



Foster Kitten Socialization

Kittens who have been socialized are less likely to be fearful in unfamiliar situations or uncomfortable with changes in their environment. Kittenhood is the best time to teach them to enjoy various sights, sounds, people and other animals. Socialization takes time but the reward of exposing kittens to new things when they are young will help them grow to be more a more confident adult cat.

Playtime

Play is an important part of healthy kitten development. Providing your foster kitten(s) with ways to release that “kitten energy” daily through play and interactive play can help alleviate stress and prevent some behavior problems as they grow. Playtime is a great way to help your kitten fight off boredom, learn appropriate play with people and gives your foster kitten(s) an outlet for their instinctive prey-chasing behaviors.

Tips for Successful Kitten Playtime:

- Dedicate lots of time to playing with your kitten. **Shoot for 2 hours a day** – 15 to 20 min sessions are a good target
- Use interactive toys when playing with your kitten – feather toys on poles, teaser wands, charmers, laser pointers, etc.
- NOTE: if you choose to use a laser pointer, always end the play session with a toy the kitten can actually catch
- Try to mimic the movement of what a cat may prey on (mice, birds, lizards, flies etc.) when using interactive toys
- Let your kitten catch the toy occasionally, not all the time, during your play sessions – makes become better hunters
- Provide toys for your kitten to play with when alone – puzzle feeders, balls, tower track toys, plush toys, paper balls etc.
- Rotate toys on a regular basis to keep playtime fresh, new and exciting for your foster kitten(s)
- Get your kitten on a play time routine. Play – Eat – Sleep! Make one of these sessions close to when you go to bed

Things to remember:

- **Never** use your hands as a toy. Hands are for petting.
- **Never** encourage your foster kitten(s) to bite you.
- **Never** have play sessions with your foster kitten(s) places where you don't want them to play like on beds, counters, couches, tables, etc.
- **Never** yell at, hit or punish your foster kitten(s) for bad behaviors.
- **Always** reward your kitten's good play behavior through praising and treats.
- **Always** make play sessions with your kitten fun and exciting.
- **Always** make sure your home is “kitten proofed” to avoid the chance of ingesting harmful objects like yarn, ribbon, string, tinsel, rubber bands, hair ties, needles, dental floss, chemicals, insecticides, toxic plants, etc.

Handling

Holding and handling your foster kitten is a very important part of the socialization process. Kittens need to learn and be comfortable with being touched, picked up and held. Your foster kitten(s) may be full of energy and difficult to hold and handle when they are like this. It is best to first tire your foster kitten(s) through a really, great play session, then spend time holding and cuddling them. Also, be sure that your foster kitten(s) is comfortable with more than just you.



Key areas to focus on when petting your foster kitten(s):

- Base of the chin
- Base of the ears
- Cheeks behind the whiskers
- Base of the tail
- Along the spine
- Try introducing a brush into your sessions

Exposure

Creating a socialization to do list is a great way to keep you and your foster kitten(s) on track to making sure they get exposed to the things they will likely experience during their lifetime. Think about creating a socialization to do list. Here's an example:

New Environments

- All areas of the house
- Patio
- Car and Car Rides
- Veterinary office
- Cat Carrier

New People

- Strangers
- Children
- Frequent guests (friends and family)
- Overnight Guests

New Noises

- Vacuum cleaner
- Doorbell and Door Knocking
- Washer and Dryer
- Hair Dryer
- Radio and Television
- Children
- Thunderstorms
- Lawn Mower

New Animals

- Cat
- Dog
- Visitors Pets

It's important that each new experience your foster kitten(s) is exposed to is a positive one. Pairing new experiences with rewards creates confidence in your foster kitten(s). Rewards can be through a food treat, play, petting or even vocal praise. And remember to allow your foster kitten(s) to approach the new experience on his/her terms and at his/her own pace. If your foster kitten(s) displays signs of fear at any point, make the experience less intense — increase the distance between the kitten and the new object.

If you should need help, tips, or are experiencing unusual behavior issues with your foster kitten(s), please reach out to the Behavior Department. We're here for you.

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