

Guide to Raising Orphan Kittens

Welcome to the team of dedicated Kitten Rescue Volunteers! Kittens under the age of 8 weeks need a mother- either a cat or a human surrogate. They are extremely vulnerable in a shelter environment. Placing them into a foster home within 24 hours is a chance to save their lives. The following guidelines will help you with the care of your kittens and will help you understand the policies and procedures of the foster care program. Please keep the following items on this list in mind before you agree to bring foster animals into your home.

- Every foster kitten will receive flea and parasite medication along with vaccination against commonly occurring viral diseases. Even with these safe guards in place, a foster animal could potentially carry illness into your home that could affect your resident animals' health.
- All kittens have been given a flea preventative before they enter your home. Please monitor for fleas since 80% of adult fleas live in the environment.
- For the safety of everyone involved, young children should not handle the foster kittens.
- You should **wash your hands** with soap and water after handling the foster kittens, fecal matter or litter boxes. This will help decrease the chances of spreading disease. If the foster animal contacts your clothes, you may also want to change your clothing.
- To protect other cats, foster animals should be separated from other household pets. You may want to consider confining them to an easily cleanable room (such as a bathroom or laundry room). Please prohibit the sharing of food and water bowls, litter boxes and toys. Please clean this area before new kittens are introduced.
- Daily cleaning with a 1:32 dilution of bleach (1 part bleach to 32 parts water) is recommended to decrease the risk of infectious disease. Remove all organic material and fecal debris before cleaning.
- It is best to have only litter at a time (rear the kittens in cohort groups) rather than constantly adding new kittens in with others. Keeping them in cohorts allows you to prevent disease mixing among cohorts and to disinfect between groups.
- It is possible even with these precautions that resident cats could be exposed to mild infections such as URI. Ask the foster coordinator for more information if this is a concern

Supplies you will need before you bring home kittens

- **Box or carrier**
You may use the same carrier that was supplied to you. It will provide a familiar-smelling, dark, quiet home for your foster kitties. You are also welcome to use a cardboard box of any size to create the same affect.
- **Newspapers**
Using newspapers instead of cloth towels, will help decrease the risk of contamination.
- **Big litter box**
- **Cat litter**
Any type of litter including pine pellets/shredding, shredded newspaper, or non-clumping variety of litter will be fine.

- **Water bowls**
Heavy and impossible to tip. Should be stainless steel or porcelain/ceramic (try not to use plastic). Plastic is difficult to disinfect because it is so porous.
- **Food bowls (at least 2)**
Use one for free feeding dry food. The other for canned food. You can use TV dinner trays, paper plates or whatever you have; any relatively flat plate or saucer will do.
- **Food**
You should have both dry and canned kitten food (any brand for adults or kittens).
- **Heating pad**
"Unless the nursery is at least 85° and your kittens are 2 weeks or older, you need to supply extra heat. **BE SURE THAT THE KITTENS HAVE ROOM TO MOVE AWAY FROM THE HEAT** (leave room for mom if she is with them). For instance, if you are using a heating pad, place it under several towels, and make sure that it covers only half of the floor area of their box. The heating pad should be on "low" or "medium" to prevent overheating the kittens. Make sure to cover any electrical cords as well, so that the kittens are not tempted to play and bite on them.
- **Clean towels and blankets**
- **Toys**
Plastic toys (that can withstand bleaching) are good to reuse for new litters. Kittens can also amuse themselves with empty toilet paper rolls. Empty 12-pack cardboard soda boxes are good for an inventive number of games. Clean tennis balls, old stuffed socks, caps from soda bottles and paper bags are marvelous toys as well. Young kittens do not respond to catnip, but mom will like it. Kittens will also "play" with anything they can find. Drapes, lamp shades and crystal ornaments are as much fun as the toys listed above.

Veterinary Care Schedule:

In order to keep your kitten fosters healthy, we would like to schedule a recheck examination every two weeks. These examinations will last about 15-20 minutes. Our staff veterinarian will evaluate the kittens, take an accurate weight, vaccinate, and apply flea and parasite control. This will help keep the kittens healthy and safe during their development process.

General care of kittens

1. Young kittens should be kept in a large box or cat carrier lined with a towel or newspaper for easy cleaning. It is very important to keep the kittens warm, and a heating pad is ideal for this. The heating pad should be placed under HALF of the towel (so they can move away from the heat if they need to) and set on "low." The more kittens in your litter, the better able they will be to keep warm by sleeping together in a heap. Small litters and singletons need more help keeping warm. Keep kittens away from heaters or cold drafts.
2. If kittens are not urinating and defecating on their own (when they are less than 2 weeks old), they will need to be stimulated. This should be done every few hours (often right after feeding) by gently rubbing a warm wet paper towel on the kittens anus and genital area. They will pee and poop into the paper towel.
3. Keep kittens clean. A mother works hard to keep her kittens clean, grooming them thoroughly to remove any sticky messes they may get into, such as kitten food or feces.

Keeping kittens clean in the absence of their mother can be a messy business, but it is extremely important.

4. A flea comb will get rid of dried feces in the fur. You can also stroke a kitten with a warm, damp cloth, using short strokes to mimic a mother's tongue. Be sure to dry him well so he can't chill. Sometimes cat litter and dried feces can become caked on the underside of the tail or between the kitten's toes. This may be softened and removed by dipping the kitten's back end into a basin of warm water. Many kittens will not even notice that they are partially wet, but some will protest violently, and scramble to escape, so beware of sharp little claws!

Proper socialization

Any introductions of cats to other cats or cats to dogs should be made with great care and under constant supervision. Part of your job is to convince the kittens that humans are kind and loving. Outgoing, friendly kittens can be cuddled and played with freely. It is also important that an adjustment period of 2-3 days is given so they may become familiar to their new environment.

Shy and Feral kittens are a special challenge to socialize. The earlier feral kittens separate from their mother, the more likely they are to adapt to people. Even at 6 weeks, some kittens can act like little tiger cubs. If your kittens are fearful and run away when you approach, try sitting or lying quietly on the floor near them and let them come to you. Spend time quietly in their presence to get them accustomed to your company. Stroke them and talk to them gently while they are eating to further reinforce positive associations.

Also, it is useless to punish a "naughty" kitten. Their little minds do not grasp deductive reasoning. Try distracting a mischievous kitten with something else until he forget whatever he was doing (it should not take long!).

Maintaining healthy growth of kittens

Commercially available kitten formula should be given at the kitten's body temperature, about 100 degrees. Once the can is opened or the powder reconstituted, unused formula should be kept refrigerated and discarded after 24 hours. **NEVER** give a kitten cow's milk (or anything else besides the specified formula).

It is best to feed the kittens one-by-one, and on a counter-top - this allows them to feed with all four feet on the counter, and their heads level, much as they would if they were nursing from their mom. Some kittens prefer to nurse standing on their hind legs while holding the bottle. They will require a little support from you in this position. Gently open a kitten's mouth with one finger and place the tip of the nipple on his tongue. If he won't eat, try stroking him. Pull lightly on the bottle to encourage vigorous sucking. Be sure to tilt the bottle up slightly to prevent the kitten from inhaling too much air. Do not force the kitten to nurse, or allow him to nurse too fast. Avoid feeding a kitten while he is cradled on his back - if the fluid goes down the wrong way, it may end up in his lungs.

After each feeding, the kitten should be burped. Hold him against your shoulder and gently massage his back or pat it lightly.

Overfeeding is as dangerous as underfeeding kittens! Keep an eye on your kittens at feeding time and monitor how much each is eating. If you see signs of diarrhea, separate them until you find out which one is sick. Your kittens will generally regulate their own food intake. If they need more food, they may whine or suck on their litter mates. A good indication that they are getting enough to eat is the size of their bellies - they should be filled out after a meal, but not bloated. The next section of this protocol discusses amounts of food required at various stages of kitten hood.

Expectations and care required at each life-stage:

WEIGHT CHART
AGE WEIGHT
At Birth 3.0 - 3.7 oz (90 - 110 grams)
Three - Four Weeks 11.7 - 15 oz (350 - 450 grams)
Eight Weeks 1.7 - 2.0 lbs (800 - 900 grams)
Kittens should gain 7 - 10 percent of their birth weight each day (10 - 15 grams).
A kitten must weigh 2 pounds and be 8 weeks old before it is adoptable.

<1 Week of age

- **Feeding:** Bottle feed 1/2 tablespoon formula every 2 - 3 hours. If the queen is with the kittens, they should nurse vigorously and compete for nipples. Newborns can nurse up to 45 minutes at a time. Be sure to watch kittens nursing at least once a day, if mom cat will permit it. Check that everyone is nursing and that there isn't too much jockeying for position. A great deal of activity and crying could indicate a problem with milk flow, quality or availability. When mom cat reenters the box, there should be some fussing for only a few minutes before everyone has settled down to serious nursing.
- **Environment:** The temperature of the nest box should be nice and warm: 85-90 degrees. Chilling is the number one danger to newborn kittens.
- **Behavior & Training :** At one week of age, the kittens should weigh 4 oz., and should be handled minimally. Kittens will sleep 90% of the time and eat the other 10%

1-2 Weeks of age

- **Feeding:** Bottle feed formula per manufacturer's instruction every 2 - 3 hours until kittens are full but not bloated- usually kittens will consume at least 1/2 tablespoon of formula per feeding.
- **Environment:** Floor temperature of the nest box should be nice and warm: 80-85 degrees.

- **Behavior & Training :** Kittens at 2 weeks of age will weigh about 7 ounces. Ear canals open between 5 and 8 days. Eyes will open between 8 and 14 days. They open gradually, usually starting to open from the nose outward. All kittens are born with blue eyes, and initially no pupils can be distinguished from the irises - the eyes will appear solid dark blue.
- Healthy kittens will be round and warm, with pink skin. If you pinch them gently, their skin should spring back. When you pick a kitten up, it should wiggle energetically and when you put it down near the mom it should crawl back to her. Healthy kittens seldom cry.

2-3 Weeks of age

- **Feeding:** Bottle feed formula per manufacturer's instruction every 2 - 3 hours until kittens are full but not bloated- usually kittens will consume at least 1/2 tablespoon of formula per feeding.
- **Environment:** Floor temperature of the nest box should be nice and warm: 75-80 degrees.
- **Behavior & Training :** If there is a queen, she will begin to spend larger periods of time out of the nest, though she will not go far from it.
- Kittens will weigh about 10 ounces. Their ears will become erect. Kittens begin to crawl around day 18. Kittens can stand by day 21. Kittens will begin to play with each other, biting ears, tails, and paws even before their teeth have come in. Their milk teeth are cut during this period. Kittens learn to sit and touch objects with their paws.
- Kittens begin their socialization phase - they will be strongly influenced by the behavior of their mother for the next six weeks. To further socialize kittens, increase the amount of handling, and get them accustomed to human contact. It is important not to expose them to anything frightening; children may seem intimidating and should be supervised closely while visiting to ensure gentle handling.

3-4 Weeks of age

- **Feeding:** Bottle feed formula per manufacturer's instruction every 2 - 3 hours until kittens are full but not bloated- usually kittens will consume at least 1/2 tablespoon of formula per feeding. At this stage kittens may start lapping from a bowl.
- **Environment:** Floor temperature of the nest box should be 70-75 degrees from this point onward.
- **Behavior & Training:** Kittens will weigh about 13 ounces. Adult eye color will begin to appear, but may not reach final shade for another 9 to 12 weeks. Kittens begin to see well and their eyes begin to look and function like adult cats' eyes. Kittens will start cleaning themselves, though their mother will continue to do most of the serious cleaning.

4-5 Weeks of age

- **Feeding:** 3 tablespoons (1-1/2 oz.) formula every 8 hours. They can usually drink and eat from a saucer by 4 weeks. Weaning should be done gradually. Introduce them to solid food by offering warmed canned food, mixed with a little water into a gruel, in a shallow

saucer. You can begin by placing one kitten by the plate of canned food gruel. Her littermates will probably copy her and do the same. But without mom around to show them, many kittens do not have a clue about feeding time. The kittens will walk in it, slide in it, and track it all over the place. Sometimes one will begin lapping right away, and in its anxiety to consume as much as it can, it will often bite the edge of the plate. Some will prefer to lick the gruel from your fingers. Some will start licking your finger after they sniff it, then slowly lower your finger to the plate and hold it to the food. The kittens need to learn to eat with their heads bent down. Sometimes it takes two or three meals before they catch on. If they do not seem interested enough to even sniff your finger, try gently opening the kittens' mouth and rubbing a little of the food on their teeth.

- If there is a queen present, she will usually begin weaning by discouraging her kittens from nursing; however, some cats (particularly those with small litters) will allow nursing until the kittens are old enough for permanent homes. Some nursing activity is the feline equivalent of thumb-sucking, that is, for comfort only. Even if kittens appear to be nursing, they may not be getting all the nutrition they need from mom. Make sure they are eating food and gaining weight.
- Be sure that the kittens have access to fresh water in a low, stable bowl.
- **Behavior & Training:** Begin litter training at four weeks. Use a low box with one inch of litter. Do not expose the kittens to the clumping variety of litter, as it is harmful if ingested. After each feeding, place the kitten in the box, take his paw, and gently scratch the litter. Be patient! He may not remember to do this every time, or may forget where to find the litter box, but he will learn quickly. Be sure to give the kittens lots of praise when they first start using their boxes. Most will use it from the start, but like other babies, might make an occasional mistake. It is a good idea to confine the kittens to a relatively small space, because the larger the area the kittens have to play in, the more likely they will forget where the litter box is. Keep the litter box clean and away from their food.

5-6 Weeks of age

- **Feeding:** Feed gruel 4 times a day. Thicken gruel gradually. Introduce dry food and water. If you are fostering a litter with their mother, continue weaning. Some kittens will not like canned food. For reluctant eaters, try mixing any meat-flavored human baby food (without garlic or onion powder) with a little water. The meat flavor is often more appealing to the picky eaters.
- **Behavior & Training:** At about five weeks, kittens can start to roam around the room, under supervision. They will weigh 1 pound and the testicles of male kittens will become visible. The strongest, most curious kitten will figure out how to get out of the nest. The others will quickly follow.
- **Play with your kittens daily!** It is a good idea to wear long sleeves and pants, as they can play roughly and their claws are sharp. If you sit on the floor they will play "King of the Mountain," using your knees and shoulders as vantage points. This game is lots of fun and good exercise for them. Some kittens may be fearful at first; do not force yourself upon them. You can get them used to your presence by sitting in the middle of the room making phone calls; this way they hear your voice but do not feel threatened. Make them an important part of your household activities; accustom them to the sounds of the TV, vacuum cleaner and other household sounds.

6-7 Weeks of age

- **Feeding:** Should be eating canned and dry food well. Feed the kittens at least three meals daily. If one kitten appears food-possessive, use a second dish and leave plenty of food out so that everyone is eating. Bear in mind that a kitten at this age has a stomach roughly the size of an acorn, so, although they may not eat much at a single sitting, they like to eat at frequent intervals throughout the day.
- **Behavior & Training:** By this time, you have "mini-cats." They will wash themselves, use scratching posts, play games with each other, their toys, and you, and many will come when you call them. Be sure to reintroduce them to their litter box after meals, during play sessions, and after naps. These are the usual times that kittens need to use the litter box.

7-8 Weeks of age

- **Feeding:** Offer wet food 3 - 4 times a day (each kitten will be eating a little over one can of food per day). Leave down a bowl of dry kibble and water for them to eat and drink at will. If you have a litter with a mom cat, she should only be allowing brief nursing sessions, if any. DO NOT feed the kitten table scraps.

8+ Weeks of age

- **Feeding:** Offer wet food 2 times a day. Leave down a bowl of dry kibble and water for them to eat and drink at will.
- **Behavior & Training:** By the end of the 8th week, kittens should weigh 2 pounds each. Congratulations! They are now old enough for early spay/neuter and adoption!

Keeping kittens healthy & recognizing common problems

A healthy kitten has bright eyes, a sleek coat, and a plump belly. Younger kittens are content to sleep between feedings. As they approach 8 weeks they begin to spend more time playing. Normal body temperature for a kitten is 100 - 102.5. Unfortunately, kittens do become ill and sometimes die while being fostered, so it is important to take steps to prevent disease and treat it appropriately as soon as it appears.

A note about treating your kitten: In general, if you need to treat a kitten, try to medicate him in an impersonal way. If you hold the kitten in your lap to medicate him, he will associate being picked up with being medicated, and think the worst every time you go to cuddle him. It is better to put the kitten up on a countertop, maybe wrapping him in a towel to administer medication.

Recognizing illness

If you one of your foster kittens becomes sick, please contact the Alachua County Humane Society Foster Coordinator. They will be able to answer any questions you may have and be able to contact the staff veterinarian if needed.

One of the first steps you can take to evaluate your kitten's health is to take his temperature. To take the temperature of your kitten, you will need a regular human thermometer and some KY Jelly. The wipe KY on the thermometer and insert just the tip into the kitten's anus. Hold it there for at least a minute and then read. If the kitten's temperature is over 103 or under 99, please contact the foster coordinator.

Abnormal signs to watch for in a kitten:

- Runny discharge from the eyes or nose, coughing, or sneezing.
 - If the kitten continues to have a normal appetite and is full of energy, this is not considered an emergency. This is most likely due to a complex called Feline Upper respiratory syndrome.
 - Please contact the foster the coordinator during business hours to ensure that no further care is needed.
- Lack of appetite
- Lethargy (lack of energy)
- Diarrhea lasting more than 3 or 4 feedings
- Vomiting
- Weight loss

Emergencies requiring immediate veterinary attention

- Continuous diarrhea with blood present
- Continuous vomiting
- Bleeding of any kind nose, urine, stool
- Any trauma: hit by a car, dropped, limping, stepped on, unconscious.
- Difficulty breathing.
- A kitten that does not respond or that hasn't eaten for more than a day.

Specific disease conditions in kittens

Diarrhea

Diarrhea is common in kittens and be caused by parasites, viruses, bacteria, food changes, stress, overfeeding, and other causes. If the diarrhea is mild and the kitten is otherwise alert and playful, you can try giving it less food but more often, and if it is over 4 weeks old, you can add 1/8 teaspoon of Metamucil to the food to help get rid of the diarrhea. Because kittens can become dehydrated very quickly, it is important to rehydrate them as soon as possible. Please contact the foster coordinator as these kittens may need to be given subcutaneous fluids. If the diarrhea is severe, lasts more than 3 or 4 feedings, or contains blood or obvious parasites, please contact the foster coordinator as this may be a serious emergency.

Some causes of diarrhea can be detected with a microscopic evaluation of the feces. Please contact the foster coordinator to set up an appointment for fecal evaluation with our staff veterinarian.

Cats will sometimes have tapeworms. This is caused by ingesting adult fleas. Please contact the foster coordinator in order to set up an appointment with our staff veterinarian.

Ear Mites

Ear mites are tiny parasites which live in the ear canal. They cause intense itching, noted by scratching behind the ears and violent head shaking. Inside the ears you may see a crumbly, dark brown discharge, which may smell bad (the discharge closely resembles coffee grounds). If you notice any of these signs, please contact the foster coordinator in order to set up an appointment with our staff veterinarian.

Feline Leukemia (FeLV) also known as Fading Kittens

Once in a while, one or more kittens in a litter that were healthy and vigorous at birth will begin to "fade" after a week or two of life. They will stop growing, begin to lose weight, stop nursing and crawling. You may also notice vomiting or diarrhea. They may cry continuously and lose the ability to stay upright. The mother cat may push them out of the nest, where they often chill and starve to death.

Kittens fade very quickly - they will not last 48 hours without veterinary care, and probably will not recover even with intensive care. Please contact the foster coordinator as soon as you notice these signs.

Fleas

Fleas are insects that love to feed on kittens. Although each flea only consumes a small drop of blood, fleas commonly attack in large numbers and an infestation can literally lead to anemia and even death.

The Life Cycle of the Flea

Adult fleas will lay eggs, which usually drop off their animal host and accumulate in rugs, carpets, and other porous surfaces. Dog houses, carpets, sofas and other such places are often good nesting grounds for flea eggs. Under ideal conditions, eggs hatch in 1 - 2 days but can take as long as 3 - 4 weeks before hatching.

Flea eggs hatch into a larval stage which feeds on debris and organic matter and lives freely in the environment outdoors or in your home. Larvae can be effectively treated with concentrated insecticides.

The larvae can develop into adult fleas in 5 days. Adult fleas prefer furry animals, but may feed on people. The common flea is hardy; it can live up to 4 months without feeding, and has a life span of up to 2 years. Fleas feed on their animal hosts, but spend most of their time off the animal. For every flea that you see, there are probably at least 100 lurking somewhere else in your home. Fortunately, the adult flea is the most sensitive to flea products.

Good Reasons to Control Fleas

Fleas harbor tapeworms. Most dogs and cats will eat a flea or two while grooming themselves and repeatedly become infested with tapeworms. A large part of tapeworm control involves flea control.

Animals may be allergic to fleas. A flea bite sets off a cycle of constant itching and scratching, and your dog or cat will begin to lose hair, especially around the tail. Scratching can severely damage an animal's skin, causing hot spots. A single flea bite can cause an allergic reaction, so flea control is essential in treating the affected dog or cat.

How to Control Fleas

All bedding needs to be washed in high heat with bleach and soapy water as soon as fleas are spotted.

An effective way to remove eggs from the house is by using a vacuum cleaner daily. This helps decrease the amount of egg burden in the house. It will not completely eliminate the source of infestation, but will decrease the amount of adult fleas.

Applying a topical flea product to every animal in the house will also help decrease environmental contamination. Even if you do not actively see fleas on your pets (or foster kitten), when a flea bites it will ingest the product and cease living and reproducing.

To kill adults and larvae, the house can be treated with flea foggers or sprays with high percentage of permethrin. This compound is also toxic to cats and should be used with caution around cats.

Upper respiratory tract infection (URI)

URI is, unfortunately, common in animal shelters. It is usually caused by the herpesvirus (which is not contagious to humans). About 94% of cats carry this virus and only present with clinical under stressful conditions (such as environmental or physiologic). Treatment usually consists of decreasing stress, ensuring eating and drinking, and normal activity level.

If you notice difficult breathing, labor breathing, or respiratory distress, please contact the foster coordinator as soon as possible as this may be a medical emergency.

Signs of URI to watch out for:

- Sneezing and discharge from eyes or nose
- Congested breathing
- Loss of appetite
- Lethargy
- Dehydration

Vomiting

If you notice vomiting in a kitten, please contact the foster coordinator.