

# Foster Kittens, Queens and Orphans

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# Welcome to the BC SPCA Foster program!

Thank you so much for the care and love you share with these well deserving animals. This booklet contains important information required for all of our fosters, including emergency contact numbers and important cat/kitten fostering guidance!

If at any point you have questions please call the shelter for assistance. Be sure to have your foster animals shelter buddy number ready for us to reference. We will do our best to help you throughout your fostering!

## Foster Emergency Protocol

Call the BCSPCA Shelter \_\_\_\_\_

After hours call Emergency line \_\_\_\_\_

When directed call an Emergency Clinic \_\_\_\_\_

### Emergency symptoms requiring immediate attention

- Bleeding that won't stop. Apply pressure on the way to the hospital  
Poisoning – ingesting cleaners, solvents, rat poison, poisonous plants, etc Surgery site open and oozing or bleeding
- Straining to urinate with no urine produced in the past 12 hours (crying/ vocalizing in litterbox)
- Unconscious, unresponsive Difficulty breathing
- Birth complications – If straining and no animal birthed in 2 hours Any trauma, i.e. hit by car, dropped, stepped on, etc
- Severe vomiting – More than 3 times in 2 hours and/or contains blood with secondary symptoms such as decreased energy, decreased appetite, etc

Double check with the shelter/medical team before you agree to have medication dispensed or tests done at the veterinary clinic or you may be liable for the costs. For full list of poisonous plants visit [aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/poisonous-household-products](http://aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/poisonous-household-products).

### Other Medical Symptoms

Please contact your shelter \_\_\_\_\_ for assistance if your foster animal is exhibiting any of the symptoms listed below.

#### Symptoms requiring assessment within 24 HRS

- Diarrhea with blood and/ or other symptoms such as decreased energy/appetite, etc.
- Straining (crying/vocalizing in litter box) while urinating, still producing urine
- Constipation – No bowel movement seen in last 48 hours
- Listlessness, decreased energy Decreased appetite
- Sudden limping/favoring of limb
- Ingestion of non food objects, ie litter, toys, blankets
- Vomiting
- Coughing (try to get video)
- Sneezing, nasal or ocular discharge
- Scratching excessively, loss of fur, lesions
- Problems with surgical site – red, hot, swollen
- Head shaking/ear itching
- Sudden changes in behaviour, i.e. aggression, reaction to touch
- Weight loss in underage kittens
- Blood in urine

Medical symptoms are not limited to these. Contact us if any new or concerning medical or behavioural issues are noticed. Please note that it is always better to err on the side of caution. If you are unsure if your foster animal needs immediate attention, please call the shelter or the Emergency Line. If after hours call the Emergency Clinic.

# FAQ

## Can I foster kittens if I have a full time job?

This will depend on the type of foster kitten, but yes! It would be best if you had someone else in the home that could check in on them while you are at work. Litters with their moms are generally OK on their own, requiring food, cleanings and play times which can easily be split between 1-2 full time working people. Orphan kittens are quite time consuming and would be best suited to a foster parent who works from home or with 2 foster parents with opposite work schedules.

## How many kittens will I foster at a time?

Anywhere from 1 bottle feeder to 5-8 kittens in a litter!

## Can I foster 2 litters at once?

No, the BC SPCA does not allow foster parents to take in 2 litters at once. Due to young animal's ability to mask potentially contagious illnesses such as upper respiratory infections or ringworm it is in the animals' best interest if our foster homes only have one group at a time, which allows a chance for a full clean between groups and allots more time for the foster parent to spend with each group.

## How long do kittens typically need to be in foster care?

Kittens must be 8 weeks of age, 2.2lbs (or 1 kg) and up to date on their vaccines before they can be made available for adoption. As per BC SPCA policy all animals must be spayed and neutered prior to being adopted, therefore once the kitten is ready for adoption a spay/neuter appointment will be scheduled. You can expect to foster anywhere from 1-8 weeks or longer if you have a pregnant queen.

## How do I know when the kitten is ready for Spay/Neuter?

The BC SPCA performs pediatric spay/neuter in accordance with guidelines from major veterinary organizations and with the following qualifications:

- The procedure takes place between 8 and 16 weeks of age
- The animal is judged to be clinically normal and healthy prior to surgery
- Proper surgical protocols specific to these young animals are employed
- Post-surgery complications receive special attention

## Can I let the kittens play with my resident pets?

Foster animals should be kept separate unless the shelter makes an exception. Kittens should be kept initially in a bathroom or other fully cleanable space. This is because kittens may carry diseases or infections (even if they are not showing symptoms) such as Calicivirus, Panleukopenia and Ringworm.

## Should my resident cats be up to date on their vaccines?

Yes. Even though they will not be in direct contact, to protect your cat against any potential viruses or infections you should have them vaccinated at least 2 weeks prior to the foster kittens coming into your home. Ask your Veterinarian how to best protect your pet prior to bringing any foster animals home.

If it is decided that the foster animal and your animal can meet, please assure the resident pet is up to date on internal and external parasite treatment and is FeLV/FIV negative.

## Will they need vet appointments or trips to the shelter while in my care?

Yes, it is likely you will be required to bring them to the shelter or to a vet clinic periodically while you are fostering them. Vet treatments are usually required every 2-3 weeks and when they are ready they will require a spay or neuter.

While in your care your foster cat/kitten will need to be weighed. Adult cats should be weighed monthly. Underage kittens will need to be weighed more frequently. For the first few weeks of their lives (1-4 weeks) they should be weighed daily. Once they become mobile and are eating kitten food on their own (5-8 weeks), they can be weighed once every 2-3 days. If you do not have a scale at home, please let the shelter know in order to make arrangements prior to you taking the animal home.

## Are there limitations to how often I can foster?

No, however there are cleaning requirements prior to introducing a new foster animal/group into your home. Please refer to the cleaning section of this document for further instructions.

## What if I decide that fostering kittens isn't for me?

Please let us know if something comes up or if your foster situation isn't working for you. It may take some time to find another foster so please be patient while we work things out!

## How will I know if my foster animal has good welfare?

Welfare is a state of optimal physical and emotional health, not just the absence of disease and stress. The BC SPCA follows the 5 freedoms as our standard of welfare. They are as follows:

- Freedom from hunger and thirst
- Freedom from pain, injury and disease
- Freedom from distress
- Freedom from discomfort
- Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being

Recognizing when an animal is in need can be challenging, especially in very young animals. Signs of possible distress are not limited to the physical surroundings of an animal. Emotional distress can occur when an animal cannot completely adapt to their environment and therefore cannot engage in normal behaviours in that environment. When this occurs, an animal may shut down, become depressed, or may even use aggressive behaviour to escape perceived threats. See our 'recognizing feline emotions' handout.

If your foster animal is showing signs of not adapting such as hiding all the time, not eating, only eating and eliminating overnight when you are not around or other anti-social type behaviours, please let your shelter branch know so we can provide support.

## What types of kittens require fostering?

### Bottle-feeding

Kittens up to 4 weeks old that still require bottle feedings from a foster parent once every 2-3 hours.

### Self-feeding

Kittens between the ages of 5-8 weeks old who are eating solid food on their own but are too young to be in the shelter.

### Queens (mother cats) with kittens

Could be a pregnant mom cat or a new litter with mom.

### Shy or under-socialized kittens

Kittens that are not coping well in the shelter due to behavioural concerns that require more one on one time from a foster parent in a home. Queen or kittens may not have had much experience with human company and may find close proximity to humans frightening.

### Sick or injured kittens

Kittens with medical conditions or recent injuries who require a temporary foster home to help them recover.

## Can I feed my foster animal whatever diet he or she likes?

No, please feed them as directed by the shelter. Some of the shelter animals could be on a special diet for a medical concern, or they may be accustomed to the diet we feed in shelter, either way it is hard on an animals' digestive system to have a diet change. We will always supply you with food and litter, just let us know when you are running low so there is no risk of you running out.

## If something happens to my foster animal can I bring him/her to my own vet?

No. There are specific vets that we work with and its possible that your foster animal already has a file with one of them. Please refer to our emergency symptoms lists if you feel assistance is required immediately. The shelter can help you organize appointments for general exams and treatments.

# Introduction into your home

Being prepared for your foster animal in your home, and even in your car, will make for a smooth transition. Be sure to place them in a safe area of your car, such as the floor of the backseat facing inwards or on the back seat with the seat belt holding them in. See *figure 1*. Place a towel over the kennel to help them feel safe. See *figure 2* for how to set up a travel kennel for the safety of small kittens (towels weaved through the kennel door).

Be sure to take advantage of any belongings they may have come with from the shelter with their scent on them. Items such as their Hide, Perch and Go™ as well as blankets will be comforting in a new environment.



*Figure 1. Travel carrier set up for the safety of mom and kittens*

<https://www.wikihow.com/Keep-a-Cat-Safe-in-the-Car>



*Figure 2. Travel carrier set up for the safety of mom and kittens*

## Creating a Kitten Room

An ideal kitten room would be separated from any other resident animals and would be easy to clean (no carpet or upholstery that cannot be disinfected). A large bathroom or spare bedroom often works well. Make sure there is space to set up multiple hiding areas with lots of blankets. You should also be able to fit multiple litter boxes a good distance from food and water.

Why not use the cat carrier as a hidey bed in their room! This way they can use this area as a safe place which they will be familiar with when it comes time to travel.

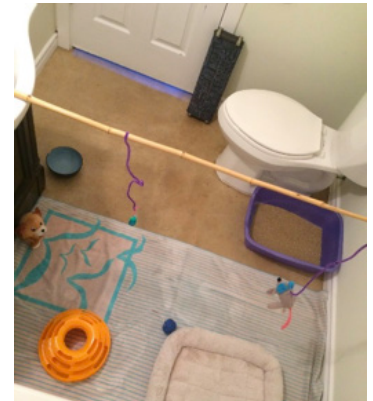
A well set up kitten room will contain a litterbox placed as far away from the food and water as possible, a comfy bed with lots of toys, a scratch pad and additional fun environmental placers such as the stick seen in the photo below (*Figure 3*) holding dangling toys for kitten to swat. A kitten room should not contain carpets or furniture which cannot be properly cleaned between groups/individuals.

If setting up a room for a litter rather than a single kitten be sure to consider the potential for bullying. Keep the water bowl away from the wall so that kitten does not have to have their back to the rest of the group. Keep the litter box in a corner so they feel protected from behind but can escape out one of the two sides available if potentially cornered. Remember to have multiple litter boxes set up for a litter of kittens.

in addition to the items seen in figure 3 you may wish to add additional hiding places or toys such as tunnels. This will be dependent on the room size (as you want to leave enough open space for them to run around) and what the animals require to have good welfare.

The following is a list of potentially dangerous things to avoid having in a kitten room:

- Chairs with rungs
- Blinds with cords
- Electrical cords (plugged in or not)
- Windows without screens
- Plants
- Breakable items
- Sewing items (yarn, needles, thread)
- Elastic bands or other potential ingestion hazards
- For a list of poisonous household items visit: [aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/poisonous-household-products](http://aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/poisonous-household-products)
- For a list of poisonous household plants visit: [aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/cats-plant-list](http://aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/cats-plant-list)



*Figure 3. Kitten room setup in bathroom.*

## Recommended Supplies

The shelter will provide you with litter boxes, blankets, litter and food. Please always use the litter and food provided to you. If you are running low, then let us know and we will happily get more supplies ready for you! If you are able to purchase these items on your own, we can let you know what we use in shelter and we very much appreciate the donation!

We encourage you to stop by to pick up more toys or purchase them as you learn about what your foster kittens like!



All cats and kittens need an appropriate scratching surface. A scratching post may or may not be supplied for you from the shelter, but we support and very much appreciate when a foster is able to get a scratcher for their new furry friends. Ideally you would be able to offer them different scratching options until it's known what kind they like. Small cardboard scratchers work great for this as they can be positioned and fastened in multiple locations.

## Kitten Return

kittens will be ready to come back when they have begun their vaccine series, are over 8 weeks of age and are 2.2 lbs (or 1kg). At this stage they require surgical sterilization (spay/neuter) before they are ready to be adopted. You can contact us to organize a spay/neuter appointment (if not already organized) once they are ready and we will get that scheduled for you.

We ask that you fill out a cat questionnaire (*See appendix I*) so we can gain information about your foster kittens and pass it along to potential adopters. This form was created for the purpose of better matching animals to people for successful adoptions. It helps give us a better idea of your foster cats' likes and dislikes as well as what type of person and home they would be best suited to.

## Cleaning Between Foster Animals

It is very important to do a full clean of your kitten room between litters. This will greatly decrease the possibility of cross contamination of infectious diseases. Your shelter will be able to provide you with a cleaner called Prevail. This cleaner is used in all of our shelters as it has been proven to be very effective against the common pathogens we might see in kittens and other animals. Prevail is very safe and you do not need to wear gloves to use it, but be sure to do all cleaning using chemicals away from household pets.

All soft items such as toys and blankets must be washed and dried in a machine to achieve high heat levels required to properly clean them. Smooth hard items such as food bowls, litter boxes and some toys can be cleaned with detergent and dried, then sprayed with Prevail and sit for 5 minutes. You may then rinse them and dry/reuse. All surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected where possible with Prevail, allowing the cleaner to sit on the surface for 5 minutes. If the area is heavily soiled please clean first, then apply Prevail.

To minimize environmental contamination, foster cats/kittens should be kept in a small, easily cleaned room (such as a bathroom) that does not have carpeting or any porous/soft surfaces that cannot be fully disinfected.

# Kitten/Cat Care

## Litter Box

Kittens typically start to learn to use the litter box for elimination behaviour when they become mobile (typically litter box use is exclusive by 6-8 weeks). Cats are naturally attracted to sandy, well-draining substrates like cat litter for elimination behaviour.



*Figure 4 and 5.  
Kitten sized litterboxes*

Make sure litter boxes are an appropriate size (at least 1.5x the length of the cat) and have a very small lip so kittens can step into them easily.

Litter boxes should be easily accessible in the kitten's environment. They should be separated from food and water as most cats have an aversion to urinating and defecating near their food. Litter should be 1-2 inches deep so it is comfortable to stand on and deep enough to dig around. Make the litter box a fun place for kittens by engaging in play time and attention while they are in there.

Kittens are more likely to need to eliminate just after a meal, just after waking up and just after a play session. Encouraging them to spend time in or near the litter box during these times makes it more likely for them to choose to eliminate in the litter box.

If your kitten is missing the box this may indicate something else is going on. Are the bowel movements normal? Are they urinating an abnormally large volume or too frequently? Medical conditions are a common reason for delayed litter box learning. (See medical symptoms flowchart)

Remember that they are babies and we need to set them up for success! Be sure to have multiple litter boxes in their room and keep them clean. If you let them out for further exploring be sure to bring a litter box with them so they are able to access it quickly.

Never punish kittens for eliminating outside of the box, and be sure to clean any areas they have soiled with the cleaner provided to you from the shelter (keep kittens away from area while cleaning). If the stools are normal and you have provided your foster kitten with all of the above recommendations, then please contact the shelter for further assistance.



Figure 6 and 7: Interactive wand and ball toys.

<https://ca.dhgate.com/product/cat-stick-elastic-plastic-wand-long-sticks/403433288.html>

<https://www.amazon.ca/Fashions-Talk-Variety-Kitty-Pieces/dp/B01AHM6P18>

## Playtime

A scheduled playtime each day works very well for kittens. Cats are creatures of habit and they enjoy a predictable schedule. This way you can get their beans out while showing them how to play appropriately with people.

Kittens need to learn that people's hands are not toys. If kittens direct play behaviour towards hands, stop play immediately and instead get them interested in appropriate toys. Punishment such as yelling at the kitten or holding their mouth shut will not be helpful in discouraging inappropriate play behaviours, and will risk making the kitten feel afraid or conflicted around people. For tips on best practices of training, please contact the shelter.

The best types of toys for kittens can be used at a distance from hands, such as wand toys or toys that can be thrown and chased

Encourage your foster kitten to express the normal and important behaviour of scratching by dragging a toy across a cardboard or carpeted scratcher. Remember that some cats like scratching vertically on tall sturdy post while others prefer to scratch along the ground on cardboard pads. Try different scratchers to see which one your foster likes the most! This is great information for a future adopter.

For a list of DIY cat scratchers that can be made at home check out this Hill's website! [hillspet.ca/en-ca/cat-care/resources/easy-diy-cat-scratching-post-ideas](http://hillspet.ca/en-ca/cat-care/resources/easy-diy-cat-scratching-post-ideas)



Figure 8: Circle ball cat toy.

<https://www.alfretonparkvets.co.uk/cat-behaviour/>

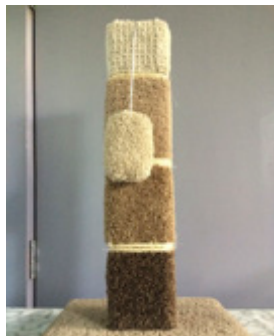


Figure 9. Vertical carpeted cat scratcher

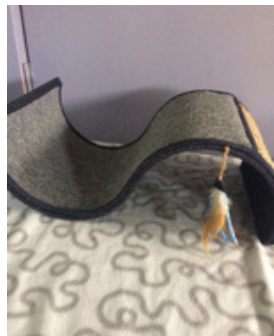


Figure 10. Horizontal carpeted cat scratcher



Figure 11. Cardboard cat scratcher.

## Socialization

If your kitten is comfortable in your home and you are able to create a secondary safe space for them, you are welcome to allow them access to other parts of your home. You must be sure these areas are cleanable (no carpets), non-accessible by other animals in the household, and are secured for kitten safety. When introducing your kitten to these new areas start slow, don't rush it. Allow them to explore at their own pace while still giving them access to something familiar so they feel safe. It may take multiple sessions before your kittens are ready to explore.

Part of socializing should include an introduction to common household noises. If a kitten is nervous of a new sound, try introducing it slowly from a distance that they are comfortable with. This may include things like TV volume set to low and then gradually turned up over a few days, or a vacuum in the other room (with doors closed) and eventually, after a few cleans, opening the doors a little if kitten seems comfortable.

It's important that we get these kittens ready for life in their forever home. We want them to be confident little kitties who enjoy the company of people so we need to introduce them to a variety of experiences and do everything we can to make them all good ones. A kitten's key socialization period is between 2 and 9 weeks of age. During this time, they will be curious and eager for new situations and will be more likely to explore new environments and experiences, which helps build their confidence.

Each new situation should be approached slowly and it's important to listen to your kitten's body language. If they back away with their ears back, let them escape. Never force a kitten into an experience that is clearly uncomfortable for them. If the first time doesn't go as planned, then allow them some time and try again later. You might be able to note where the discomfort seemed to happen and make changes to your next approach. If you are noting any fear or aggression in your kitten, please alert the shelter so they can help you with the next steps.

For a full socialization guide, please refer to appendix F.



The following are a few ‘play rules’ to assure a positive play session:

- Never play with a cat using your hands, feet or clothing. This teaches cats to pounce on people and scratch or bite. Hand play can lead to play aggression.
- Use toys that are safe (no small strings they could eat, nothing to get tangled in).
- Make the toy act like prey – a mouse or a bird. Pretend that the toy is running away. Make it hide, duck and freeze. Vary the speed and direction of the toy. Let the cat set the pace.
- Don’t make it too easy but let the cat catch the toy (prey) every once in a while.
- Once the play session is over, give the cat a few minutes to settle down before attempting to pet him/her. Once settled and accepting pets, give treats if they remain calm.

## Food Puzzles

DIY food puzzles are a great resource to keep kittens and cats minds busy. Felines would naturally hunt for their food, so giving them cognitive puzzles to access food is a natural behaviour for them. Here are some great food puzzle ideas that can be made at home. Alternatively, your shelter may have a few they can lend you.



Figure 12.

Example of holey feeder.  
<https://www.kisspng.com/png-advent-calendars-box-cardboard-advent-calendars-3112582/>

### The holey feeder

simply get any box used for bottle shipment and turn it on its side! Most liquor stores will happily give you one of these free of charge. Place kibble into the slots and place on its side so kittens can swat and explore for their food.

### Scavenger hunt

Hide food around their room! Make sure you are hiding kibble in areas that are safely accessible by the kittens. Mix up your hiding spots each day and watch them hunt!

### Box exploration

Give your kittens some boxes to explore. You can connect them to make a box castle (this is an especially fun activity for kids!) You can place food and treats throughout the box structure to encourage exploratory behaviour.



Figure 14: Example of tic tac food.

<https://www.chewy.com/petcentral/pet-parenting-diy-recipes-diy-food-puzzles-for-cats/>



Figure 13: Example of box exploration.

<https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/440930619759016591/?lp=true>

### Tic tac food

Place wet or dry food into a muffin tin, then cut a cardboard box into small squares, a little larger than the muffin holes, and place these over the food!

## Handling

Gently pick up and handle your kitten frequently so long as they are accepting of it. Signs that you handling them is too much would be frantic wiggling, meowing or biting. If this happens then you will need to move slower. Begin with handling them while they are still on the floor. Once comfortable with this you can move on to a hand under the belly and move up to brief moments of full handling. Try to keep these sessions short as kittens have a lot of energy and usually prefer to be exploring on the ground. Pairing this with a play session afterwards will help them associate the handling with something fun. If your kitten continues to show signs of fear (as stated above) and you are unable to handle them, please contact the shelter for further instruction.

Remember to handle their toes and mouth to get them used to it for vet exams in the future. Basic grooming such as brushing and nail trims are encouraged. If you want to learn how to trim your kitten's nails (this is great socializing) ask the shelter if they can show you this the next time you're in for a vet treatment.

Organizing interaction times with friends and family can be very beneficial for a kitten. Be sure everyone washes their hands before and after handling the kittens. If they seem fearful of the new people, try having them attempt interactive play with toys from afar. If this does not work, then give the kitten a break and try again another time. It may take multiple visits for some kittens to become comfortable with new things.

Keep an eye out for bullying between kittens. This could happen around food or the litter box and becomes a problem when the bully kitten is persistent and it begins to create fear in the other kittens. It may also be difficult to distract this kitten with toys. If you see this bullying activity happening, call the shelter to discuss a plan. It's possible you may need to separate the group into 2 smaller groups.

Under-socialized kittens have very little if any exposure to people, so they may hiss or swat due to fear. The key in these situations is positive interactions. Short visits and high value treats will go a long way. Each undersocialized or otherwise fearful kitten will go into your home with a behavior plan that must be followed. The time period they are in your home is very important for molding their future confidence and personalities. If you are unable to follow this plan or are having any trouble along the way please let the shelter know, we will be happy to further assist you.

Please see the please see appendixes G and H for more information.

## Medical Concerns and Emergencies

Medical symptoms in kittens are not limited to those discussed in this section. If you are unsure, please contact the shelter for assistance. With your foster manual you will get a medical symptoms flowchart ([appendix D](#)). This is meant to be a guide. Please refer to the beginning of this document for emergency contact information.

To avoid losing these numbers, please program them into your cell phone. All medical care must be approved by the Branch Manager or designate. Allow us to help you with scheduling appointments to avoid any issues with approval unless you are in an emergency. Only ever administer medications, apply lotions, drops, etc. if they have been prescribed by a veterinarian for that animal.

There are a few medical issues that can be common for growing kittens. Be sure to alert the shelter if you note any in your foster kitten or cat. Medical concerns requiring attention are not limited to these:

### Diarrhea

Diarrhea is never normal in a kitten. There are multiple reasons that this could be happening including stress and parasites. It's best if you call the shelter so they can help you figure out what is going on and how we can work to improve it!

### Not eating, decreased appetite, or failure to gain weight

This can be dangerous in kittens and might be due to a number of underlying factors. Kittens should gain weight every day (see weight chart). If your kitten is not gaining weight or is eating less than usual, please let us know.

### Parasites

If you see parasites on your foster animal, in their feces or in in their vomit please alert the shelter. Treatment will be required.

### Eye issues

If you see crusts in your kitten's eyes when they wake or if they have squinty eyes (light sensitivity) or discharge please alert the shelter for further assistance.

### Vomiting

This is never normal in a kitten. Always tell your shelter if your kitten has vomited. Medical assistance may be required.

### Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)

Kittens with a cold will sometimes eat less or have breathing difficulties. Always monitor their eyes and noses for discharge. If any is noted, alert the shelter. If kittens breathing appears impaired, please refer to our emergency protocol. If you are not sure, call the emergency numbers listed at the beginning of this document.

### Lethargy

If a normally active kitten has had a drop in energy keep an eye out for other symptoms of illness. If you don't see signs of sickness but are still unsure about your foster kitten's activity levels, please call the shelter for further advice.

### Fleas, lice and ear mites

Symptoms will include scratching, chewing and/or twitching of skin. Fleas can sometimes be visible and lice may be seen as dandruff that cannot be brushed off whereas ear mites will appear as black/brown gunky buildup in the kitten's ears. Alert the shelter if you see any of these symptoms.

### Ringworm

This fungal infection will show as areas of hairloss. Classically this would be on the face, ears or front paws although is not limited to these areas. Ringworm is a treatable condition but it is contagious to you and other pets in your home. Contact the shelter if you see any hair loss develop.

### Dealing with Kitten death

Sadly there is a chance not all kittens will survive. This is especially true of orphaned bottlefeeders, where a mortality rate of up to 50% is reported. Timely treatment of any medical issues can reduce this rate to around 10%. All illnesses and deaths must be reported to the shelter ASAP. We will do all that we can to help you and your foster kittens but sometimes they will pass suddenly or overnight through no fault of any person. We understand that this can be a very difficult situation. Please reach out to us if you are struggling with this.

## Care of Queens and Kittens

Provide mom with a cozy nest in your home. An area with minimal activity that is quiet will help mom feel as though she is keeping her babies safe, and this is very important for a new momma as fear can cause her to become aggressive with her babies or refuse them care. It is best to keep mom and babies away from other pets.

Start things slow in a new home with mom and babies. Be sure to have the room setup prior to your foster animals arriving. Make sure there are multiple litter boxes, water bowls and safe spots (hiding areas) for mom to nest with her kittens. Once they are home and safe, gently place their kennel into their new room and completely remove the door. Leave them to explore the room for an hour or two before checking in on them. Allow mom lots of time to become accustomed to her new area. Don't push mom or kittens to come out of hiding, they may take a few days to be comfortable enough to do so.



Figure 15: Queen in nest with kittens

Take extra precautions when interacting with a mom cat. She may feel the need to protect her babies and may prefer if you stay away. Always allow her to approach you first and watch her body language closely. A swishing tail or a long drawn out meow likely means 'please give me some space', even when a kitty is rubbing against you. Make sure you have multiple play opportunities available for mom. She needs play time too! Refer to playtime section for more ideas.

### Caring for a Queen

A cat in late term pregnancy will require food and water available at all times. She will choose a place to have her kittens on her own so make sure you note where she is spending most of her time prior to birth and keep this area clean and warm. Before she gives birth mom cat may become restless. She may not give birth where you had thought she would. Don't insist, rather have multiple warm and clean boxes and blanketed areas around the room for her to choose from. Some cats will want you there to soothe them while others will hide away, either way be sure to check on mom frequently. For most births you will not need to intervene. Mom will clean up the mess of the birth on her own. A lot of times the birth happens when you are asleep or not home!

### Birth and the New Mom

Birthing occurs in 3 stages for cats. For the first stage of birth mom cat may dig and yowl, sometimes appear to be straining in the litter box. This can last for up to 12 hours.

In the second stage mom cat's water will break and a kitten will be born minutes later. Do not interrupt this very important stage. Mom will clean baby and bite at the umbilical cord. It may appear that she is being too rough but she is stimulating breathing and circulation. Babies will begin to nurse shortly after birth.

In the final stage mom cat will eat the placenta. Each kitten birth will take around 15-30 mins on average. If mom cat appears to be straining with no kitten delivered for longer than 2 hours this is an emergency and she should be taken with all of her babies to the emergency clinic. If mom cat is content and happy she is probably finished giving birth.

For the first few weeks of kitten's lives mom will have a lot of responsibilities to care for them. If you have concerns at any point please alert the shelter. Although their eyes are not yet open, they will be able to find mom due to her warmth.

There are 3 stages to their nursing and suckling:

1. Mom initiates by licking the kittens and encircling them with her body. If you note any kittens who do not feed often or if it is a large litter and 1 runt kitten often does not get a nipple, please alert the shelter right away. It is not common but occasionally one kitten may require further support from the foster parent with formula feedings (this is a last resort as mom's milk is the most nutritious choice for the babies).
2. At weeks two and three kittens eyes and ears are functioning. They will begin to initiate suckling occasionally at this stage and mom simply cooperates by laying down and allowing them to nurse.
3. At week 4-5 kittens will initiate all feedings, mom will begin to become more and more uncooperative in an attempt to wean them off of her milk. This is normal. You can help the weaning process by offering fresh wet food, and later dry food.

The first 2-4 weeks mom will groom the babies quite a lot. The grooming helps stimulate elimination and mom consumes the matter to keep the nest clean. Later the licking will stop and the babies will begin to eliminate close to the nest. This is when low sided litter boxes should be added into the room. You will likely not need to help them with this process but please let the shelter know if your kittens are having trouble using the litter boxes.

## Queen Behaviour

We will do our best to make you aware of any behavioural concerns we see in shelter prior to you taking mom cat home. Birth can alter a queen's attitude toward you, other animals and sometimes her own babies. She is simply adjusting to this life changing event and needs your help to get through it. A quiet safe environment will make all the difference. Let us know if any of the below concerns are happening and we will help you work through it!

### Maternal Neglect

A weak kitten with a birth defect or other ailment may be seen as a weak link and be ignored by mom. Stress can sometimes play a role in maternal neglect so it is important to remember to keep visits to a minimum for the first 2 weeks after birth. During weeks one and two check Ins should be limited to feedings for mom, daily weights (if mom is accepting of this), litter box cleaning and a quick look at the babies to assure they are all growing. Do not handle babies at this stage. Alert the shelter if mom spends all of her time away from the kittens, if they cry and she doesn't respond or if they are losing weight.

### Maternal aggression toward other animals

This is a very common behaviour as mom is trying to protect her babies. Keep other animals out of mom's area at all times. Ideally other animals would not have access to the door leading to the room mom and babies are housed in. If mom does see another animal and becomes upset, remove the source of anxiety (if through a window, cover the window) and leave the room for 20 minutes to allow her time to relax.

### Maternal Aggression towards people

We will do our best to pass along any information we may already have regarding the mom cats' behaviours but sometimes aggression (hissing, swatting, scratching, or biting) towards humans can develop later. Alert the shelter if you see any new behaviours while you are fostering.

## Care of Orphan Kittens

This is a very special chance for a foster parent to bond and watch a kitten grow into a little cat! These kittens need you to provide the care they would otherwise receive from their mom which can be tiresome and intense at times. Consistent schedules with lots of play time and positive interactions will help set kittens up for a rewarding foster experience and future. It's a big commitment, being a literal cat mom/dad is a lot of work!

Below are a few main points of care for orphan kittens. Please keep in contact with us along the way. This is a challenging and rewarding job, and we're so happy to have you offer this to them!

### Warmth

Kittens under 4 weeks of age are unable to thermoregulate and will need your help to keep warm! If you have the ability to adjust the heat in the room kittens are in, please do so. Ideal temperature for a room of orphaned kittens

is 29C. Practicing the safe use of warmie bottles and disks can be very beneficial in these situations as well. A warmie can be either a disc or unused IV fluid bag. If using an IV fluid bag please be sure to label this as a warmie by writing WARMIE in permanent marker on the outside of the bag so it is not used for other medical purposes in the future.

To safely use a warmie, microwave in 1 minute intervals, checking the temperature with your hands each time. Once you've achieved a temperature



Figure 16 and 17: (Left to Right) IV bag warmie, Snuggle Safe warmie



that is warm (not hot) to the touch for you, wrap the warmie in a towel so that no area of the warmie is directly exposed. When using warmies it is important to check on them frequently. You want to assure kittens appear comfortable and that you aren't leaving cold warmies in their sleeping area.

Providing a 'nest' for babies to gather with lots of blankets and warmies securely wrapped in towels will help keep babies warm while they grow and become able to warm themselves. Be sure to always keep the warmie in one section of the 'nest' to allow the kittens the ability to crawl away from them if they want to. Continue to provide extra heat sources for kittens until they are 4-6 weeks old.

## Feeding

Each day at the same time all kittens should be weighed to assure they are gaining and to calculate how much food they will require that day (see appendix B). Kittens should gain 10-15 grams per day. Kittens will eat small amounts frequently while they are young as this is essential for digestion. If a kitten is not interested in eating for a feeding, move on to the rest of the litter and come back to that kitten after (or simply try again in a short period of time).



Figure 18: kitten feeding bottle angle example.

<https://www.petmd.com/cat/care/6-tips-safely-bottle-feeding-kittens>

### Helpful feeding tips

1. Keep kitten warm, they will be unable to properly digest their food if they are cold.
2. Never feed cow's milk. The shelter will provide you with Kitten Milk Replacer (KMR). If using the powder solution, mix 1 part KMR to 2 parts water. Place mixture into feeding bottle and place bottle into a cup of hot water. Check the temperature before beginning the feeding by squirting a small amount onto the inside of your wrist. The milk should be luke-warm.
3. Kittens should eat 30 ml of formula for every 113 grams of body weight per day broken up into multiple feedings (see feeding chart). Kittens less than 2 weeks should eat at least every 2 hours. Kittens 2-4 weeks should eat every 3-4 hours, however if they are at that time sleeping for longer periods through the night, do not wake them. Any weak or smaller kittens who are not thriving should get more frequent feedings. Please call the shelter for direction on this if it occurs.

4. Their position for feeding is very important. Place kitten onto a soft blanket on their stomach (never on their back) and hold onto them gently with one hand over the body. They will use the blanket to knead and may reach up to the bottle, this is normal. If kitten becomes frantic while feeding, try wrapping kitten in a towel while still assuring they are on their stomach.

The bottle should be inverted nipple down at a 45-degree angle so that milk collects at the nipple and kitten doesn't get gulps of air. See figure 18.

Do not squeeze the milk into the kitten, this could cause them to aspirate (inhale formula into their lungs). Aspiration often leads to pneumonia, which can be fatal. Bubbles in the bottle and wiggling ears means suckling success! If kitten is having trouble with suckling on the bottle, gently open their mouth and slip the nipple into it. If they are still struggling then try rubbing kitten's forehead or stroking their back like mom would. Please alert the shelter if you are having any troubles with feedings.

If feeding multiple kittens, go through each kitten once, and then start over for 2-3 sessions. A full kitten will have bubbles around its mouth and a full pear shaped belly. Once kittens are done each feeding use a warm damp cloth or piece of gauze to gently rub their body's to replicate the feeling of being groomed. Be sure the kitten is dry prior to placing back into the 'nest'.

If you catch kittens suckling one another then you will need to increase your feeding frequency. **Please let the shelter know if this is happening** as it may have long-term health effects on some of the kittens.

## Weaning

Please note that formula should only be used for orphaned kittens. If a litter of kittens is with their mom do not introduce formula at 4 weeks, rather introduce wet food mixed with a little warm water in a low sided dish.

An orphaned kitten will be ready to wean off the bottle once it can lick formula from your finger, which generally starts when they are around 4 weeks old.

The next step is to have them lick formula from a spoon, then a bowl. Once they are licking from a bowl you can start adding in warm kitten wet food and mix it with the formula to create a gruel. See [figure 19](#).

Gradually use less and less formula until you are on full kitten food. This should take 1-2 weeks. Be sure to continue to supplement the kitten with formula from the bottle as needed so they are still getting their daily food requirements.

Use a low sided dish so the kittens can easily access the food. You may need to try a couple dishes before you find one that works best. If kitten is confused by the dish, try getting them to lick some from your finger and slowly lowering your finger into the dish.



Figure 19. Kittens eating gruel.

<https://thecatsite.com/ams/weaning-how-to-get-your-kittens-to-eat-on-their-own.33380/>

Once kitten is eating the kitten food well and seems to be tolerating it, you can decrease bottle feedings and begin skipping feedings at night. During this weaning process you can leave small bowls of dry kitten food around for them to play with and discover. Try crushing up some dry food to entice kittens to eat it. This stage can get quite messy so remember to assure each kitten is clean and dry prior to heading back into their 'nest'.

### Stimulation for Urination and Defecation

Before and after each feeding you will need to gently rub the kitten's abdomen and genital/rectum area with a piece of gauze or cotton ball dipped in warm water.



Figure 20. Kitten food bowl examples

Use short strokes and only rub enough to stimulate elimination. Too much rubbing will irritate the kittens sensitive back end.

Kittens should defecate once a day and will likely urinate each time they are stimulated which will be after each feeding. At 3-4 weeks of age you can place a low sided litter box in their room and fill it with the litter provided to you by the shelter. Do not use clumping litter. This is a good time to start placing kitten kibble in the room in bowls as well. Kittens will want to chew at this stage and we want them to chew their kibble rather than the litter.



Figure 21, 22 and 23. (Left to Right)

Plastic kitten sized litter box, pellet litter, cardboard kitten sized litter box

### Socialization

Key socialization period for kittens is between 2-9 weeks of age. If you are fostering a single orphan kitten, then you will need to make room for lots of play time in your future! Starting at 4 weeks the kittens should have access to a variety of toys. Pipe cleaners and old toilet paper rolls are a great start! The shelter should be able to provide you with toys at any time. Single living orphan kittens should have a foster parent who is home most of the day to assure they are stimulated. We will work closely with you so your foster kittens get the socialization they need. It's important for you to help kittens learn how to play appropriately. Avoid using your hands or feet as toys as this will become very undesirable once they are older and bigger. You can coax them to begin play time by gently jingling a toy that makes noise or rubbing something along the blanket to initiate chase and hunt. Take it slow when encouraging play, you don't want to scare them!



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# Appendices

**Appendix A** - *Kitten Requirements and Milestones by Age*

**Appendix B** - *Kitten Bottle Feeding and Stomach Capacity*

**Appendix C** - *Orphan Kitten Daily Journal*

**Appendix D** - *Kitten Medical Symptoms Flow Chart*

**Appendix E** - *Kitten Litter Weight Chart*

**Appendix F** - *Kitten Socialization Checklist*

**Appendix G** - *Body Language of Feline Anxiety by Dr. Sophia Yin*

**Appendix H** - *Recognizing Feline Emotions*

**Appendix I** - *Fecal Scoring Chart*

**Appendix J** - *Cat Questionnaire*

**Appendix K** - *Foster Animal Vet Treatments Schedule*

