

Kitten Fostering Guide

As a foster parent, you will be responsible for feeding, cleaning, socializing, cuddling and your kittens. In some cases, you may need to bottle feed, give medications or take the kittens to the veterinarian.

Your Kittens should start out in a confined area.

A 'kitten-proofed' bathroom or extra bedroom is perfect, but a large cage set up in the corner of your bedroom or den can also work just fine. Do not keep them in small cages or carriers. Kittens need room to stretch their legs and they need ventilation and light which carriers don't provide. Be sure room temperatures are mild, not too hot or too cold. Kittens are sensitive to temperature. It can work nicely to put a large cage in a room where you spend time so the kittens can be around you even when you are doing other things - but make sure it's not too noisy an environment. Provide soft cozy beds and blankets and be sure to provide a little hiding place like an upside down box with a door cut in the side. Take the kittens out and let them exercise and explore – but only in areas that are well 'kitten proofed' (details below). When kittens become more confident you can let them roam free in a safe kitten-proofed room.



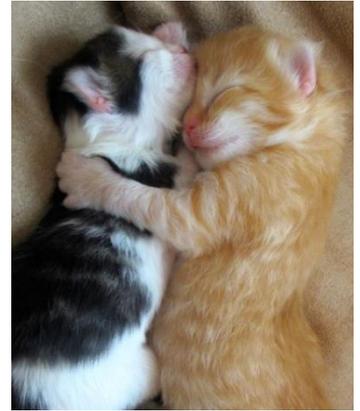
Spend as much time with the kittens as possible; especially single kittens without siblings or buddies. **Kittens can become very lonely and depressed and even sick if they are isolated.** Try to put at least two kittens together. You are shaping their futures by giving them love and security at this vulnerable and impressionable time in their little lives. Spend as much time with them as possible. They absolutely should not be alone for long periods or not only will they suffer but their development will be adversely affected. Depending on how old the kittens are, you'll usually be caring for your foster kittens for approximately one to eight weeks or until they are adopted. Finally, unless you adopt them, you must be prepared to let your foster kittens go. It can be sad to say goodbye, but remember, you have given them a great start on life. Thanks to you, they will have a loving, permanent home with some very lucky adopters.

Kitten Timeline:

Newborn (or neonatal): Eyes are closed, ears are flat to the head, fur is thin and skin looks pink. **Ten days old:** Eyes begin to open. **Three weeks old:** Ears stand up, teeth are visible, and kittens begin walking – wobbly! **Four to five weeks old:** Kittens begin eating regular cat food and using the litterbox. They also begin to pounce and leap. **Eight weeks old:** Healthy kittens will weigh approximately two pounds and are old enough for adoption.

Fostering Options

A mom cat with kittens. This is actually one of the easiest fostering situations since mom does most of the work. You'll need a room or large cage along with a nesting area-part of the cage, Mom will need a litterbox. The mother cat will feed, clean, and socialize the kittens. You will feed mom, clean her litterbox and bedding, handle the kittens, and monitor everyone's health.



Bottle feeders (or bottle babies). These are kittens under four weeks old who need to be bottle fed every 2-4 hours depending on how old they are. Since these kittens don't have a mom, you will also have to help them go to the bathroom, keep them clean, wean them, and train them to use a litterbox. You'll need a warm, safe area in which to confine bottle babies, preferably a cage or extra-large well ventilated carrier. Some foster parents even convert an extra bathtub into a kitten area. Because warmth is so important, kittens should have access to a towel-covered heating pad, set on low. They must have enough space to be able to crawl off the heating pad if it gets too warm. But you if you will be fostering bottle babies you **MUST** read up and learn all about caring for them because they are very fragile and there are many details you must learn to avoid tragedy!

Self-feeding kittens. Kittens 5 to 8 weeks old can already eat on their own and use the litterbox, but need TLC until they are old enough to be adopted. You'll feed them, clean them, cuddle them, play with them, monitor their health, and clean their litterbox. It is best to keep them in a confined area such as a small, kitten-proofed room, or a very large cage.

Feral kittens. These are kittens, usually 5 to 8 weeks old, who have grown up with little or no human contact. In addition to the care described above, they also need more intensive socialization to help them become comfortable around people. That means lots of patience, lots of cuddles and lots of love. Your reward will be to watch them blossom and become wonderful loving pets. You should spend a minimum of 2 hours per day with them – divided up into at least 3 sessions or more.

IMPORTANT: If you are fostering a single kitten, provide a stuffed animal or something fuzzy for the kitten to cuddle and spend lots of time with the kitten. Single kittens can suffer terribly from isolation so play and cuddle with the kitten constantly!



The Basics:

You will want to have a separate room for the kittens.

You will need a quiet, small place away from any other pets that you can kitten proof. Kitten proofing means getting all the things that could be dangerous to small kittens out of the room. Dangerous items include: wires, electric plugs, anything small that a kitten could swallow and choke on (hair ties, clips, toys, etc), any plants that could be nibbled on, computers, or other expensive easily damaged equipment, etc. If the room is cluttered, it may be a good idea to move out desks, chairs, shelves, bookshelves etc. Move out anything that you care about or could be dangerous for the kittens. Consider moving out beds or other furniture that makes hiding easy



for kittens, as it is not fun to spend your time trying to get the kitten out from under them. To kitten-proof a room, remove anything that might fall on a kitten - even a book can cause serious injury. Remember that kittens can climb into tiny holes and crevices and get stuck. Bathrooms seem to be especially easy to kitten-proof, and they are easy to clean. But don't isolate the kittens or leave them alone for too long. Also make sure there is nothing the kittens can climb into or behind. They will get into holes in the walls or holes you didn't even know where at the bottom of a cupboard, they will climb into drawers from behind dressers, under beds, into dryers, into pipes, behind bookcases, under the sink, etc. Kittens can get into the tiniest spaces and jump higher than you imagine, so kitten proof carefully! They will also put anything in their mouths so remove anything small they could swallow. Paper clips, rubber bands, ribbons and strings can be very dangerous.

Furnish the room with kitten friendly supplies. You will probably want to have some sort of cage, box, or den for the kittens to sleep in, and as a general safe area for the kittens to go to relax – if with a mom, there should be a place where the mother can nurse them. It should have a top and feel enclosed. Layer it with towels, blankets, and other soft stuff.

Near this, get food and water bowls/trays (if the kittens are super young, they won't need it yet.) The best are trays - long and shallow, good for a lot of kittens eating in at once. Don't use bowls that are too deep, as the kittens will have a hard time accessing food and water. If the kittens are needing to be bottle fed, get bottles and milk formula or order it at your local pet store or online.

You will definitely want to get training pads if the kittens are not litterbox trained. You can spread them out all over the floor of the cage or if in an open room, especially over the bed. You will of course also need a small litter box. The litter box will need to be scooped at least three times a day and the litter changed at least twice a week. Its important to keep the litter box

clean or the kittens may not want to use it. Regular litter boxes are too big for young kittens. You can start out with small shoebox lids or Kleenex box bottoms cut down to be only a couple of inches high. You can also purchase kitten sized litter boxes. As the kittens grow, so should the litterbox.

Toys are a must! You may want to get a couple of soft toys, maybe some balls and feather chasers. If you have the budget, cat trees provide kittens over 5 weeks with endless fun and are a great place to sleep as well. Try to have something for kittens to climb on and something for kittens to hide in. They need a safe soft hiding place and a fun climbing place. Improvise. You can build great kitten houses, bed and trees with cardboard boxes and duct tape. Try duct taping old towel pieces on top of boxes surfaces so the kittens can grip the surface better. You can make little houses out of boxes by turning upside down and cutting doors, and you can even put boxes of different heights next to one another and make fun cardboard towel covered ramps.

If the kittens are with a mom and still nursing, let her take care of them. She will feed them and clean them herself, so you don't need to do that. But keep a close eye on it, and make sure each kitten is getting plenty of milk and attention. If there is a runt in the litter, make sure you give that kitten a little extra time with the mother cat alone, without the other kittens to compete for food. Make sure the mother cat is eating plenty of food. Either feed her dry kitten food or protein rich wet food, as she needs the protein to produce milk. If the kittens are not getting enough nourishment from mom you should supplement by also bottle feeding them.

If the kittens are orphans and still bottle feeding, make sure you feed them every two to four hours – depending on their age. This includes feeding the middle of the night. Feed the kitten until it is full. Before feeding, warm the formula to 99–101 °F (37–38 °C). After each feeding, wet a cotton ball with warm water and gently massage the kittens rectum until it defecates (this replicates the mother's tongue). Don't let bottle babies nurse on their siblings - this can cause serious injury. Read up on all the details about bottle feeding because there are special methods used to be sure not to get fluid in kittens lungs and kittens must be gently burped, etc. **Do your homework** before bottle-feeding because tiny kittens are very fragile and there are many details you will need to know. Some foster parents bring very young bottle babies to work with them. Kittens sleep much of the time and can stay in a small carrier under your desk. Very young bottle-feeder age kittens should be kept in a large carrier or something in which they can't climb too high. In a large high cage they may try to climb and fall.

The kittens will eat solid food when they are about 5 or 6 weeks old.

You may start with feeding them wet kitten food, and supplement that with dry food, but feed a lot of wet food for healthy hydration. Feed them at least three times a day and let them eat as much as they want. Also leave food out for them. Never limit the amount of food. They are growing and should be able to eat all they want. There should always be fresh clean water available. Monitor how much they eat to be sure they are eating enough. Use low



dishes so they can reach the food and water.

Health and Safety Basics



Do NOT wear shoes around the kittens, and be especially careful when walking around. They move quickly and it's all too easy to step on them.

Very Young Kittens should be alert and warm to the touch. Chilling is a risk mainly during the first four weeks of life. If the kittens are cold and listless, they must be warmed up immediately. Do not attempt to feed chilled kittens. Place the kittens in a box or pet carrier with a heating pad (placed in a pillowcase then wrapped in a towel) set on low inside the box. Be sure the heating pad covers only half of the bottom of the box--the kittens must be able to move off the heating pad if it gets too warm.

- **If you notice fleas, you should flea comb the kitten ASAP!** Do not use insecticides or any other flea products until kittens are approx. 8 weeks and healthy. Check with your vet first. Chemicals can be deadly for young kittens. Kittens can be carefully bathed with warm water and a very gentle soap. Do not wet the head. Dry the kitten immediately with a towel, then with a blow dryer set on very low/warm not hot, not cold.
- **Diarrhea and upper respiratory infection: Can be serious!** Watery eyes, stuffy nose, sneezing - similar to a human cold - or diarrhea or vomiting should be immediately treated by a veterinarian. **A kitten can die within 24 hours from vomiting and/or Diarrhea.**
- **Keeping the kittens clean helps to maintain their health.** Wash bedding and food and water dishes daily. After they eat or use the litterbox, clean dirty kittens with warm, damp towels and dry them well. Wash your hands before and after feeding and handling kittens. Strain and clean litterboxes regularly.
- **Never give cow's milk to kittens.** Since they cannot digest it properly, it can make them sick. Only give formula made for kittens.
- **Keep foster animals separate from your own pets.** IMPORTANT: Always wash your hands and wipe feet if stepping in messy areas before and after coming in contact with the kittens, to protect the kittens, you, and your pets from possible disease - until you are sure the kittens show no signs of illness or diarrhea and have been 'snap/combo-tested'. Littermates can be kept together from the start.
- **Kittens under 8 weeks old should have non-clumping litter,** because they taste everything and even a small amount of litter can clog up their intestines and create a life-threatening blockage.

If You Let the Kitten Run Loose in any Room/s.... You Must Kitten-Proof and Beware of Hazards!

Your kitten/s will most likely view everything in the house as a potential toy. She'll also have a strong desire to be vertical so your curtains and bookshelves are potential jungle gyms. Kittens often get themselves into trouble by squeezing into the most unlikely places so take the time to go room by room to kitten-proof. There are things in almost every room that you wouldn't think could be harmful so it's important to look at each room from a kitten's point of view. For example **a recliner can be deadly to kittens!** It can be easy for the kitten to hide underneath and get up inside and get injured or even killed when you tilt a reclining chair or put it back in the upright position.



Clothing Washers and Dryers may seem out of reach but kittens easily find their way inside. One way is that a kitten can crawl into a pile of dirty laundry and hide there. You may unknowingly scoop up the laundry and toss it in the washer. Always put each piece of laundry into the washer separately. Also, check the washer and dryer before you turn them on and then again after you empty the laundry before you close the doors again. Tragically, many kittens and even adult cats are killed in washers and dryers.



Another danger due to a misconception many new cat parents have, has to do with a **simple ball of yarn**. You may have seen lots of pictures of kittens and cats playing with balls of yarn and that might appear to be a convenient and fun toy for a curious kitty but it's actually potentially deadly. All cats have backward-facing barbs on their tongues that are used in the wild to rasp meat from the bones of prey. The barbs also trap dirt, hair and parasites as cats groom themselves. These barbs are what give your kitten's tongue that scratchy feeling when she licks you. Because of the way



the barbs face, anything that gets attached to the tongue must get swallowed. The cat can't spit out a piece of yarn or string. Swallowing these types of items can lead to choking and can also cause potentially deadly intestinal blockages. They can either get stuck or they can wrap around the intestines. Don't leave string, yarn, thread or rubber bands around where your kitten can get them. Also, if you see thread hanging from the back end of your kitten, don't pull because there may be a needle attached. Take your kitten to the vet immediately!

Kitten Safety Checklist!

Kittens are playful and curious so it's crucial that you go through any room the kitten will be in carefully to make sure you've kitten-proofed. Here are just some examples of what needs to be done:

- Secure window screens
- Keep all medicine away. Even aspirin or Tylenol can be deadly.
- Don't leave out string, ribbon, rubber bands, pins, tacks or any other small items that things that can be swallowed.
- Keep household cleansers put away in cabinets
- Use trash cans with lids or secure them in cabinets
- Cut handles off paper bags before offering as a toy
- Don't let your kitten play with plastic bags
- Look for holes in the walls around bathroom or kitchen pipes
- Cover small openings where a kitten could wedge herself and get stuck
- Keep kittens away from recliners as they can be crushed if they get underneath or up inside
- Look for hidden holes in or under cupboards where kittens can get into walls or under house
- Secure electrical cords so they don't dangle
- Coat any dangling electrical cords with a bitter anti-chew product
- Use museum or earthquake wax to secure breakable objects that can't be put away
- ALWAYS Check the washer and dryer before doing laundry
- Always double-check when closing closets and drawers
- Keep all household plants out of kitten's reach (most are poisonous to cats)
- Close all sewing and knitting baskets after use and double-check for any pins on the carpet
- Don't leave candles burning where a kitten could reach them
- Make sure fireplace has a secure screen
- Don't throw boxes out without first checking if the kitten is hiding there
- Do a "kitten check" before leaving the house in case she's locked in a closet or drawer
- Block the space behind the refrigerator so the kitten can't get wedged in there



The above list is just a sample of the types of kitten-proofing that may need to be done. You'll have to customize it based on your specific household. Kitten-proofing may seem like lots of work but remember that kittens are a lot like human babies; both need extra care love and care!

Two Kittens are Better than One!

Find out why it's Ideal for Kittens to be Adopted in Pairs!



Many people are under the false impression that cats are solitary and don't want feline companionship. The truth is that cats are social animals and they thrive when they are blessed with feline friendship, especially if they grow up in a pair! There is a lifelong magical sweetness in the love of two sibling kitties! Not only is it good for kitties to grow up together but it is bad for them to be alone. Isolating a kitten can delay the kitten's development emotionally, socially, and sometimes even physically. The companionship two kittens provide each other can help prevent future behavior problems from boredom or separation anxiety. Just like a human child, a kitten suffers if left all alone when you are out. Two kittens who have one another will play, groom and cuddle. Togetherness creates security and comfort for while you're gone. They will be just as happy to see you when you return, but they will not have suffered in your absence and they will ultimately develop into more well-adjusted and happier kitties!

If you already have an adult cat, it's still ideal to adopt a pair of kittens because a pair of kittens actually makes for better companionship for the adult. This is because kittens have boundless energy. They want to play and run constantly which can overwhelm and irritate an older cat, but if there are two kittens, they will focus more of their play energy on one another and the older cat can choose to join their play when he feels like it. This allows the older cat to more comfortably move into a healthy relationship with the new family members at his own pace.

A single kitten is likely to keep people awake at night with constant jumping, pouncing and other normal kitten behaviors. With a companion to play with at night, this behavior is minimized because they will have each other to play with until they too fall asleep.

Adopting a pair of kittens does not add much cost or work because the kittens will share the same space and most of the same supplies. Your effort to kitten-proof the house and set up for the pair will be the same as it would be for one - and you will get twice the love and twice the cuddles, while your kittens will get the lifelong joy of a best buddy, playmate and snuggle-mate! The bottom line is that when you adopt two kittens of the same approximate age, you are almost certainly assured of them sharing a happy loving bond that will create comfort and joy for the kittens for the rest of their lives and bring extra amounts of love and happiness into your home!

