



FOSTERING: Kitten Guide

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For any topic covered here or for questions about something not listed, please contact the Foster Coordinator at (707) 576-7999 x 218.

Tame vs Un-tame

If your kittens are tame, you may set them up in a suitable room where they can be confined, safe, warm, and away from your own pets. If they are under socialized, (hissing, spitting, never been touched before), you will need to house them, at least at first, in a cage. Forgiven Felines uses rabbit cages.

Cage/Room Set Up

Once you have found an appropriate place for the cage, cover the entire bottom with sheets, blankets, or towels. This will keep kitten feet off the wire grating. If you have a single cage, place a bedding area in one of the rear corners, the litter box in the other corner with food and water toward the front. Make the set-up easy for you to clean and reach.

Add safe toys (ones that cannot be chewed and swallowed by kittens) and you're set.

If your kitties are tame, find a small, cozy spot to set up bedding, litter box, food and water bowls. Remember that the only appropriate place to foster small kittens is in a place where they can be safely confined – a laundry room, small bathroom, even an extra shower or bathtub are ideal. Remember they can be moved to a larger room if available in a few weeks. To ensure that your room is "kitten proof", please refer to the **Kitten Hazards** information.

Water and Food

Clean water must always be available. Never feed a young kitten cow's milk. This could cause diarrhea or constipation.

Forgiven Felines free feeds Purina Kitten Chow to all kittens. Offer ¼ can wet food per kitten twice daily. Pate is recommended. Poultry flavors are best for kittens. (fish & red meat are generally too rich)

Observe kittens when they are eating to be sure each kitten gets enough food. Food and water bowls should be cleaned daily.



Litter

Use regular, clay litter, NOT clumping litter. Clumping litter is hazardous to kittens as it will cause intestinal blockages if swallowed and can get in their eyes and nose.

For small kittens, a regular litter box is too tall. Instead, use a flat container with small lip around edge.

It is very important to clean the litter box daily or more often if required. Cats and kittens are reluctant to use dirty litter boxes.

Bedding

Place clean, warm bedding inside something that will provide a cozy nest. Use a box or container with low sides so kittens can easily crawl in and out. Towels and small blankets work well for bedding. Change bedding often to keep the environment clean. Be sure to remove wet and/or soiled bedding promptly.

General Care

Be observant. Are all kittens eating? Do they appear healthy (eyes and nose clear, alert, etc)? Are they using the litter box? Do the stools look normal? Watch carefully for any changes as kittens often do not "act sick" until they are extremely ill.

Socialization

When the kittens arrive, give them a day to calm down and adjust to their new surroundings. During this time, cover the cage completely with a sheet or blanket to help them feel extra secure. When they are calm, you must pick them up.

It is important to be cautious with kittens, because out of fear they can inflict some painful bites and scratches. If a kitten bites you, it is out of fear, not malice. Cat bites can be serious. If you are bitten, clean and disinfect the bite area immediately. A sensible, careful approach is needed at all times for successful socialization of a wild kitten, we suggest the following:

- Confine in cage
- Approach often and with food
- Wrap and hold in a towel
- Play radio/TV
- Have both female & male friends visit
- Speak softly, move slowly
- Be patient
- Try to be with the kittens at least an hour in the am and hour in pm

If you have more than one kitten from a litter, it is sometimes necessary to separate them. This is often difficult to do because our natural tendency is to want to keep them together. However, sibling kittens will bond with one another and what we want them to do is bond with a human. It will take a great deal of time and effort to socialize a wild kitten if it is kept with others. There is the possibility that a wild kitten cannot be socialized if it is not separated from other kittens.

Remember that the separation is temporary, and kittens can and should be reunited with their own kind once they are socialized.



To begin kitten socialization, take the kitten out in a secure area only. Make sure all doors and windows are shut. To pick up an un-tame or unsocialized kitten, wrap your hand in a thick towel and “scruff” the kitten (hold the loose flesh on back of neck). While holding the scruff with one hand, wrap the towel around the kitten with the other hand. A secure grip on the scruff is essential.

Wrapping a frightened kitten in a towel while you pet it helps it to feel secure while getting used to being held and touched. Pet the kitten on the head with your hand coming at it from behind. Many kittens will flinch at a hand coming toward their face.

Hold them, pet them, talk to them, play with them, love them. The more socialization they receive from you the better companions they will make. Never use your hands as play toys and discourage kittens from biting and scratching. If they become rough, stop playing immediately and ignore them for a few minutes. If they are playing inappropriately, redirect their play to toys. Never hit or spank a kitten. This just teaches them to fear human hands. Always supervise closely when kittens are handled by children.

Some kittens will socialize very quickly. Others will take much more time and patience on your part. However, most kittens can be socialized and are good candidates for adoption.

Play with your kittens. Use kitty teasers and dangle toys. Also, keep toys in the cage so kittens will be able to play when you are busy. During socialization sessions, offer small bits of canned food from your hand. Kittens will begin to associate pleasant treats with your hand and become less fearful.

You will know your kittens feel safe, secure, and trust you when they come to the front of the cage when you enter the room (instead of hiding in the corner). Do not allow your kitten to run in a large room unless it exhibits this type of trust.

Kittens need to be handled frequently. In addition to socialization times, try to reach in and pet the kittens every time you walk by the cage. This takes just a few minutes and can have a dramatic impact on how fast the kittens tame.

Give your kittens as much attention as possible. Kittens who are caged too long or not handled regularly can develop psychological problems. Severe loneliness can develop if you do not have consistent quality time with your fosters. However, with love, affection, and a keen eye, you should be able to avoid this problem.

Symptoms of Illness

We hope your foster kittens do not become sick, but if they do, immediately consult a veterinarian.

Symptoms of a sick kitten include:

- Diarrhea (dehydration from diarrhea can kill kittens)
- Refusing to eat for more than 24 hours
- Continuous vomiting
- Bleeding of any kind (nose, urine, stool, etc.)
- Sneezing
- Lethargy/listlessness
- Changes in eating or drinking behavior
- Difficulty breathing
- Rectal temperature below 99.5 or above 102
- Eye or nasal discharge
- Hairless or crusty patches of skin that normally have hair (this could be an indication of ringworm)

Fleas

Fleas are tiny insects that love to feed on kittens. Although each flea only consumes a small drop of blood, fleas commonly attack in large numbers. An infestation can literally drain blood from a kitten's body producing anemia and death.

It is essential to remove fleas from kittens and bedding. Change bedding frequently and flea comb kittens daily.

KITTEN HAZARDS

Being aware of the following hazards could save your kittens' lives. Be sure to "kitten proof" any room or portion of the home that the kittens will have access to.

- Heating Pads – If you are using a heating pad, keep it on the lowest setting and leave a space where the kittens can crawl off the heating pad if they become too warm.
- Personal pets- Never allow a cat, dog or puppy alone with kittens unsupervised. Always keep a leash on a dog when meeting a kitten for the first time. Monitor closely for aggression.
- Plastic Bags – Fun to play in, but a kitten or cat can suffocate if it gets stuck.
- Clumping Litter – Kittens can get this in their eyes, mouth, up their nose or ingest it causing serious damage. Clay litter should be used until the kitten is 4 or 5 months old.
- Poisons & Medications (Pills) – Keep out of reach.
- Washer, Dryer, Freezer, Refrigerator, Ice Chest, Cooler – Look before closing. Count noses often to be sure nobody is missing. Kittens and cats love to hide in cozy places.
- Narrow spaces, behind appliances – Seal up nooks and crannies where kittens may enter and become trapped.
- Sliding glass doors – Close cautiously as heavy glass doors can fatally injure cats.
- Bathtubs – If full, kittens can drown. If empty, they can't crawl out.
- Open Toilet Seats – Keep seats down as kittens will drown if they fall in and can't get out.
- Choking Dangers – Marbles, rubber bands, beads, small items that kittens might put in their mouth.
- Plants – Many plants are deadly if eaten by cats. Keep them out of reach.
- Drapery Strings – Keep strings up and out of reach. Kittens can become tangled and choke
- String, Thread, Tinsel, Easter Grass, Fringe – Any string like substance can be swallowed and cause obstruction in cats and kittens. If any of these are swallowed, do not attempt to pull them out unless they come out easily. Take the cat to vet immediately.