there is not a lot of research on this topic, some neighbors of feral cat colonies report a decrease in rodent populations.
- **Disease reduction:** Most rabies is transmitted by wildlife, not feral cats. Even so, the majority of TNR programs vaccinate ferals for rabies—meaning vaccinated feral cats are much less likely to acquire or transmit the virus and much less likely to pose a threat to humans or other animals. Additionally, some programs offer a FVRCP (Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus and Panleukopenia) vaccination.

3: Understand the Benefits to Cats

Cats have been living outside for thousands of years and they will continue to be a part of our society whether we implement TNR or not. However, implementing TNR will not only benefit the community, it will help feral cats too.

The sad reality is that the vast majority of feral cats brought into a shelter will be euthanized. However, if they are allowed to live out their natural lives, most can have a lifespan similar to a pet cat. And, according to a 2006 study of 103,643 stray and feral cats, less than 1% of the cats needed to be euthanized due to debilitating conditions, trauma, or infectious diseases.

4: Speak the Language

There was a time TNR stood for *Trap/Neuter/Release*, not *Trap/Neuter/Return*. The problem with the word “release” was that some people thought it meant that after vetting, the cats were simply let out the clinic door into a new environment. Simply switching the “R” in TNR to “return” conveyed what was actually happening in most cases – the cats were being brought back to their original environment. Changing this one word impacted how TNR was perceived by cat lovers, making it a more acceptable practice in their eyes.

Here are some other words you should pick and choose carefully when discussing TNR:

- **Feral or stray.** When recruiting volunteers and supporters for your program, consider using the word “stray” instead of “feral.” Not everyone knows what a feral cat is, but many people adopt socialized homeless strays off the street and already have empathy for them. Once you have someone’s attention on the topic, you can tell them the difference between a stray and a feral cat.
- **He or she.** Referring to cats with a gender-specific pronoun, as in “*She* was spayed,” gives them value. Save “it” for inanimate objects like rocks.
- **Cost-saving.** Use this term as often as you can when it comes to promoting TNR. Talk about how TNR saves tax dollars spent on euthanasia. Additionally, much of the cost of TNR is covered by private donations, which is a huge cost-savings to the community.
- **Humane!** This is another great word to sprinkle into your TNR conversations as often as possible. TNR uses *humane* traps; the practice as a whole is *humane*, allowing cats to live out their natural lives. No one wants to be considered inhumane, and TNR allows everyone to be a humane hero.

More Resources

Here are fun and easy to understand handouts that address common concerns that cat lovers—and those who lack an appreciation for felines—have about TNR. These appealing comics, downloadable in [English](#) and [Spanish](#), are chockfull of useful information that can help combat misconceptions.

To learn more about effectively messaging TNR, listen to this recorded webinar on [Starting a TNR Program in Your Community](#).

Looking for Feral & Community Cat webinars, blogs, research, tips, and forms & samples? [Check out the resources here](#).