



Kitten Care 101



What *IS* Kitten Season?

- ▶ **WHEN:** March through October – time is subject to change
- ▶ Cats are seasonal breeders and breed during the warmer months. In Florida, the weather can be warmer sooner and last longer.
- ▶ Most female cats will reach sexual maturity around 5-6 months of age.
- ▶ Cats can have another heat cycle as soon as 4 weeks after their most recent litter, leading to several litters from one cat.
- ▶ Litters can vary in size from 1 to more than 10 kittens.

More kittens born = More kittens surrendered to shelters/rescues



Where Do HSNCF L Kittens Come From?

- ▶ We are not a public intake facility, so the majority of our kittens are transferred from Alachua County Animal Services and other shelters.
 - ▶ We intaked 1225 kittens last year, with 638 being bottle babies!
- ▶ In the rare instance that we do accept a kitten over the counter, the kitten will most likely be ill or a bottle baby kitten that the finder is not willing to care for.
 - ▶ We took in over the counter 255 bottle babies and 125 older kittens



The Importance of Kitten Fosters

- ▶ Because shelters are overwhelmed with kittens this time of year, kittens are at a high risk for euthanasia. When we send kittens into foster homes, it opens up space in our facility. **More space = more kittens pulled to safety!**
- ▶ Bottle baby kittens need around the clock care and cannot be left unattended in our facility overnight. Staff members will routinely take bottle babies into foster, but we can have several litters here at a time!
- ▶ Ill kittens will feel better quicker when they are recovering in a cozy foster home as opposed to an overcrowded shelter where they are exposed to other ill kitties.
- ▶ Kittens will receive socialization and “learn how to cat” in a home environment making them more adoptable!



Becoming a Kitten Foster



- ▶ The Foster Application can be filled out on the website, www.humanesocietyncfl.org.
- ▶ Fosters will fill out a Foster Release Form when they come in to pick up kittens. The Release Form will contain our contact information and Emergency Line Number.
- ▶ Our two foster coordinators are in charge of our Foster Program and will send out kittens into approved foster homes and schedule foster appointments.
- ▶ Fosters will need to provide their own transportation to get kittens to and from appointments.
- ▶ If kittens are available for adoption, they will need to be taken to PetSmart Adoption Events by the foster **EVERY** Saturday and Sunday until they are adopted. Otherwise, they will need to be returned to our facility.
- ▶ Fosters will need to provide a safe indoor place for kittens to grow up.
- ▶ We cover the cost of medical care and supplies. Fosters can pick up supplies as needed. Once a foster has finished fostering with us they need to return the provided basic supplies (ie litterboxes etc).

Communication



- ▶ **The BEST way to reach us is via email: foster@humanesocietyncfl.org.**
- ▶ We do have a Foster Emergency Line for after-hour emergencies. When you leave a voicemail on this number, our foster coordinators or a member of our Vet Team will reach out to you as soon as possible. If an emergency arises while we are open, COME IN! Our front office is open every day of the week except certain holidays.
- ▶ If you have minor concerns such as fleas you can send us an email, and we are happy to schedule an appointment for you to come in.
- ▶ Kittens will need to come in for updates every 2-3 weeks. We will contact you to schedule an appointment, but if you haven't heard from us, you can send us an email!
- ▶ Kittens will need to come in to be spayed or neutered when they reach 2 pounds, typically around 8 weeks of age. We will schedule their surgery when they come in for booster vaccines, but if they come of weight while in foster care you can email us and we will happily schedule them!
- ▶ If you need more supplies, you can drop by our lobby anytime between 10-6
- ▶ We do have a Foster Facebook Group, Humane Society of North Central Florida Fosters. This group is intended to help us spread the word about kittens in need of foster homes and provides a fun way to keep fosters connected. Please feel free to share stories, pictures, and advice in this group. You can ask general questions to other fosters about kitten care and helpful tips, but please call or email if you have serious concerns.
- ▶ PETSMART FOSTERS: We do expect fosters of available kittens to come to PetSmart EVERY weekend. If you are unable to attend an event, we must be notified! If you have an available kitten in foster and cannot attend these events, the kitten needs to be returned to us.
- ▶ If you can no longer foster the kittens, permanently or temporarily, please let us know as soon as possible, so we can make arrangements in our facility or line up another foster home. If you find a different foster yourself, even if just for a few days, please let us know! Temporary foster still have to fill out a release form and have access to our information and emergency number.

Help Them Get Adopted!

- ▶ You can send our Foster Coordinators pictures and bios that can be added to their profiles and kennel cards to be seen on our website and at PetSmart.
- ▶ Helpful bio information can include:
 - Litterbox Trained
 - Cat Friendly
 - Dog Friendly
 - Personality: playful, snuggly, etc.
- ▶ Spread the word! Share information on your own social media platforms, and encourage your friends and family to check our website, www.humanesocietyncfl.org, for adoptable cats and kittens.
- ▶ If you find someone who wants to adopt your foster kitten, the potential adopter should put in an application on our website and once approved can come by during Adoption Hours to finalize the adoption once the kitten is available. If you are unsure of your kitten's current status, we are happy to let you know! Typically, kittens become available as soon as they are healthy and spayed/neutered.
- ▶ If you decide to adopt your own kitten foster, you must finalize the adoption within the week your kitten becomes available for adoption. We do not place holds on adoptable animals.



Basic Kitten Care – Kittens with Momma Cats

- ▶ Mother cats are, generally, the best caretakers of kittens.
- ▶ The shelter is an extremely stressful place for a mother cat to raise her kittens, so if we do have a cat family come in, we will place them in a quiet foster home as soon as possible.
- ▶ The foster will need to support the mother cat and make sure she is properly caring for the kittens, a back up mother to the mother so to speak!
- ▶ The family should have a small, quiet area (a spare bedroom or bathroom) with a comfortable, warm nest (blankets, large pet bed, large, open carrier, etc). You can use a heating pad to keep the area warm.
- ▶ The area should be small enough to provide the kittens easy access to mom but large enough for the mother cat to have a break when needed.
- ▶ Mother cats should have access to a litterbox, food, and water. Mother cats can eat dry kitten food while they are nursing kittens but may need supplemental wet food especially if she has a large litter of kittens to care for.



Basic Kitten Care – Kittens with Momma Cats

- ▶ The foster should monitor the family and look for signs of rejection. What is rejection?
 - ▶ Rejection may occur for several reasons including the mother cat being stressed, the kitten being ill or having a birth deformity, large litter size, and the mother cat being immature.
- ▶ Watch momma cat for signs that she is irritated, distracted or distressed. Cats should snuggle their kittens to keep them warm, clean them, and feed them. If you find that she is not accomplishing this with one or more of the kittens, she may be rejecting them.
- ▶ If a mother cat rejects a kitten, the foster will need to intervene to ensure the kitten is getting the proper care.
- ▶ The foster should also monitor the mother's milk, she should be lightly swollen with milk around her teats but not painfully so



Basic Kitten Care – Kittens with Momma Cats

- ▶ Sometimes momma cats can be angry or feisty! This does not necessarily mean that they are feral however.
- ▶ If mom is lashing out or even attacking, give her space as this usually means that they are stressed and upset or being overprotective
- ▶ Sometimes mom cats start nice and get angry as the kittens get older, it usually means that we should start weaning them at an early age and remove them from mom as soon as we safely can.
- ▶ Try to ensure mom and family have as much privacy as possible!



Basic Kitten Care – Kittens with Momma Cats

- ▶ Weaning can take anywhere from a week to 2 weeks typically
- ▶ Begin around 4-6 weeks of age dependent on litter size and moms' temperament
 - ▶ Some momma's will start weaning the kittens on their own and won't require encouragement.
 - ▶ Large litter sizes or low milk production may require early weaning
- ▶ Start by separating kittens for about 4 hours at first, make sure they have access to warmies, water and a slurry made of pate wet food and KMR
- ▶ Increase the time mom spends away from her kittens, after about a week and a half you should be able to have her away from them during the day and together at night.
 - ▶ Mom may need warm compresses if she is painfully full of milk



Basic Kitten Care – Kittens with Momma Cats

- ▶ Medical Issues to watch out for with momma cats
 - ▶ Diarrhea - mom is stimulating and cleaning up after the kittens, so frequent dewormings may be necessary
 - ▶ Dehydration - can be serious or life threatening if feeding a large litter
 - ▶ URI/sniffles - stress and nursing can cause a weakened immune system, and can spread to the kittens
 - ▶ Weight loss/lack of appetite
 - ▶ Bleeding the first week after birth is normal, but watch for signs of labor, restlessness, lack of appetite, excessive licking: if seen alert us as soon as possible!



Basic Kitten Care – Bottle Babies



- ▶ **Age:** Newborn – ~3-4 weeks (aka neonatal)
- ▶ Bottle baby kittens need around the clock care.
- ▶ Bottle babies can be kept in a carrier, large (open) box, or another quiet, confined space. Kittens do not travel far when they are this little!
- ▶ **Bottle baby kittens MUST be kept warm. Bottle baby kittens cannot regulate their own body temperature and need our help!** Heating pads, heating disks, and rice socks can be placed under towels and blankets. Heating pads are the best option (if disks and rice socks lose warmth, kittens can get cold). The majority of the kitten's area should remain comfortably warm, not hot.
- ▶ Bottle baby kittens need to be kept clean.
 - Original Dawn Dish Soap can be used for baths – it also kills fleas!
 - Baby/Kitten Wipes to clean face and body (use unscented)
 - Wash/change the bedding every couple days
- ▶ Use gloves/wash your hands before handling kittens.

Basic Kitten Care – Bottle Babies

Bathroom Business

- ▶ Mother cats assist kittens with bathroom business, but when a mother cat is not present, the foster must assist. This is called stimulating.
- ▶ To stimulate a kitten to go potty, use a baby wipe or soft, absorbable material and gently rub the kitten's genital area.
- ▶ Kittens should be stimulated before being fed. Kittens will usually pee after being stimulated but will only poop ~1/day (every 2 days is not uncommon)
- ▶ Kitten stool will usually be yellow/brown in color and soft. Diarrhea should be reported as this can become life threatening in young kittens.
- ▶ Constipation or super hard stool can indicate that the formula is too concentrated.



Basic Kitten Care – Bottle Babies

Kitten Milk Replacer

- ▶ Kittens should NOT be given cow's milk.
- ▶ Kittens can be given goat's milk, if available, but we use Kitten Milk Replacer (KMR).
- ▶ KMR can be purchased as pre-made liquid or powder. We almost always use powder.
- ▶ When preparing KMR, stir or shake **1** part powdered KMR into **2** parts warm water.
- ▶ KMR should be comfortably warm. Test the temperature on your wrist or arm.
- ▶ KMR is only good for 24 hours after being mixed, and must be kept refrigerated.
- ▶ Toss out mixed KMR if it sits out for more than 30-40 minutes.
- ▶ How can you warm up cold KMR safely?
- ▶ Make sure and stir it thoroughly.. There should be no clumps.



Basic Kitten Care – Bottle Babies



Bottles and Tools

- ▶ Kittens need to be fed from a bottle with a nipple designed for kittens.
- ▶ Cut an X-Shape in the top of the nipple with scissors or make another small puncture that will allow a slow, steady flow of formula to come out when the bottle is gently squeezed.
- ▶ There are Nursing Kits that have different size nipples and cleaning brushes.
- ▶ Syringes and Miracle Nipples can also be used to feed kittens.

Basic Kitten Care – Bottle Babies



Feeding Kittens

- ▶ The amount of KMR will increase and the frequency will decrease as kittens age. There are feeding charts for how much and how often kittens should eat on the side of KMR cans, in Foster Care Guides, and on the Kitten Lady Website, www.kittenlady.org.

kitten weight and feeding chart

AGE	WEIGHT	AMOUNT PER FEEDING	SCHEDULE
0-1 week	50-150 grams	2-6 ml	Every 2 hours
1-2 weeks	150-250 grams	6-10 ml	Every 2-3 hours
2-3 weeks	250-350 grams	10-14 ml	Every 3-4 hours
3-4 weeks	350-450 grams	14-18 ml	Every 4-5 hours
4-5 weeks	450-550 grams	18-22 ml	Every 5-6 hours
5-8 weeks	550-850 grams	(weaning; offer ample wet food)	Every 6 hours

Basic Kitten Care – Bottle Babies

Feeding Kittens

- ▶ Kittens should ALWAYS be fed belly down – do NOT feed kittens like you would a human baby!
- ▶ Kittens should be warm before being fed – NEVER FEED A COLD KITTEN!
- ▶ Use one hand to gently hold the kitten's head to support his or her neck.
- ▶ Use the other hand to guide the nipple into the kitten's mouth. The kitten should, ideally, latch onto the nipple. Lightly squeeze the bottle to start a steady flow of formula and encourage the kitten to latch.
- ▶ Feed the kitten until he or she is full or until the appropriate amount of food for his or her age range has been consumed.
- ▶ Be patient! Aspiration occurs when a kitten inhales formula into the lungs. The result can be fatal!





Basic Kitten Care – Bottle Babies

▶ Fussy Bottle Feeders/Trying to Get the “Perfect Latch”:

- Try a different size nipple/miracle nipples
 - Provide a soft stuffed toy
 - Dab of Karo syrup
 - Kittens can be gently restrained with a blanket/cover the eyes (purrito wrap or barbershop wrap)
 - Check the temperature and flow of the formula
 - Stimulate and try again after a few minutes
 - Rubbing the face with a cloth or toothbrush can simulate a mother's tongue and help them feel prepared to eat
 - Feed in the crate with other siblings, some kittens will nurse better due to competitive nursing instinct, and can be comforting!
 - Feeling a heartbeat/body heat can help encourage them to eat
- ▶ The Kitten Lady website has tons of helpful tips and videos for bottle feeding! The last two pictures are from her website.

Basic Kitten Care – Syringe Feeding

- ▶ Always be slow and careful!
- ▶ Monitor that the kitten is swallowing
- ▶ Syringes can be re-used short-term, however remember to thoroughly clean between uses
 - ▶ Use dawn dish soap to clean, hot water and bottle brush if you have one
- ▶ Toss out syringes daily or every other day, as washing and general use can weaken the plunger, increasing the risk of it slipping and spilling excessive milk into the kittens' mouth.



Basic Kitten Care – Gruel and Wet Food Babies

- ▶ **Age:** 4ish – 6ish weeks
- ▶ Kittens should still have access to a cozy, warm space, but they will be sleeping less and will begin wandering around and playing!
- ▶ Kittens will usually start going potty without assistance around 4-5 weeks of age. A shallow litterbox can be introduced (cardboard trays work well as temporary litterboxes), but kittens may still need to be stimulated. Not all kittens will immediately get the hang of the litterbox, so stimulate until you are sure the kitten is going potty without assistance.
- ▶ Kittens should have access to a shallow water dish.
- ▶ Around 4-5 weeks of age, kittens can start being weaned onto wet food. KMR can be mixed with pate-style wet food to form a “slurry” or “gruel.” KMR should be warm.
- ▶ **Feeding:**
 - Kittens 4-5 weeks: every 5-6 hours
 - Kittens 5-8 weeks: every 6-8 hours



Basic Kitten Care – Gruel and Wet Food Babies

Feeding

- ▶ While some kittens are very excited to start wet food, others may need more convincing. You can use your finger (gloves are recommended), spoon, or syringe to guide kittens to the gruel.
- ▶ As kittens age, you can use less KMR in the mix and more pate-style wet food.
- ▶ By 6 weeks of age, kittens should be weaned off KMR and eating wet food.
- ▶ Kittens at this stage are messy and will get wet food everywhere – keep them and their area clean! Puppy Pads or bed sheets will make your life easier around this time.



Basic Kitten Care – Dry Food Babies

- ▶ **Age:** 6ish weeks +
- ▶ Kittens should have the hang of the litterbox, but regardless, stimulating is no longer necessary.
- ▶ Kittens can be introduced to dry food around 6 weeks of age. If kittens are not nibbling on dry food by 7 weeks, you can mix a little bit of wet food in the dry food to get the ball rolling! We want kittens eating dry food by 8 weeks.
- ▶ Kittens should have access to water at all times.
- ▶ Healthy kittens at this age can be left unattended overnight.
- ▶ At ~8 weeks of age, when the kitten weighs 2lbs, the kitten is ready to be spayed or neutered. As soon as kittens have been spayed or neutered, they are ready to find their forever homes!



Basic Kitten Care – Litterbox Training

Litter types

- ▶ Non-clumping: better for very young kittens up to about 8 weeks of age
 - ▶ Clumping clay litter: can get stuck in toes/paws, and when licked clean while grooming can cause digestive issues and blockages in younger kittens
- ▶ Pelletized litter - usually pine pellets, and best used for kittens with eye issues or surgery, we will often buy a few bags of this litter from a feed store and give out case-by-case
- ▶ Clumping: clay litter - donated to us most often

Litter box training tips

- ▶ Place kitten in litter box
- ▶ Put stool into litter box to attract kitten
- ▶ “Cat attract” cat litter
- ▶ Wider and more shallow litter boxes
- ▶ More litter boxes
- ▶ Puppy pads/sheets
- ▶ Move the litter box



Basic Kitten Care – Socializing Kittens



- ▶ Kitten socialization should include pleasant exposure to various environments, sounds, people, and other animals. Adopters are often looking for kittens that have been raised with dogs and other cats!
- ▶ ALWAYS use caution and do slow introductions before introducing your foster kittens to a new animal, especially dogs. If you have other animals in the home, we are happy to walk you through what slow introductions entail when you pick up the kittens!
- ▶ Handle your foster kitten often. Bottle babies will spend the majority of the time sleeping, but it is important to spend a lot of time loving on kittens as they age.
- ▶ Remember, young kittens are fragile, so be gentle and handle with care!
- ▶ You can reward kittens by using “kitten-approved” reinforcers, such as special treats, toys, and lots of chin scratches!



Basic Kitten Care - #hissesgetkisses



- ▶ Some young kittens we get in over the counter may need extra socialization
 - ▶ These kittens tend to be 4 weeks and up
- ▶ Keep them in a small space like a bathroom at first
- ▶ Food is a huge motivator in gaining trust, start by sitting nearby while they eat
- ▶ Kittens are naturally curious and playful, once they relax and start becoming playful introduce a feather toy on a string/stick - this allows you to start engaging with them without being too close. As the kittens start playing with the toy and become focused on it have them pounce and play on it closer and closer to you.
- ▶ For “shut down” kittens, do forced snuggles and quietly sit with them in your lap for long periods of time - scratching the chin releases a calming scent from the scent glands located there and will help relax them.

On to Medical!



©Warren Photographic

Fading Kitten Syndrome



shutterstock.com • 14125273

- ▶ A collection of symptoms resulting in “failure to thrive.”
 - ▶ As scary as it sounds, only a super low number of kitties that come through our program don’t make it
- ▶ Fading Kitten Syndrome can occur several days to several weeks after birth, but bottle babies are especially at risk.
- ▶ Symptoms can include:
 - Diarrhea/Dehydration
 - Weight loss
 - Muscle wasting
 - Lethargy
 - Unable/refusal to nurse
- ▶ Unfortunately, in some cases (usually bottle babies) there are no symptoms, and can come as a shock to staff and fosters.
- ▶ If you have ANY concerns about the health of your foster kitten, contact us immediately! If an emergency arises during business hours, please do not hesitate to bring the kitten in

Non-Emergencies - What Does this Mean?

These symptoms may appear serious, but normally this category constitutes of kittens that can wait until we are open to be seen by a vet. Still email the foster email to let them know what is going on and to set up an appointment..

MULTIPLE symptoms may entail an emergency however!

- ▶ Occasional Sneezing
- ▶ Clear Ocular Discharge/Swollen eyes
- ▶ Clear Nasal Discharge
- ▶ Constipated/bloated stomach
- ▶ Diarrhea for the past 24 hours
- ▶ Mild Weight Loss/Recent Lack of Appetite
- ▶ Low body temperature
- ▶ FLEAS



Emergencies - When to Call or Come In

These symptoms need *immediate* vet care and should be brought in as soon as possible.. If it is after hours call the emergency line and you may be sent to an after hour vet we use.

- ▶ Continuous vomiting for more than 12 hours
- ▶ Bleeding of any kind (from nose or in stool)
- ▶ ANY trauma (hit by car, dropped, unconscious etc)
- ▶ Difficulty breathing or agonal
- ▶ Non-responsive
- ▶ Prolapsed rectum
- ▶ Fever/high temperature more than 103 degrees



The following individual symptoms may not need to go to an emergency vet but in combination may qualify

- ▶ Diarrhea for more than 24-36 hours/scalding
- ▶ Not eaten for 1 day/loss of appetite
- ▶ Dehydration/lethargy
- ▶ Decreased body temperature

Emergencies - What Can You Do from Home?

- ▶ Make sure and have a clear and concise list of symptoms before calling the emergency line or emailing! The more information we have the better the decisions we can make for the kitten.
- ▶ “Crashing” Kittens/lethargy etc
 - ▶ Take the temperature of the kitten - temperature is taken rectally
 - ▶ Normal temperature should be 99.5-102.5 F
 - ▶ *Remember: Do not try to feed a cold kitten!*
 - ▶ Check for dehydration - lightly scruff the back of the kittens neck and let go, if the skin remains “tented” and slowly relaxes down it is dehydrated.
 - ▶ Karo syrup - rub onto gums while kitten is warming up.
 - ▶ Lack of Appetite - syringe feed carefully, avoid aspiration
 - ▶ Warmies - what can you use?
 - ▶ Discouraging inappropriate suckling



Emergencies - URI in kittens

- ▶ Sick/Sniffly kittens (generally 4 weeks and up) - a couple days of clear nasal discharge and occasional sneezing is ok, most immune systems will fight it off
 - ▶ Severe nasal discharge (green or bloody)- wipe nose clean with wet warm washcloth. May need to gently “unclog” nose if it has dried over! A kitten that cannot breath will usually not eat much and will be lethargic.
 - ▶ Severe ocular discharge - eyes swollen shut. Again, use a wet warm clean washcloth, you may need to hold against the eye for a few minutes to soften the dried discharge enough to wipe it off. Do NOT “pull” sealed eyelids open! Our vet team will usually prescribe an eye ointment given twice a day for 7 days.
 - ▶ Lack of appetite - sometimes with sickly kittens we will send home A/D. This is a wet food that is specifically formulated for sick animals with low appetites. We often recommend mixing in some warm water to make a smelly slurry!
 - ▶ Doxycycline - after we have diagnosed a kitten with a URI we may give you doxy to give them. This is a pale yellow liquid that is light sensitive and must be kept refrigerated. Vet team/foster team can show you how to give it orally if you need to be shown!
 - ▶ Give them plenty of TLC and cuddles!

Emergencies - Other Medical

- ▶ Diarrhea - light brown/tan vs pasty pink
 - ▶ Scalding/irritated rump - you may get prescribed an ointment to apply to it a couple times a day.
 - ▶ ID - you may be given a special wet and/or dry food called I/D, feed the kitten strictly this until it has firm stool for 2-3 days then wean it off of it
 - ▶ If I/D does not work you may also be given probiotics - add into a small portion of wet food and watch to ensure the kitten eats it before feeding it more of its regular food.
 - ▶ Dewormer - given orally for up to 5 days depending on which one our vet prescribed. Generally you will see panacur or strongid/marquis
- ▶ Ear Mites/ear infections
 - ▶ Watch for kittens with tilted heads or black “crud” in their ears, they may also be scratching at their ears incessantly, sometimes until they scratch the outsides of their ears raw
 - ▶ Head may be tilted or ear sideways
 - ▶ How to give ear meds



Emergencies - Other Medical

- ▶ **Mystery Spots!!!**
 - ▶ Watch for hair loss especially on the ears, face, tail and paws - what should you do once you see some spots?
 - ▶ What are Woods Lamp and DTM's?
 - ▶ Your kitten tested positive for ringworm - what does this mean for you?



Compassion Fatigue

- ▶ “Compassion Fatigue is a state experienced by those helping people or animals in distress; it is an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create a secondary traumatic stress for the helper.”
- ▶ We are here for you! Caring for and losing kittens can be extremely stressful. If you need a break from fostering, we understand!
- ▶ Take care of yourself 😊
- ▶ Remember, **YOU ARE SAVING LIVES!**

<http://www.compassionfatigue.org/>



**Phoenix, Pheasant, and Phantom
the kittens were fostered by our
Adoption Coordinator, Sarah, last
Kitten Season.**



These kittens and hundreds of other foster kittens found forever homes last Kitten Season, and with your help, even more will this year!





From everyone at HSNCFL,

THANK YOU 🥰

