

New Kitten Handbook

Congratulations on your new kitten! Now let's give your kitten every opportunity for success in her new home. As tempting as it might be, do not give your kitten the run of the house. Your house is just too big and all that space will be stressful for her.

What is the first thing to prepare?

Confine your kitten to a small "safe" place like your bathroom or a small bedroom. A very shy kitten should be confined to the bathroom only, where you can easily reach her. The ideal safe haven is small, quiet, and easy to close off with a door. This new safe place allows your kitten to make a gradual transition to her new home. Visit her often to feed her, play with her and talk to her. Your kitten will need to stay here with the door closed until she is completely comfortable with you and her new home which could take days or weeks. When she is comfortable, running up to you to greet you at the door, you can gradually let her explore the rest of the house one room at a time (close off bedrooms and other bathrooms). Always let her retreat to her safe room whenever she feels the need.



What items should be included in the "safe" room?

- Food (kitten dry and wet)
- Treats (kitten approved)
- Water and food bowls (stainless steel or ceramic—no plastic!)
- Litterbox and litter (place litterbox as far away from food, water, bed as possible)
- Interactive toys (fleece wand, Cat Catcher wand)
- Play-alone toys (jingle balls, soft mice, plastic rings)
- Scratching post or horizontal cardboard scratcher
- Cat bed
- Cubby bed, hidey box, or cat carrier

How should I introduce my new kitten to the household?

Safe Room Set Up

1. Take your kitten to her safe room.
2. Open the carrier and let her decide whether she wants to come out to explore—she may come bounding out or it may take a few hours. If you have adopted a very shy kitten see the ***Shy Kittens*** handout.
3. Visit often for feeding, litterbox cleaning and playing but let your kitten decide the pace of interactions. Limit the number of visitors who visit at once, so she isn't overwhelmed.
4. Give her at least 24 hours to adjust to you and her new environment before deciding to move on to letting her explore more of your house.
5. When she is comfortable, running up to you to greet you at the door, eating and using the litter box, you can gradually let her explore the rest of the house one room at a time (close off bedrooms and

other bathrooms). Always let her retreat to her safe room whenever she needs too. Shy kittens may need to be confined for several weeks before they are ready for more space.

6. Until she is more mature, remember to confine her to the safe room whenever you can't supervise.

Multi-cat households

Slow introductions are especially important if there are other cats in your home—for both your kitten's safety and the acceptance of the kitten by your resident cat. Be aware of the size difference between your kitten and adult cats and supervise play at all times. Give your adult cat a break from the kitten if he gets tired and annoyed by the energy level of the kitten. For tips on introducing kittens/cats to each other--please see handout [Successful Cat to Cat introductions](#)



Your Kitten and Your Dog

Again, slow introductions are a must! Without proper and controlled introductions, your kitten could become injured. Please see the [Cats & Dogs – Living Happily Ever After](#) handout.

Bonding Time

- Food and treats
- Playtime
- Talking and petting
- Grooming

You are the “giver of all good things”! Begin by leaving dry food out for your kitten and giving wet food when you come into the safe room. Stay in the room while she eats the wet food. She will soon associate you with the yummy food.



Play with her! She is a youngster with loads of energy! If you don't keep her active, she will find things to do herself (like climb the curtains). Homemade toys using cardboard boxes, paper bags (handles removed) and treats hidden in toilet paper rolls work just as well as more expensive toys to keep your kitten busy. Other toys that kittens love include the Cat Dancer, Cat Catcher, fleece wands and Kickaroos. Always keep safety in mind, and choose safe and kitten-appropriate toys. Put wand toys away before leaving the room. An active kitten can get a wand toy wrapped her neck or other body part. Consider a second kitten to give your kitten a playmate and keep her entertained. Please see the [Two Kittens Are Better Than One!](#) handout. If your kitten is very mouthy when playing please see the [Raising Well Behaved Kittens](#) handout.

The best time for petting and grooming your kitten is when she is all tuckered out. She will enjoy grooming much more when she is not trying to chase down a jingle ball or bunny kick a Kickaroo toy.

Create a Routine

- Feed your kitten at the same times every day
- Play with her in the morning and the evening (when cats are most active)
- Talk to, pet and groom your kitten every day
- Reward your kitten for behaviors you like (treats)
- Clean the litterbox daily



Kitten Proofing Your Home: Manage common household hazards.

- Close windows and doors to the outside. Are your screens secure? Supervise children and teach them to be careful opening and closing doors when they leave the house.
- Keep all plastic bags in drawers and away from your kitten.
- Keep strings, dental floss, yarn, thread, tinsel, rubber bands, hair ties, electrical wires, cords, necklaces, and anything similar out of your kitten's reach.
- Plants—many plants (especially bulb plants, lilies, onion and garlic) are poisonous to cats.
- Poisons and chemical rub-off—human medication (especially aspirin, acetaminophen and NSAIDS) are toxic to cats. Other medications, insecticides, rodenticides, paints, chemicals and chocolate can all poison your kitten. Household cleaners that are ammonia or phenol based are particularly dangerous. Cats are fastidious groomers and will lick up any chemical residue on their fur or paws.
- Unsafe hiding places—block access to places where your kitten may get into and get stuck—behind stoves, washer and dryer (always check inside before operating), refrigerators, even small holes in the wall. Kittens have been known to get into cupboards and the walls by squeezing through plumbing openings for pipes

Nighttime/Bedtime Routine

Cats love routine and are creatures of habit. Even though they are diurnal (most active in the early morning hours and again at twilight), we can use their love of routine to our advantage. If you don't want a future of midnight antics and early morning bed pouncing with demands for food—shape your kitten's habits now.

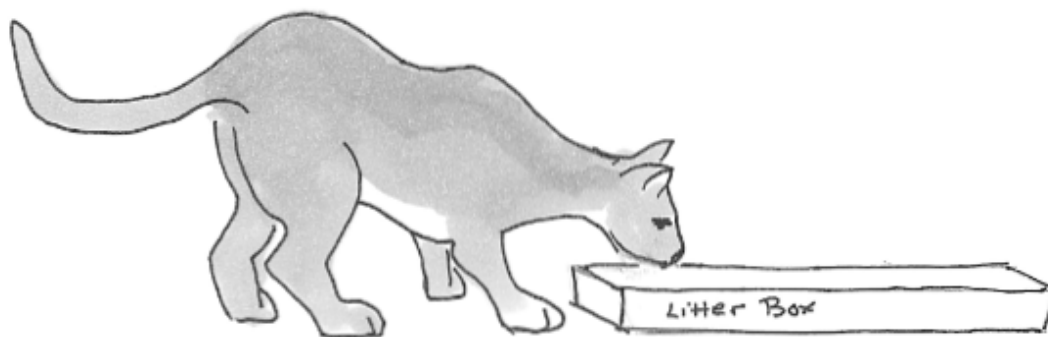
- Play with your kitten every day at times that work for you. Play with her 30 minutes before you go to bed to tire her out and give part of the evening meal after the play session. Try to be as consistent as possible.
- Don't play in your bedroom—establish a special location for play (next to her cat tree is an ideal place).
- Pick up her toys and items she likes to play with at night and put them away.
- Place your kitten in her safe room. Ignore her meows for release, unless you suspect an injury or illness.
- For more information, please see the **Early Morning Feline Antics** handout.



Litter Boxes

Do:

- Scoop the box everyday—keep the litter box immaculate!
- Clean the entire box using mild (unscented) dish soap every 3-4 weeks.
- If using non-clumping litter, change litter every day.
- All litter should be unscented.
- Have one box per cat, plus one extra.
- Two-story house—at least one on each floor.
- Big spaces need more boxes; little kittens won't go far to potty.
- Use uncovered boxes.
- Place litter box in a quiet private area and away from food, water bowls and bedding.



Don't:

- Do not use a box that is too small—it needs to be at least one and one half the length of your cat. Cats need room to turn around, dig and cover. That means your kitten will outgrow her original kitten size litterbox much like a puppy outgrows his original puppy collar.
- Do not use scented litter. Smells good to you, smells bad to cats.
- Do not use a litterbox liner.
- Do not leave waste sitting in the litter box; nobody likes a dirty bathroom.
- Do not place a litterbox in a high-traffic or noisy area.
- Do not use strong chemicals or disinfectants to clean box.
- Do not put litter boxes near noisy appliances.

Litter Box Issues? Call the Cat Behavior Advice Line at (415) 506-6284.

Kitten Playtime: Let's keep everyone safe!

- Play is using your kitten's prey drive in appropriate ways. Get an assortment of "prey" toys so you can vary the game—toys that look like and mimic the movements of birds, rodents, insects, and snakes. Some kittens prefer bird toys and some prefer mouse toys. You can mimic the various prey behavior with wand toys that you swing up in the air or drag and hide on the floor. Give your kitten time to engage her mind and plan her attack rather than just swat at the wand.
- Never use your hands to play-box or encourage your kitten to play bite your fingers. Always redirect play biting to a Kickaroo type toy, use a wand toy or throw balls across the room away from your body to redirect your kitten to appropriate play.

- Make it fun. Allow your kitten to make satisfying “captures” during play. For example, if using a wand laser toy, make sure to provide a treat or wet food at the end of the game. It is frustrating for your kitten to never actually catch her prey.
- End the game by slowly winding down the play. This sets off the end of the hunt response as the injured prey slowly “dies”, lowering your kitten’s excitement and energy level.
- Put all interactive toys away between play sessions as they should be reserved for playtime with you. Leave out jingle balls and furry mice that are safe for solo play.



Environmental Enrichment & Training: For ideas on how to enrich your kitten’s environment please see the [Environmental Enrichment](#) handout or come to the [Feline Environment Enrichment](#) workshop. For information on training your kitten please come to Marin Humane’s [How to Train your Cat](#) workshop. See MarinHumane.org/catclasses for more information.

Kitten Socialization

Consistent, gentle handling: Spend 2 or 3 brief sessions every day handling and petting your kitten. If she struggles, try pairing handling with a yummy treat.

Positive reinforcement: Use treats or something else your kitten loves and gradually work toward gently petting her all over (except tummy—often that’s a no touch zone.) Get her comfortable with touch for nail trims and vet visits.

Do not over pet: if she becomes irritable from petting, she may resort to swatting, nipping or bunny kicking. Keep sessions brief using positive reinforcement and stop the session on a high note of enjoyment rather than waiting for signs of distress.

Guest time: Allow your guests to interact with your kitten as long as they comply with the “rules”. Give your guest a wand toy to initiate play but let your kitten decide whether or not to approach your guest and play.

Quality sleep: Always allow your kitten uninterrupted sleepy time. Just like kids, their seemingly boundless energy requires recharging through sleep.

Veterinary Visits

- Vaccinations if needed (FVRCP every 3-4 weeks until at least 16 weeks of age). Then annual checkups and boosters.
- Possible de-worming protocol
- Flea control

Medical Issues: Please contact your veterinarian if you see any of these issues.

- Not eating, drinking or using the litterbox regularly
- Losing weight
- Diarrhea

- Vomiting
- Lethargic/stops playing
- Sneezing/eye discharge/nasal discharge
- Shaking her head/scratching
- Stops grooming/coat looks less healthy
- Missing fur

Feline Resources:

We are here to help. Marin Humane's Behavior & Training department conducts various [cat workshops](#). Sign up on our Cat Behavior (MarinHumane.org/catclasses) page. We also have Cat Behavior Consultants who are available for private training or [consultations](#) (phone, online or in-home) at 415.506.6284 or CatBehavior@MarinHumane.org. More information about cat behavior is available on our website at MarinHumane.org/cathandouts.