

In conjunction with its executive director, the Central Vermont Humane Society Board of Directors constantly monitors the shifting dynamics of the animal rescue and sheltering world in order to ensure that the Society's policies and practices are current.

Recently, *Socially Conscious Sheltering* has been developed as a guideline for compassionate sheltering and rescue practices. The CVHS Board of Directors endorses the main tenets of this guideline, and adopts the following policy statement to guide the Society's practices and operation.

Socially Conscious Sheltering¹

1. **Place every healthy and safe animal.** Every single one. A healthy animal is defined as either an animal having no signs of clinical disease or evidence of disease or where a veterinarian determines that an animal has a good or excellent prognosis for a comfortable life. Safe means that the animal has not exhibited behavior that is likely to result in injury or death to another animal or person.
2. **Ensure every unwanted or homeless pet has a safe place to go for shelter and care.** An animal's opportunity to be nurtured, healed, and rehomed should not depend on its age or condition—every community should have a shelter that accepts all animals brought to it. It is unacceptable to turn animals away because they are too old, too sick, or too broken.
3. **Assess the medical and behavioral needs of homeless animals and ensure these needs are thoughtfully addressed.** Animals housed in shelters and rescues must be assessed for disease and injury and must have all medical conditions addressed so the animal does not suffer. These animals must also have their behavioral and social needs assessed and met, including enrichment activities sufficient to make them comfortable and to prevent self-destructive, obsessive-compulsive coping behaviors.
4. **Align shelter policy with the needs of the community.** Does the community allow trap-neuter-return programs? If so, offer them. Shelters must make sure that potential adoptors are willing to adopt animals with chronic disease, and are willing to assume the time and expense of managing that disease. If so, with full disclosure, shelters should place them in these homes. Socially Conscious Shelters listen to their communities.
5. **Alleviate suffering and make appropriate euthanasia decisions.** Compassionate euthanasia is a gift. It is not acceptable to let a terminally ill, suffering animal languish in a cage until it dies naturally when compassionate euthanasia can ease that endless pain. It is not acceptable to interminably house a known dangerous animal who cannot be safely placed in the community until that animal goes crazy in a cage. Each euthanasia decision is difficult, and every decision must consider the welfare of the individual animal.
6. **Enhance the human-animal bond through safe placements and post adoption support.** Integrating a living being into a new home can be difficult. As adoption agencies, Socially Conscious Shelters have a responsibility to support the new family. This can mean post-adoption behavior advice, classes for new pet caregivers, addressing

shelter related medical needs and being willing to accept the animal back if the pet and the family are not a good fit. It also means not placing animals into homes that disrupt the human-animal bond by injuring children, other pets and other people. There are many behavior issues that can be addressed through behavior modification and positive experiences. There are other behaviors that are dangerous and that cannot be mitigated.

7. **Consider the health, wellness and safety of animals for each community when transferring animals.** Moving dogs and cats from communities that do not have homes available for them to communities where people are actively seeking pets saves lives. However, bringing pets into a community is a responsibility. It is a responsibility to the animals already living in that community to not bring in infectious diseases. It is a responsibility to humans and animals living within the community to bring in animals that will live with them in harmony. And there is a responsibility to the community from which animals are being moved to address that community's animal welfare struggles through education and spay and neuter programs.

8. **Foster a culture of transparency, ethical decision making, mutual respect, continual learning and collaboration.** Socially Conscious Shelters are committed to full transparency. This can include reporting accurate statistics, sharing policies, and fully and quickly admitting when mistakes are made. Integrity must be the foundation of all decisions. Every shelter can learn something from every other shelter—it is important to be curious and to share innovative solutions to common problems. Only by working together can we ensure the best outcomes for all animals.

1. Edited from <https://www.ddfl.org/news/what-is-socially-conscious-sheltering>