

Socialization and Behaviour

Your goal as a foster parent is to prepare your foster kittens for forever homes. While a big part of that is helping the kittens to grow and be healthy, another component is helping them develop the good habits that will make them wonderful companions for their adopters.

Litter Box

- Use only unscented non-clumping litter with kittens. Clumping litter is okay for older kittens.
- Provide a litter box with low sides that makes it easy for the kittens to get in and out of
- Litter boxes should be kept as clean as possible and scooped at least twice per day
- Dump litter and wash the litter box with hot soapy water at least every 2-3 days. A clean box will encourage good litter box habits



Missing the Litter Box?

- If the kittens have diarrhea, please contact the animal care department. They may need additional deworming or medication
- Keep the kittens confined to a small territory. If kittens have too much space, they may not make it to the litter box in time to eliminate
- Add additional litter boxes. If the kittens are eliminating in particular spots, add litter boxes there.
- If urine and feces get outside the box, clean the area well with an enzyme cleaner such as Nature's Miracle
- Never yell or punish a kitten for missing the litter box.

Please contact the animal care department if you have tried all these options and the kittens are still not using the litter box.

Play time

Play time is a very important part of kitten development. It is crucial for young kittens to have other kittens to wrestle with in order to develop appropriate play skills and be properly socialized with other kittens. Kittens also need toys to play with so that they can get physical exercise and mental stimulation.

There are two types of toys that help with kitten development:

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- Solo toys – should be easy to clean and impossible for the kittens to consume. They must be safe enough to leave for the kittens to play with when unsupervised.
 - Interactive toys – include anything with a string or parts that encourage kittens to exercise and use their natural hunting instincts. Do not leave these types of toys for kittens to play with when they are alone.

Teaching Appropriate Play

- Take it slow – encourage play, but do not startle or frighten them
- Don't hang toys in the kittens' faces or hit them with it. Drag the toy away from them to encourage stalking and pouncing behaviour
- Always use toys and discourage kittens from biting your hands and feet
- Don't punish or scold kittens – the use of positive reinforcement builds a bond of trust between you and your foster kittens.
- If a kitten bites or scratches you during play, redirect their attention to an appropriate toy. Reward desirable behaviors and ignore unwanted behaviors.





Claw Sharpening

Encourage good habits by providing your foster kittens with a cardboard scratching surface. Encourage kittens to use it by dragging toys across or up if you are using a scratching post. Never make a kitten use it by dragging their paws along the surface. This can actually discourage scratching behaviour!

Grooming and Body Handling

It is important for young kittens to get handled frequently so they become accustomed to it, particularly with more sensitive areas like toes, paws, belly, chest and the mouth.

- Pick up and hold kittens several times each day, petting gently to encourage purring and affectionate behaviour
- Pet and hold their paws gently to help prepare them for name clipping – pair this with a treat to build a positive association
- Brush your kittens gently, especially medium or long haired kittens

New Environments

- If your kittens are comfortable in their safe room and you have the ability to kitten-proof other spaces in the home, you can expose them to those areas as long as the spaces can be disinfected afterward.
- Use treats and interactive play when allowing kittens to explore new spaces to create a positive association with these novel experiences.
- Keep the sessions brief and return the kittens to the safe room if they seem overwhelmed.
- Keeping kittens in a large dog crate or kitten playpen for a short period of time is another way to safely expose them to new situations.

New People

- Introducing your foster animals to new people will help them become well-adjusted adult cats.
- Monitor all interactions with new people, to ensure that they are positive and not scary experiences for the kittens.
- Have new people give gentle pets and treats to the kittens and interact with them using fun toys.
- If children are visiting, they must always be supervised until they are old enough to understand how to gently interact with a kitten.
- Hands should be washed before handling any kittens.

New Noises

- It is beneficial to expose kittens to a variety of normal household noises but, again, try to do it in a positive way.
- The key is to introduce different noises gradually. For example, start by keeping a radio on low volume and gradually increase the volume over a few days. Another example: Run the vacuum in another room at first, with your kittens at a safe distance. Then, over the course of a few days, move the vacuum noise closer to their room.
- If another person plays with the kittens while you make the noise, it may help alleviate any stress or fear that they may feel.
- You may also play audiobooks, bird noises, meditation music, etc. Do not play recorded sounds or music for longer than two hours at a time.



Working with Under Socialized Kittens



Some of the kittens in need of foster are under socialized. Many were born outdoors and have had minimal contact with humans. These kittens may show fearful behaviour such as hissing, swatting, spitting, scratching, biting or simply attempting to run away. Most kittens learn to trust people quickly, but some kittens can take longer than others. With lots of positive interactions in their early socialization period, under socialized kittens can grow up to be wonderful companions.

Interpreting Body Language

Fearful Body Language

- Ears back
- Moving or shrinking away
- Hissing
- Swatting
- Dilated pupils
- Spitting
- Stomping
- Hiding
- Tense or frozen body

Signs that Socialization Efforts are Working

- Follows toys with eyes
- Ears forward
- Willing to eat in front of you
- Smaller pupils
- Engages with toys
- Seems curious or willing to approach
- Relaxed or loose body language
- Purring
- Kneading
- Leans in for pets and scratches



When working with under socialized kittens, it is important to note the following:

- Observe the kitten's behaviour before approaching and take note of where the kitten is located and what the body language is communicating
- Approach slowly and quietly with a relaxed body language and avoid eye contact
- Notice negative reactions and back off as needed
- Keep your voice low and calm at all times
- Pique the kitten's curiosity with interactive toys and allow the kitten to make choices, including not to interact.
- Reward interactions with food
- Keep visits short and always end on a positive note
- Be patient and remember that setbacks happen. Success is incremental and any relaxation, curiosity, resilience, playfulness, or willingness to approach is excellent.

You can use this chart to help your under socialized kitten progress.

First Days	Days 3-7	Days 7+
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Select a small, quiet room so that your kitten can adjust gradually Set up safe hiding spots that are <input type="checkbox"/> easily accessible to you Close off or stuff any area into which a <input type="checkbox"/> kitten can wedge Set out plenty of solo toys: ping <input type="checkbox"/> pong balls, wine corks, etc. Sit quietly on the floor <input type="checkbox"/> Speak softly to the kittens <input type="checkbox"/> Handfeed wet or chicken flavoured human baby food <input type="checkbox"/> Use interactive toys to encourage kitten to approach you, but don't <input type="checkbox"/> force play Don't push interactions with the kittens for the first one to two <input type="checkbox"/> days Remember that any relaxation is important 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Continue to observe behaviour <input type="checkbox"/> Continue handfeeding wet and chicken baby food <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage kitten to approach you with food or toys <input type="checkbox"/> Practice picking up the kitten just so that the feet leave the ground and then place back down Over a few days, work up to <input type="checkbox"/> picking up the kitten and placing it in one of its safe spaces When relaxed enough, create a <input type="checkbox"/> "burrito" kitten by wrapping it in a towel, holding it close to your body, and petting in short increments Pet the kitten while it is eating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Continue to observe behaviour <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage kitten to approach you with food or toys <input type="checkbox"/> Remember that any relaxation or playfulness is progress Continue to <input type="checkbox"/> pair food with hands and, if kitten is relaxed, experiment pairing food with novel sounds Continue short petting sessions <input type="checkbox"/> Establish a routine of play time, <input type="checkbox"/> feeding time and handling time <input type="checkbox"/> Increase handling time gradually Work on touching the kittens' <input type="checkbox"/> paws and ears Introduce the kitten to new people <input type="checkbox"/> using toys and food Congratulate yourself on doing a good job! <input type="checkbox"/>