



Action Volunteers for Animals

ADOPTING A KITTEN

Congratulations on adopting a kitten! The information provided here is designed to help you prepare your home and your life for your new feline companion.

A kitten is not just a miniature cat; its development into an adult cat is a remarkable process. It has been proven that the first year of a kitten's life is extremely important to its physical development. Just as important though is the feline-human bonding phase that must occur during a kitten's first few weeks after birth. This sets the stage for its specific personality characteristics as well as the special relationship that you and the kitten will have over time together.

Your Kitten's Basic Needs

Safe Room (Sanctuary Room)

Your kitten will need its own space, which is usually a spare bedroom, a den, an extra bathroom, a separate space with a door, where you can put the kitten and keep it safe and comfortable. This is necessary in order to provide a place of security for the kitten in which to adjust after having left the comfort of its littermates.

A safe room allows the kitten to adapt to its new surroundings which include you, your family members, your pets and the new smells. It is highly recommended that you keep your kitten isolated from any family pets and in this safe room for a week to ten days minimum. The younger your kitten is, the longer you will need to keep it housed separately. Of course family and friends can visit the safe room to interact with the kitten.



Set this room up with at least one litter box, a comfy, cozy place to sleep, a water dish and food dishes. You will need to kitten-proof this room.

Once you begin to introduce the kitten to the rest of the house, keep the safe room available for the kitten to retreat to when it feels frightened or threatened or just wants to have a cat nap.

Food:

- Your kitten will need both wet (canned) and dry **kitten** food for basically its first year.
- Use a good quality medium-priced **kitten** food that you purchase at your veterinarian's clinic or at a reputable pet store.
- *Do not shop for kitten/cat food at your grocery store* as there is a limited selection with limited nutrition.
- Depending on the age of your kitten, it may not be used to eating from a dish so you will have to show it.
- Do not just put down a dish of cold food and walk away, stay with the kitten and keep putting the dish under its nose.
- You may have to warm the food and put a little on your finger or tongue depressor up near the kitten's mouth to encourage it to eat.
- The smell of the food is what encourages a kitten to eat.
- Monitor your kitten's eating habits daily to ensure that it is gaining enough weight.
- Always provide fresh water daily.

The Litter Box:

- Keep the litter box in a quiet, low traffic area, away from doors and make sure that it is easily accessible to the kitten.
- Use an *uncovered* litter box to start with and one that the kitten can step into effortlessly.
- Two litter boxes are better than one; *the rule for litter boxes is one more box than the number of cats you have.*
- **'Yesterday's News'** litter is better for kittens as it has less dust content.
- Do not use clumping litter for young kittens as it can stick to their fur and they will ingest it. Wait until four months of age before introducing the clumping type to your kitten.
- Never use scented litter.
- Use only enough litter to cover the bottom of the box, a kitten does not need to be knee deep in litter; it has to be able to scratch through to the bottom.
- Scoop the litter box after every use as much as possible and add a little fresh litter each time.
- Monitor for any signs of diarrhea, constipation, straining to urinate or excessive urination and if you are concerned, check with your vet immediately.
- Clean the litter box every week for the first while and then every couple of weeks, replacing all the litter.

More Basic Items:

- Plastic carrier
- Nail clippers
- Soft bristled brush
- Adult sized litter box and scoop
- Unscented and non clumping litter to start with
- Metal food dishes, not plastic
- Heavier water dish that will not tip over easily
- Find a veterinarian as soon as possible who is close to home that is open seven days a week



Kitten Proofing Your Home:

a. Cleaning:

All surfaces in the safe room that the kitten can reach, should be wiped down with a diluted water/bleach solution of 10% bleach (½ cup bleach to a gallon of water) *Scrubbing Bubbles can be used. Do not use Lysol, Pine Sol, 409, Spic and Span, or any cleaner ending with 'ol'*; these ones are highly toxic to both kittens and cats.

b. Safety Check of the Safe Room /Household:

- Remove all things that a kitten might break or harmful substances it might ingest.
- Keep all craft supplies such as needles, thread and balls of yarn in a closed container as these can be fatal to a kitten if swallowed.
- Secure window blinds so the kitten cannot get tangled up in the cord and strangle.
- All windows must have screens on them that are in good repair.
- Clear the floor of rubber bands, ribbon and string as these are all hazardous when ingested by a kitten.
- Keep cupboard doors and dresser drawers securely closed.
- Cover electrical cords with covers, sold for that purpose, or anything that will keep the kitten from chewing on the cords.
- Make sure that each heating and air vent is enclosed with a secure metal cover.
- Remove any living plants from the safe room/household.
- Please ensure that all the toilet lids in your home are down at all times as a kitten can drown in a toilet bowl very easily.
- If your floors are carpeted, you may wish to put a vinyl covering over the area in the safe room. *See the dollar type stores for tarps which work well.*
- Always check your refrigerator and dryer to ensure that a kitten has not jumped inside.
- Keep balcony doors closed and the balcony off limits to your kitten at all times.

The real secret to kitten proofing your home is to look at each room through the eyes of a kitten. Find everything that looks like it might make a great toy, and if it is something harmful, remove it.

Feline Behaviour

Appropriate Play Time:

Playtime should be a vital part of your kitten's daily activities. It gives you both a chance for some bonding and fun time while allowing your kitten an opportunity to practise its survival skills. Try to provide at least two play sessions every day as this helps it with the bonding process and builds trust. You must set the house rules for your kitten's behaviour and everyone who interacts with it is required to adhere to and reinforce those rules.

- Kittens generally need a lot of daily playtime and often show aggressive behaviour during play: batting, pouncing, even biting make-believe prey (toys). They can use exploratory, investigative and predatory behaviour as well.
- Play will provide your kitten with an opportunity to practise skills that it would normally need for survival.
- Always try to redirect any aggressive behaviour onto toys by dragging, dangling or throwing a toy.
- Some good kitten toys are: anything on a stick or string, furry toy mice, rubber or plastic balls, any small toy that makes a noise like prey.
- Give your kitten a larger, soft, stuffed toy to wrestle with as this is one way kittens play.

- Do not leave out string, shoelaces, any wand toys, feather toys, toys with pieces that can be chewed or swallowed.
- Discourage your kitten from playing with your hands or feet, always redirect to a toy.
- If after all your attempts to discourage inappropriate play, you feel that your kitten is playing too roughly, simply stop the play and leave the room.
- Do not pick up your kitten and take it to a 'time out' spot as you will be reinforcing the behaviour you want to change because it will not get the message.
- *You must be the one to leave*; close the door long enough to make your point, be consistent with this course of action and your kitten should get your point.
- During rough play, never slap, tap, flick or hit as your kitten will become afraid of your hands.
- **Physical punishment never works; it just teaches your kitten to fear you.**

Handling and Grooming:

- Sit down at floor level and approach your kitten from behind, rather than hand outstretched at its face.
- Start by wrapping the kitten up in a soft towel or cat blanket before picking it up if it appears hesitant as this can have a calming effect.
- With the body covered except for the head, gently hold the kitten to your chest, pet the chin, ears and top of the head area.
- Talk to it softly, go slowly, be gentle and observe the signs your kitten gives and encourage affection.
- Continue to do this but stop when you sense that it has had enough.
- Some kittens may be sensitive in certain areas such as the back, abdomen and paws.
- Tail swishing, pupils dilating, ears flattening are signals that your kitten has become over stimulated. **STOP what you are doing**, the kitten has had enough for now.
- Come back every 20 minutes or so and repeat the process for a little longer each time as often as possible.
- Before long you will not need to wrap the kitten and you should hear it purr.
- Give your kitten time to settle in and get to know you before attempting to brush it.
- Your kitten needs to be brushed but it should be enjoyable, so start with a very soft-bristled brush like a baby's brush. Kittens are not familiar with brushing, so start slowly, take your time, and do not give up; this is the time to inspect your kitten's body all over.

Scratching:

This is a very natural activity for a kitten and an essential exercise to maintain healthy muscles. Its muscles can weaken due to an inability to stretch if it does not have a suitable place to scratch. A kitten uses its claws: to defend, to climb, to exercise, to mark its territory and for an emotional release if it is stressed or excited. Scratching just feels good.

- Trim its nails
- Provide a scratching post; a tall, sturdy, vertical one is best; train your kitten to use it
- A horizontal post will work if your kitten likes to scratch carpet
- Put the post beside any piece of furniture that your kitten seems to like to scratch
- Cover any area or piece of furniture that your kitten has chosen to scratch; double-sided tape will help

Inappropriate Elimination or House Soiling:

Here are some reasons that a kitten may choose not to use the litter box.

- *Wrong location*; make sure that the box is in a quiet, low traffic area, away from its food.
- *A dirty box*; kittens want the box to be clean so try to scoop after every use.
- *Too much litter in the box*; your kitten needs to be able to scratch the bottom without going through layers of litter.
- *Changing the type of litter*; take your time changing from one type of litter to another by adding some of the new to the old; this could take a week or two or even longer.
- *Anxiety or stress*; the kitten is now in yet another strange place with unfamiliar people.
- *Aversion*; the lingering scent from the use of deodorizers, cleaners, scented litter can be off putting.

- *Territorial behaviour*; if reusing a litter box, make sure that it has been thoroughly cleaned with a water/bleach solution.
- *Medical issues*; house soiling can indicate a number of medical issues; so watch and listen. If you hear the kitten crying while in the box and there is only a small amount of urine, then an immediate visit to the vet is necessary.

Socialization:

- **New People**
Invite friends and family to meet your kitten while you control the interaction, keeping the kitten safe. Use the interactive toys, and insist that all shoes are off and everyone is down at floor level. Keep in mind that most people have no idea how to handle a kitten.
- **New Environments**
If your kitten seems to have adjusted well to the 'safe room', and there are other rooms that you can kitten proof, then allow your kitten to explore some of these new spaces. Provide toys and interactive play but keep the session brief.
- **New Noises**
It is always helpful to expose your kitten to as many of the normal household noises as possible. Start with radio/TV with the volume on low. Work up to running the electric broom or vacuum briefly near the safe room but behind the closed door.

Children and Kittens:

- You must teach your children the proper way to behave around the kitten and what they can and cannot do.
- Above all, shoes off, down at floor level and using quiet voices only.
- Your child should by no means approach a kitten that is eating, sleeping or using a litter box.
- Never allow your child to pick up, squeeze, yank, pull, hit or throw objects at a kitten.
- Always supervise your children and do not allow them to chase or corner the kitten.
- Kittens that feel threatened will resort to aggression.

Reasons to Keep Your Kitten Indoors:

You may think that letting your kitten outdoors is the natural thing to do; however, kittens like children, depend on us to recognize the dangers and protect them from harm. The list below contains just a few of the lethal risks the outdoors poses to your kitten:

- Traffic – Being hit by a vehicle can leave your kitten very seriously injured but most likely dead.
- Poison – Pets can easily come into contact with poisonous substances put out by your neighbours, even though it is illegal to do so; antifreeze dripping from a car has a sweet taste but is lethal.
- Cruelty – Regrettably there are a lot of people in this world who have no qualms about intentionally being cruel to animals.
- Trauma – Allowing your kitten outside exposes it to all sorts of injuries from fighting with other cats, dogs and wild animals; bite wounds which tend to abscess and prove fatal.
- Disease – Even a vaccinated pet can contact serious diseases such as: FIV, Feline Leukemia.



No kitten or cat, no neighbourhood, is immune to these dangers. Save yourself some hefty veterinarian bills and the heartache of losing a beloved pet.

Keep your kitten indoors!

Signs That Your Kitten May Be Sick:

- Appetite loss
- Dragging hind quarters on floor
- Severe constipation, severe diarrhea, dehydration
- Increase drinking
- Straining to urinate
- Enlarged abdomen
- Red or swollen gums
- Excessive drooling
- Weight loss despite good appetite
- Upper respiratory infection
- Shortness of breath
- Lumps
- Low energy/Hiding



Keep in mind that if you have concerns about your kitten's health, do not hesitate, always check with your veterinarian. Make sure that you book an appointment for your pet to have a yearly check up.

Patience and a Sense of Humour:

Adopting a kitten and guiding it as it grows into the adult cat you want can be a very challenging, yet rewarding experience. Your kitten looks to you for direction; no doubt you both will make mistakes, so this is where you will need that sense of humour. Remember to enjoy this time with your kitten as it will be over all too soon. Here is one more important piece of advice...



"The more love you give, the more love you get back."

-By Cheryl C. - 2015

