



Society for the Friends of Ferals
Helping the Helpless

Your New Kitty 101

WHAT YOU NEED CHECKLIST:

- Food
- Ceramic or Metal Bowls (food and water)
- Litter box(es)
- Litter (clumping may be used if kitty is older than 4 months)
- Scratching post or box
- Toys
- Carrier
- Blanket or other soft place for sleeping
- Baby nail trimmer or cat claw trimmer
- Lots and lots of LOVE!

BRINGING KITTY HOME:

If your kitty is experiencing separation anxiety you may want to put a soft stuffed animal and a clock or watch (with a tick-tock) in or near her bed. This will give her the cuddling she is used to as well as a soothing sound to fall asleep to. Lots of play before bedtime will also wear your kitty out and ensure a longer sleep.

Try to bring your kitty home into a calm (as possible) environment. You may want to set up a small area with a safe spot (carrier or other cozy hiding place), food, water and a litter box. Allow your kitty to get accustomed to this safe spot first so she always has a “home base” to retreat to if she feels overwhelmed. Avoid introducing your kitty to lots of new people and animals right away. Start the introductions slowly as your kitty becomes more accustomed to your home. Slowly but surely your new kitty will fit right in!

INTRODUCING NEW KITTY TO OTHER PETS:

Introducing animals can be very easy or very difficult. *Patience is the key to the process.* See article at: <http://www.littlebigcat.com/behavior/cat-to-cat-introductions/>. There are also lots of additional introduction articles online.



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FOOD:

The person fostering will let you know what food the kitty is eating. You should start off with this food.

Cats do not always drink a lot of water, which can cause kidney failure, so most vets now recommend feeding both canned and dry food (or only canned), rather than all dry food. It's also a good idea to mix the canned food with some extra water. Always try to purchase the best food you can afford to keep your kitty healthy!

If you switch brands introduce the new food slowly (over a week or two). You may also use a probiotic to help support your kitten's tummy during transition time (or any time). NaturVet Digestive Enzymes with Prebiotics and Probiotics (available at some pet stores and online at amazon.com) is a great product. Optagest is another very good digestive enzyme carried by a lot of pet stores.

- Days 1 and 2: mix a small amount of new food into the bowl of old food
- Days 3 and 4: mix 1/4th new food with 3/4th old food
- Days 5 and 6: mix ½ new food with ½ old food
- Days 7 and 8: mix 3/4th new food with 1/4th old food
- Day 9: all new food!

If you notice your kitty getting an upset tummy (especially diarrhea), go back to more of the original food. For diarrhea or constipation, you can add about a teaspoon of canned pure pumpkin (not pumpkin pie mix) to the canned food.

As babies, they should have dry food available to them at all times, or feed them canned food 3-4 times/day. You can adjust this as adults (1 year +) if they start getting too chubby. Provide fresh water at all times. Some cats will drink more water if you provide a water fountain!

If you are already free feeding adult cats in your home, you may want to introduce your kitten to their adult food. (The kitten's food will be too rich for your adult cats.) You can then supplement your kitten with canned kitten food in the morning and evening so he gets the kitten nutrition he needs.

LITTER BOX:

Use non-clumping litter until the kittens are at least 4 months old (just in case they try to eat it or lick it off their toes). After that, you can switch to clumping litter if you'd like. (Clumping litter makes the box much easier to clean.)

Some cats are very picky about having a clean litter box. It's always best to keep the boxes as clean as possible so that the kitty has no reason to avoid it.



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If you are adopting more than one kitty (or if you already have a kitty), two kitties will do best with two litter boxes. (The rule of thumb is to have at least as many litter boxes as you do cats.)

Here are some links to check out if you have having litter box issues with your new kitty or the resident cat(s)

<http://jacksongalaxy.com/2012/08/02/does-your-cat-pee-outside-the-litter-box/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34cHfvYOYS0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzliLSt7myE&feature=youtu.be>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFphS8VMNZc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cVLoPAh0-8>

<http://www.catbehaviorassociates.com/category/litter-box-101/>

PLAY:

The kitties want to play all the time! Often homemade toys are the best (a wadded up piece of paper, a paper bag, a box, a cork, a hair tie, a ribbon, etc.) You can also buy lots of fun toys. (My personal favorite is a wand toy called “Da Bird”. Kitties LOVE it!) Take the toy away if the kitties get out stuffing or try to eat small parts. Watch out for string that the kittens can try to eat. (Ribbons may have a tendency to unravel so watch for loose string.)

Sometimes kittens will play too rough (biting, grabbing your foot with their claws, trying to climb up your leg, etc.). When they do this, just say “no” and walk away. They’ll quickly figure out that play-time will end if they get too rough. (A squirt bottle of water works well if your kitten tries to climb your leg. Ouch!)

BAD KITTY:

All little kitties are bad sometimes. If your kitties are jumping up on the counter or scratching furniture, you can use a water bottle to squirt them off. Usually a squirt or two is all it takes before they run off. There is also a good aerosol product called “SSSCAT” that is motion-activated and sets off a loud “psst” of air when the kitty (or you!) gets within 20 ft of it.



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If you notice them trying to chew on anything bad (plants, cords, etc.), you can spray the item with “Bitter Apple” or some other spray meant to make things taste yucky. You may need to kitten proof your house before bringing your babies home (especially electrical cords).

Be aware that kitties may eat string, rubber bands, or dental floss which gets into their digestive tract and can be a costly surgery, or worse. Cords on blinds can get wrapped around their necks and are very dangerous

Remember that a kitty is just like a toddler – she gets into EVERYTHING!

This website has lots of good information, and the book available here is excellent:

<http://www.catbehaviorassociates.com/>

SCRATCHING:

You can keep their front nails trimmed with a baby nail clipper (available in the baby section at Target) or a claw trimmer specifically for pets. The easiest way to trim kitten nails is to have one person hold the kitten and push the nail out. Have the second person snip the tip of the nail where it starts to hook (be careful not to snip the nail bed). You may need to trim a nail or two and then let the kitty go and play. Kittens can often be squirmy during trims. Keeping nails trimmed will save your furniture and little nails won't get snagged on everything.

Give the kittens a place to scratch. A scratching post is wonderful! I also love the cardboard box scratchers you can put on the floor. If your kitties like to scratch a certain piece of furniture, try putting a scratching box (sprinkled with a little catnip) in that area. You can also put double-sided tape or a product called “Sticky Paws” on the furniture to deter scratching.

The following is an excerpt from Cat Daddy by Jackson Galaxy regarding declawing.

*“Don't Declaw Your Cat! It's easy to think of declawing a cat as just permanently clipping her nails, but nothing could be less accurate. Imagine somebody cutting off all your fingers just below the first knuckle, and then having to go through life like that. That's much closer to what a declawed cat experiences. Declawing can cause physical, behavioral, and emotional problems for years to come. If your cat is scratching things you don't want her to scratch, here are some things you can do: *make sure she has satisfactory scratching surfaces that aren't furniture, *instead of old carpet, try sisal or corrugated cardboard, *try Soft Paws: covers you can put on her claws to keep her scratching from doing any damage.”*



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VET:

Take your babies in for their first check-up as soon as possible. You will receive their current health record from Animal Rescue of the Rockies. Be sure to bring this with you to your first vet visit. Your vet will get the kittens on a regular vaccination/well kitty schedule.

See your vet right away if the kitty gets diarrhea that won't go away in a day or two or seems really bad (kittens can dehydrate quickly!) or if your kitty stops eating or drinking.

We highly recommend pet insurance for your new kitty. You never know when something will come up unexpectedly and this is very much worth the money.

INDOOR VS. OUTDOOR:

The average lifespan of an indoor cat is 12-20 years while the average lifespan of an outdoor cat is less than 5 years. Outdoor cats face many dangers including cars, coyotes, and other cats. If you never allow your kitties unlimited freedom outside, they will never beg at the door or try to sneak out. (That is a huge favor to your kitty and to you!) Some families enjoy taking their kitties on supervised outings in the yard or on the patio. This type of limited exposure can be fun and healthy (just be prepared for your kitties to throw up all the grass they ate as soon as they get inside – yuck!). *Love your kitty enough to keep him/her as an indoor pet.*

MOST IMPORTANT:

Enjoy and love your new baby!!!



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Addendum 1: Feral Kittens

In case you adopt a kitten who has not had adequate socialization early on in life, or is just very shy/scared, here are some excellent tips from a top feral rescuer/foster that will help you to enhance the kitten's adaptation to a new household. PATIENCE is the key!

Truly feral kittens usually take *several weeks to a few months* to tame depending on their age at the time they're received. **Be patient with yourself.** :)All that said, here's what I typically do:

At first, I spend *at least* an hour or two a day (usually several hours) in the room with them just doing work on my computer, reading, etc. so they can get used to humans. I'll slow blink and talk to them if I'm not working on something, so they adjust to my voice and know I'm not a threat.

I start them in a very small space and slowly introduce them to increasingly larger areas (they revert back to terrified ferals every time I expand the territory). I usually make the change every week in the beginning (depending on how they're progressing).

When they start moving around a little bit with me in the room, I use feather toys and the toys with the ball on the track (ball chaser? Hope you know what I'm talking about), and play with them--spin the ball around the track, which gets their attention, keep doing it until (usually) one of them decided to sit across from me and kick the ball back to me. Since I'm down at their level and we're usually looking at each other a bit, LOTS of slow blinking and gentle, quiet reassurance. I don't try to touch them in the beginning--I just work on them getting to the point that they can trust I'll play with them without touching them. With the play, they often forget to be afraid, at least for the moment. They'll go back to being terrified and skittish as soon as playtime is over, at least at first.

I always reach underhanded from down on the floor (making myself as small as possible) when I first go to pet feral kittens. The reaching down and overhanded approach seems frightening to all of them. If you can get them to sniff at your hand when you slide it in under their chin, try scratching their chin. You can also do that with treats: offer treats from your hand. At first, I have to throw them, then make the treats gradually closer until the kitten is considering taking stuff out of my hand. Get them to take a few treats out of my hand, then when they've done that a few times, try scratching their chin while they're stealing a treat.

I try to have neighbors come over and visit them once they're willing to let me hold them to improve and speed up their socialization.



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If you're still having problems, there's also only allowing them to have food when you are sitting in the room with them (or even making them eat from a spoon in your hand or out of your hand).

A couple things I do, depending on my gut instinct and the litter, but these are usually for more extreme cases or when they aren't making ANY progress:

- I sometimes put them in the cat cage in the living room when I'm cleaning, cooking, etc. so they're around the regular household noises (did this a few times with my TNR kids, especially early on--partly because they were so sick, but I did use this method with them a bit).
- Separate them from all other cats in the house so they can only bond with people (I have a kitten right now who I'm likely going to have to do that with because she's completely bonded with her mom and terrified of people)
- Keep them in a very small space/cage and hold them, whether they want it or not. I'll try this a few times, but if they don't start purring after a few attempts (over a few days), I don't force it any more.
- When you want to start to let them out in your house, use a harness and leash – it helps to not lose them (!) and seems to make them feel more secure.

Some people advocate doing those last three from the beginning with feral kittens, and it probably works in certain environments and with certain kittens, but I've found that it's much more successful for me and they become more outgoing if I take the slow, quiet, patient approach with them.

Finally, when you feel frustrated, you have to remember that with feral kittens it is ALWAYS two steps forward, one step back. You'll make a breakthrough, then they seem to be back where they were before the next day; but a week later, you can see that they've made progress--if it helps, keep notes each day of what you did with them and how they responded, then you can go back and see the progress.



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Addendum 2: How to Introduce a Second Cat

Cats, despite what you may have been told, aren't solitary creatures and many of them benefit from having feline companions. That said, cats are also territorial so the introduction process requires some finesse and patience. If you just toss the cats together with a "they'll work it out themselves" mentality, you will put a tremendous amount of stress on both cats as well as risk physical injury to them. An incorrect or hurried introduction can set the cats up to become bitter enemies. On the other hand, the correct introduction can open the door to a lifelong feline friendship.

CATS IN HIGH ALERT MODE:

You may know some people who used the old-fashioned (and not well-thought-out) method of simply putting the cats together and letting nature take its course. Some of these people may have had successful outcomes but at what cost? How stressful were the introductions? And, did the cats really become friends or did they merely divide up the territory and draw a line in the sand? Just because these cat parents don't see overt aggression doesn't mean these cats aren't living under constantly stressful conditions. The "let them work it out" method is risky, ineffective and inhumane. Why would you want to use a technique that puts all cats involved at risk?

DO IT THE RIGHT WAY:

The way I tell my clients to do new cat introductions is to take it "one sense at a time." First the cats may hear each other (if one or both are vocal), then they're going to smell each other (in a controlled way via my behavior modification method) and then they'll see each other (again, in a controlled way). Finally, they may touch each other (we definitely want this to be a controlled and positive way). As for tasting? Well, that's optional if one cat eventually licks another. Hopefully, the tasting aspect won't involve any biting though.

The proper new cat introduction technique must address the emotional and physical needs of both cats. From the resident cat's perspective, there's an intruder in his territory. From the newcomer's point of view, she has just been dropped on hostile turf. Both cats need to feel secure. If they feel as if there's no safe place for them, that's when they'll revert to survival mode and you'll see panic, fighting and perhaps spraying. If, however, they feel they can remain in their comfort zones while checking out the situation, you can usually keep a lid on the panic button. Both cats need safe areas to decompress during this life-changing event — and it is a life-changing event. Your resident cat doesn't understand why he no longer has the entire territory to himself and the newcomer must get to know an unfamiliar territory, unfamiliar humans AND an unfamiliar cat. Talk about stressful!



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STEP ONE: SET UP A SANCTUARY ROOM

Set up a room to be used as a safe place for the newcomer. This gives her time to get somewhat familiar with her new surroundings in a more secure way. It's stressful enough for a cat to move to an unfamiliar environment so before you attempt to introduce her to your resident cat, let her get her bearings and have time to herself in a sanctuary room. You don't want to even attempt an introduction with a reactive newcomer so the sanctuary gives her a place to get herself back to normal functioning level. The more relaxed each cat is, the better the chances of a successful introduction.

The sanctuary room can be any room that you can close off. It should contain a litter box, food/water, a few cozy hiding places, a scratching post, and toys. If you use a carrier to bring the cat into the house, leave the carrier in the room with its door open so the cat can stay in there if she chooses before venturing out into the rest of the room. If the newcomer kitty is timid or fearful, being able to stay in the carrier that contains her own familiar scent may provide much needed comfort in the beginning.

For a fearful cat, set up some paper bag tunnels as safe ways for her to get to resources. That way, she can get to the litter box or food without feeling too exposed. Put other hiding places around the room for her as well, such as upside-down boxes with entrance holes cut in them. This may help her feel as if she doesn't have to remain hidden under the bed or in the closet. If she spends her days cowering under the bed and wedged behind your suitcase in the closet, she'll be too frightened and reactive and that will lead to an unsuccessful and extremely stressful introduction.

I Know You're in There!

Even though your resident cat won't be able to see the newcomer kitty, he's going to be aware of the fact that she's on the other side of the door. This is normal but by having the newcomer in the sanctuary, you're letting your resident cat know that only a portion of his territory has been invaded and not the entire home.

STEP TWO: MEALTIME = TRAINING TIME

The key to a successful new cat introduction is to ***give the cats a reason to like each other***. You can't just separate them for an extended period of time and then open the door expecting them to magically form a bond. They'll need to see that good things happen when they're in the presence of each other, and later, within sight of each other. The best way to do this is with food and treats. Food is a powerful motivator!



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Feed the cats by placing food bowls on either side of the closed sanctuary door. How far from the door itself will be determined based on the reactivity level of each cat. If your resident cat won't come within six feet of the door then place his food bowl well within his comfort zone. In subsequent sessions you'll gradually move the bowls closer and closer to the door itself.

If one cat eats faster than the other you can give that cat a bowl with some obstacles in it (such as a brake bowl used for dogs who eat too quickly). You can also push the food against the bottom and sides of the bowl (as opposed to just placing a heaping mound of food in the center) so the cat has to spend more time licking at it.

Don't offer too much food during each training session. It's better to do frequent sessions that are short and that end on a positive note.

STEP THREE: LET THE NOSE DO THE TALKING

The Sock Exchange

This is the method I came up with many, many years ago and has been very successful with new cat introductions. It's very simple and it starts with a pair of clean socks.

Place a clean sock on your hand and gently rub the newcomer along the face to collect some facial pheromones. Pheromones are scent chemicals that are released from a cat's scent glands. The pheromones around the cat's face (along the sides of the mouth, on the chin, cheeks and on forehead) are basically "friendly" pheromones. Cats facially rub on objects in locations where they feel comfortable. So by using the sock, we're going to create a simulated cat that contains lots of friendly pheromones.

Place the scented sock in your resident cat's area. This will give him a chance to do his own initial investigation of the new cat's scent. If you have Feliway you can give a quick spritz on the bottom part of the sock (not near where you rubbed the new cat's real pheromones). Feliway is a product that mimics a cat's own pheromones. In theory, when a cat smells the synthetic pheromones he'll view them as his own. Using the pheromone spray is optional but if it's in the budget, it can't hurt and may just help increase your odds of success.

Let your cat do his own investigation. I use clicker training with introductions and I click and reward any positive move the resident cat makes toward the sock. I click and reward for merely walking toward the sock. I click for anything I would like to see the cat do again and I ignore any negative behavior. For example, if the cat sniffs the sock I click and reward. If he walks by the sock without giving it a second look I click and reward.



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The reason I use the sock is that it gives the cat time to get to know the other cat's scent in a safe and controlled way. The cat doing the sniffing can safely approach and I can do behavior modification without worry that one or both cats will get injured.

Take the mate to that sock and rub the resident cat to collect the facial pheromones and place that sock in the newcomer's sanctuary room.

You can do the sock exchange as often as needed. You also don't have to use clicker training – it's optional. If you prefer not to use it, then either offer a treat to the cat for any behavior you want to encourage. If you don't want to give treats then you can use a portion of his food. This method will only work if you feed on a schedule rather than having food available all the time. If you've always kept food down for free-choice feeding, this might be the time to reconsider going to scheduled meals. Food is a powerful tool for behavior modification but it won't work if the cat is never hungry.

When it comes to rewarding the cat's behavior as he comes upon the sock, keep in mind that the behavior doesn't have to be over-the-top-great; it can be a very neutral behavior such as the cat simply walking by the sock. He doesn't have to roll all over it in order for this to be a positive behavior. We're looking for any sign of relaxation or acceptance.

Now it's time for the newcomer to start investigating and exploring her new territory and spreading her scent around the environment. This has to be done safely so your resident cat will need to be placed in a separate room. Then open the door to the sanctuary room and let the newcomer check things out. As she walks around she'll be distributing her scent around the house. Do this exercise a couple of times a day.

Depending upon how reactive your resident cat is, you can also let him do some exploration of the sanctuary room. Put the newcomer in another room so she can explore safely (or place her in her carrier and put then put the carrier in another room) and then open the door to the sanctuary room so your resident kitty can check things out. Keep toys and treats handy for distraction. Whether to let your resident cat into the sanctuary room depends on how reactive he is so you'll have to be the judge here. For some cats, the sanctuary room of an unfamiliar cat is too over-the-top. For other cats, it's a chance to do a more in-depth scent investigation in a safe way.

STEP FOUR: PEEK-A-BOO

The next step involves opening the sanctuary room door just a crack during the feeding sessions. Feed the cats within sight of each other but far enough apart so they don't feel threatened. Do short sessions where you're offering a tiny amount of food and then close the sanctuary room door. It's better to do several short sessions a day that end on a positive note rather than attempting one long session where someone's tolerance is tested and a fight breaks out.



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If one cat routinely tries to bolt through the door, use a door stop to prevent the door from fully opening. You can also place a hook-and-eye closure on the door temporarily.

STEP FIVE: FULLY OPENED DOOR

When do you move onto this step? That's determined by your individual situation. There's no set time limit on how long you should stay in one phase before entering the next. If your cats aren't comfortable enough yet with eating on either side of the door when it's cracked open then you aren't ready to move onto to the fully opened door. Cat introductions shouldn't be rushed. Take each phase slowly and watch your cats' reactions to determine whether to move on.

When it comes time to open the sanctuary room door and you're worried that one cat may charge through or if one or both cats have already attempted that then you take an interim step by putting two or three baby gates across the entrance or install a temporary screen door (with secure pet screening). This will allow the cats to see each other without being able to charge. When the short feeding session is over, close the actual sanctuary room door again. You can even use just one baby gate during the feeding sessions if you're standing by the door ready to close it in case the worst happens. Even though the cats could easily hop over the gate, it can become a psychological barrier — just enough of one to relax the cats so they'll be comfortable to eat.

Keep doing sessions where the cats see each other while eating or getting treats. Gradually increase the exposure time.

Continue the Clicker Training

As you gradually increase the time the cats are exposed to each other, use clicker training and click and reward for any positive move. I tell my clients to click for any absence of an unwanted behavior. For example, if one cat breaks a stare or walks by the other cat without hissing or swatting — that deserves a reward. Again, even if you're not using clicker training, offer a food treat or verbal praise for any positive sign.

Use Playtime

Use interactive playtime as a way to help the cats have more positive experiences with each other. Do parallel play by having a fishing pole-type toy in each hand or enlist the help of another family member. This way, each cat will have their own toy. You don't want the cats competing for one toy or risk having a cat feeling intimidated by another cat. When you use two toys they get to enjoy the game while seeing the other cat in their peripheral vision.



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FINAL STEP: THE CATS' ENVIRONMENT

Set up the environment to encourage security, fun and plenty of territory for everyone. This will be very important when the cats are spending more time together and no longer separated. Use cat trees, perches and hideaways to create low, medium and high levels. If you increase the elevated territory in the environment you'll greatly increase the cats' perception of the amount of territory they feel they have. Vertical territory also helps a cat feel safe because he knows he can't get ambushed from behind and he has more visual ability to survey the environment. Some cats also use vertical territory as way to display status and it can often avert an actual physical confrontation.

Increase environmental enrichment to give the cats ways to divert their attention, release energy and have fun! Set up food-dispensing toys, puzzle toys and other opportunities for solo playtime. A bird feeder outside the window or some cat shelves for climbing and playing may divert attention and ease tension.

Have more than one litter box and more than one scratching post in the environment. The litter boxes and scratching posts shouldn't be in the same room because you don't want one cat having to cross another cat's path. Place important resource items in each cat's preferred area. This will give the cats more choice and often helps when it comes to a peaceful co-existence.

Continue to do the mealtime training where the cats eat in the presence of each other but keep in mind that they may never feel comfortable enough to eat out of the same bowl. It's a good idea to feed in separate bowls anyway because it'll train them for the possibility in the future of one cat having to be on a special nutritional program.

Remember ... Don't Rush

I always advise clients to go at the pace of the most stressed-out of the cats. If one cat is ready and willing to make friends but the other cat isn't, you have to go at the pace of the unhappy kitty. New cat introductions take time but it's worth it to increase the odds of helping these two cats develop a good relationship.