

A Lifesaving Matrix

For well over a century, the killing of animals has been a central strategy of most SPCAs, humane societies and animal control facilities. They even created a euphemism—"putting them to sleep"—to make the task of killing easier. And, in the end, that's exactly what the humane movement has become: a movement of "euphemisms"—euphemisms such as "putting them to sleep," "euthanasia," and "humane death." These euphemisms have been created to obscure the gravity of what is actually occurring and to avoid accountability for it. In the age of No Kill, add one more: "unadoptable."

To shelters mired in reactionary philosophies, an "unadoptable" animal is interpreted very broadly. Some shelters, for example, consider a kitten with a minor cold or a dog older than five years old to be unadoptable. Shelters with a highly restrictive, meaningless definition of "unadoptable" ignore the fact that some adopters want older animals who are less excitable and more sedate to match their own lifestyle. They ignore the importance of people wanting to be heroic, to save the life of an animal who someone else failed to love. They ignore the fact that if shelters let people know how they can help, people respond. And they ignore the fact that communities across the country have proved that these animals can and should be saved. But the restrictive definition of what constitutes an "adoptable" animal is not simply a failure to overcome a personal bias. It also has an intentional and dark side: the label of "unadoptable" allows shelters to appear to be doing a better job than they are doing.

To the public, "unadoptable" implies an animal who is irremediably suffering. That is what many of these shelters expect the public to believe: that they are, in fact, meeting the dictionary definition of euthanasia for medical cases ("the act or practice of killing hopelessly sick or injured individual animals in a relatively painless way for reasons of mercy") and that rehabilitation has proved futile. But that is not the criteria they are using to make those determinations. As a result, while shelters claim that they are saving "adoptable animals," they are still killing as they have always done but only after unfairly labeling the animals "unadoptable."

In order to create fair and realistic definitions, the No Kill Advocacy Center has developed a "matrix" for agencies to use in order to categorize animals. Instead of giving shelters an excuse to kill, this model matrix is focused on pushing shelters to save more lives, or as the document states:

"No matrix can conceivably cover every condition or combination of conditions that might affect an individual animal. These definitions should be utilized based on a candid and

realistic assessment of each animal's condition and not based on subjective and often self-serving notions of adoptability... In cases of doubt, the default shall always be a preference for lifesaving."

Indeed, regardless of the prognosis, the emphasis remains, where possible, on lifesaving. The document states that *"animals who are hopelessly ill or injured can still be successfully cared for, transferred or adopted to an individual or organization capable of providing sanctuary or hospice care, or other suitable environment. In addition, very progressive shelters have been able to successful and fully rehabilitate dogs even with a history of severe aggression or to partner with sanctuaries which safely provide such animals with care."*

While some organizations try to define animals away so they can appear to be doing a better job than they are, the Matrix says that:

"Conditions such as fleas, ear mites, or pregnancy do not change the animal's status from being healthy since they are resolved through professionally standard routine shelter care or, in the case, of pregnant animals, through giving birth. Healthy also includes animals who are exhibiting behaviors considered normal for the species such as house soiling, territorial marking, barking, chewing, digging or scratching behavior. Likewise free-living community cats who are inhibited in social interactions with humans are not exhibiting abnormal behavior for the species. The animal may be blind, deaf, old, or missing a limb, but as long as the animal is healthy, she meets the definition."

Moreover, "treatable" does not mean an animal has to be cured. For example, a cat with early kidney disease or diabetes can have a good quality of life with appropriate care, even if the animal cannot be cured. They should not be killed as they are not "suffering." As with other "special needs" or injured/ill animals, such as panleukopenia, the diagnosis does not indicate a death sentence as the outcome depends on the prognosis. Spina bifida, likewise, should not be an automatic death sentence as the prognosis is variable—some animals can live a pain-free life and these animals should be saved. In other cases associated with severe neurological deficits, however, the animal may be in a great deal of pain and irremediably suffering.

To meet the definition of irremediably suffering, the animal must have *"a poor or grave prognosis for being able to live without severe, unremitting pain even with prompt, necessary, and comprehensive veterinary care."*

Finally, unlike some other plans, the No Kill Advocacy Center requires community cats to be saved, regardless of whether they are social to humans.

Several notes of caution are in order. The Matrix's main purpose is to force accountability on shelters and their leadership who claim they are saving "adoptable" animals. The Matrix should not be one more layer of bureaucracy to be created before lifesaving begins. For instance, some agencies have indicated that "shelters must first determine exactly what animals are being

euthanized and for what reasons. This information is essential in order for shelters to better direct their resources and efforts.”

This is unnecessary, a needless delay, and a financially wasteful process for three reasons. Every shelter which has not achieved No Kill is killing animals because they are not comprehensively implementing the programs and services necessary to achieve No Kill which are identified in the No Kill Advocacy Center’s No Kill Equation. The No Kill Equation is the *only* national model which has allowed communities to achieve No Kill. If those programs are immediately implemented, greater lifesaving will immediately follow, so there is no reason to delay. The necessary size and scope of those programs can be determined while those programs are already underway.

The No Kill Equation provides for all categories of “at risk” animals, and resolves all of the reasons animals are being killed in shelters. There is simply no need for a study which will identify the cause of the problem as lack of the No Kill Equation programs. The problem is self-evident: no alternatives to killing for the categories of animals who invariably enter every shelter.

Finally, if a shelter has comprehensively implemented the programs and services of the No Kill Equation and is labeling animals honestly, it will save over 95% and upwards of 98%-99% of all animals it takes in.

For more information, see No Kill Advocacy Center, *Defining No Kill* (2015).

Lifesaving Matrix for Shelter Dogs & Cats

In order to facilitate accurate data collection and assure consistent reporting on the condition of individual animals in the community, the following definitions have been developed. A shelter achieves No Kill when it zeroes out the killing of all but irretrievably suffering animals.

Healthy	Treatable	Dangerous Dogs	Irretrievably Suffering
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No matrix can conceivably cover every condition or combination of conditions that might affect an individual animal. These definitions should be utilized based on a candid and realistic assessment of each animal's condition and not based on subjective and often self-serving notions of adoptability. Additionally and importantly, animals who are hopelessly ill or injured can still be successfully cared for, transferred or adopted to an individual or organization capable of providing sanctuary or hospice care, or other suitable environment. In addition, very progressive shelters have been able to successfully and fully rehabilitate dogs even with a history of severe aggression or to partner with sanctuaries which safely provide such animals with care. In cases of doubt, the default shall always be a preference for lifesaving.

Healthy: Conditions such as fleas, ear mites, or pregnancy do not change the animal's status from being healthy since they are resolved through professionally standard routine shelter care or, in the case of pregnant animals, through giving birth. Healthy also includes animals who are exhibiting behaviors considered normal for the species such as house soiling, territorial marking, barking, chewing, poor manners, digging or scratching behavior. Likewise free-living community cats who are inhibited in social interactions with humans are not exhibiting abnormal behavior for the species. The animal may be blind, deaf, old, or missing a limb, but as long as the animal is healthy, she meets the definition.

Treatable: Any animal who is sick or injured, whose prognosis for rehabilitation of that illness and/or injury is excellent, good, fair, or guarded. An animal does not have to be "cured" to be treatable. For instance, a diabetic cat may never be cured but she is likely to live a normal life with insulin supplementation. Moreover, aggression in dogs is treatable depending on the severity of the aggression and the prognosis for rehabilitation.

Irretrievably Suffering: An animal who has a poor or grave prognosis for being able to live without severe, unremitting pain even with prompt, necessary, and comprehensive veterinary care.

Dangerous Dog: "Dangerous Dog" is a dog adjudicated to be vicious by a court of competent jurisdiction and ordered killed by that court, where all appeals of that judicial determination have been unsuccessful.

Aggression in dogs is not the same as a dog deemed dangerous by a court of law. Aggressive dogs require a prognosis analysis to determine outcome, such as a dog who exhibits severe aggression to people or has a history of causing grievous bodily harm even when the dog is not hungry, in pain, or frightened, and whose prognosis for rehabilitation of that aggression is poor or grave. When rehabilitation proves impossible, sanctuary care is the humane outcome for these dogs. For more information, see No Kill Advocacy Center, "Defining No Kill" (2015).

Common Conditions: *Provided is a list of common conditions seen in shelter animals categorized appropriately.*

Healthy:

*Age (senior/geriatric animals)
Behavior issues typical with dogs and cats such as house soiling issues, social shyness, barking, escaping
Blindness
Fleas
Ear mites
Missing limb
Pregnancy
Neonatal*

*Abscesses
Parvovirus
Aggression in dogs*

*Irremediably Suffering:
Fulminant organ system failure*

Community cats ("feral cats") who are not social with humans are considered healthy. In order to achieve No Kill, a shelter or community must "zero out" deaths for these cats as well.

Treatable:

*Allergies, including dermatitis
Broken bones
Dental conditions
FeLV, FIV, asymptomatic
Heartworm positive
Hyperthyroid
Lacerations
Mange, demodectic or sarcoptic
Motherless neonatal
Unborn
Ocular conditions
Otitis
Respiratory infections
Ringworm
Separation anxiety
Conditions resolved by surgery
Food guarding
Urinary tract infections
Stomatitis
Diabetes*