

Kitten Socialization



Did you know that kittens learn and develop a big part of their adult personality by 16 weeks of age? It's true! If you want a happy cat that takes life in a joyous stride, there are ways you can help. The positive associations that young cats develop during this critical stage of brain development can last a lifetime. Here are some suggestions for helping your kitten grow into a confident adult. Note: Don't force things! Make sure these exposures are done in a way that's comfortable for the kitten.

Handle your kitten - literally!

Make a point to touch your kitten all over. Don't be forceful or push to the point of struggle, just touch and hold gently and reward his acceptance with a high-value treat and praise. You will eventually need to be able to trim toenails, clean ears, and brush teeth. If your kitten learns to enjoy these rituals when he's young, life will be better for you both.

Introduce your kitten to your friends

Let your kitten meet people of all shapes, sizes, and mannerisms to learn there's nothing to fear from people of all kinds. Introduce children, men, women, and people with hats, uniforms, or costumes. Don't forget the treats to make "scary" into fun! Ask everyone to move slowly and speak softly because kittens can be cautious by nature. If new people are nonthreatening, the kitten's curiosity will inspire him to get to know his new friends. You may also want to stop by the clinic for a "happy visit" so your kitten can meet his care team on a day he's not getting any shots!

Clothes and the cat carrier

If your kitten is ever going to need to wear a sweater or coat - or even a bandage - now is the time to teach him about them. Try putting your kitten in a baby onesie and let him get used to the feeling. Don't forget lots of treats! Importantly, you can also teach your new kitten about the cat carrier. Buy one that you like, but keep in mind it's helpful to have a door on the top as well as on the front. Store it where you both can see it and think of it as an everyday thing. Leave it in your kitten's favorite area with the door open. Consider hiding treats inside or even feed him inside the carrier to teach him it is a safe place.

Litterbox Tips:

The good news: your kitten is already hardwired to make litter training easy! Bigger is better when it comes to a litterbox. Your cat should have room to completely turn around inside, so be sure that your box accommodates your kitten's expected adult size. Pick one that is easy to clean - a clean box is the key to maintaining good litter habits. Most cats prefer unscented clumping litter, but you can try different kinds to see what you both like best. You will need one box per cat plus one extra so there's no conflict over box use. Don't forget to place your litter box in a safe, quiet place but not so far away that it is inconvenient for your kitten.

Make Noise!

Expose your kitten to loud noises and novel objects, like the vacuum cleaner or hair dryer. Show him that these things aren't harmful (start slowly and gradually make noises louder). Reward him when he's calm. Remove the noise if it's too scary and try again later with a quieter noise. Do your part to prevent noise phobias!