



Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA

Bringing Your Kitten Home

As exciting as it is for you to bring your kitten home, it's a huge life-changing event for your kitten. Unfamiliar sights, sounds, smells, and sensations can easily overwhelm a kitten. You can help him adjust by making his experience smaller and more manageable.

Please Consider Two!

If you adopt two kittens, you've already provided them with comforting and familiar companionship that will ease the transition from shelter to home. If you think you'll eventually want a second cat, bringing them home together is easier on everyone.

Set up a kitten room

Start by setting up a small space in your home just for the new kitten. A small bedroom, a utility room or bathroom can be temporarily transformed into a safe haven, complete with a litter box (with low sides), a scratching post or pad, food and water. Use the brand of litter he's used to at first, to help him recognize the purpose of the box. Feed him familiar food, too, to reassure him that not everything is changing. You can switch later if you choose, but do so gradually to minimize the chance of an upset tummy.

When you bring your kitten home, leave him in his carrier in the room with the top open so he can emerge when he's ready and retreat to the carrier when he wants protection. He may choose to sleep in his carrier, but a soft, warm bed with sheltering sides may lure him out. You may also want to make a few other hiding places to allow your kitten to explore without venturing too far out into the open. Distribute a few boxes on their sides, lined with towels or your old clothing, or make a "cave" by turning a box over and cutting an opening in the side. Knowing his territory is a cat's key to peace of mind, so give your kitten quiet time to explore and to rest.

Get to know each other

Your kitten needs some down time, but he also wants and needs to bond with you, his new family. Visit him often in his room and make these visits low key. Sit on the floor, especially if he seems intimidated,

and bring a book to keep yourself amused until he ventures out. Talk quietly to the kitten or read to him so he can get used to the sound of your voice.

Find out who your kitten is by letting his personality emerge over time. Many of us harbor assumptions about "how cats are" based on previous experience or fond hopes of how a cat will relate to us. Try to set those expectations aside and observe the real kitten before you. The more you know about his preferences, the happier you will be with each other.

Get to know your kitten physically, too, by slowly and gently running your hands over his body. This will accustom him to being touched and allow you to monitor his health throughout his life. Carefully hold his paws, press lightly, and release as part of this daily exam, so that when you clip his nails the sensations won't be entirely new.

Always handle and play with your kitten gently. Engage him in play "hunts" with soft balls, stuffed "mice," wand toys with feathers or felt strips, scrunched paper balls, tissue paper, and the ever-popular paper bag. Give your kitten a few small toys (firm but with some "give" to them, like stuffed mice) that he can chew on as he's teething.

Don't ever use your hands as toys. Never frighten or chase your kitten even in jest. (He may never forget!) Make sure children or guests follow these rules, too.

If children are part of the kitten's new family, supervise all visits and make certain your new pet has some time off to rest and calm down. Even the most gregarious, confident kitten still needs lots of sleep.

Monitor Your Kitten's Health

For the first few weeks, especially, monitor your kitten's attitude, appetite, and litter box closely. Diarrhea, listlessness, or lack of interest in food warrant a call to your vet right away.



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Keep your kitten safe

Once your kitten seems at ease in her own room, introduce her gradually to the rest of your house. But first go through every room to spot and eliminate hazards such as

- sewing baskets, stray needles and thread
- electric cords (that she could chew through or pull in play)
- stray pills, paper clips, and other small items she could swallow
- tight spaces she could disappear into (block the entry if possible)
- open windows with missing or loose screens
- fragile glassware
- string, rubber bands, ribbon, tinsel (any of these, if swallowed, could mean an emergency trip to the vet)
- plants like dieffenbachia that are poisonous to cats (see <http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/cat-care/poison-control.html> for a detailed list)

Establish rules to help everyone keep your quick and curious kitten safe:

- Watch your feet as you walk and be especially careful as you open doors and windows.
- Be careful opening **and** closing drawers (a kitten may get inside **and behind** a drawer).
- Declare the garage permanently off limits. Warm car engines, wheel wells, and antifreeze are all alluring and can all be swiftly fatal.
- Check the washer, dryer, and dishwasher before turning them on.
- Keep kitchen counters and sinks clear of food and scraps.
- Put sharp utensils and toothpicks away.
- Do not put out poisons for rodents or insects.
- Close the toilet lid.

Finally, keep your kitten inside where she will be safe from communicable diseases, parasites, cars, dogs, other cats, and getting lost. Just in case she slips out, get her a collar with an ID tag.

Introduce Your Resident Cat

Most cats will accept a newcomer—but on their own terms and definitely on their own schedule. You want to give your tenured tabby plenty of clues and time to process the idea that there's a new cat in town. Expect it to take weeks or months for your cats to accept each other.

Start with scent. Rub your new kitten with a cloth and leave it where your older cat can find it. Do the same for the kitten with a cloth imbued with the body odor of your resident cat. Let your cat sniff around the door of the kitten's room. After a few days or a week, take the kitten out in her carrier and let your cat explore the room. (If your kitten seems confident, let her explore another room of the house.)

Finally, let your two cats see each other by opening the door part way. Keep the meeting brief and offer treats or make a distracting noise if things get tense. When you give the kitten access to the house, make sure she can retreat to her room if the two need a break from each other.

Keep in touch

You can always call our Behavior staff for advice and tips or just to chat. We love to hear how our alumni are settling in.

For more info, call our free Behavior Helpline (650/340-7022 x783 or, for Spanish, x786) or consider a low-cost consultation. To make a consultation appointment, call 650/340-7022 x667. The PHS/SPCA Behavior Department, like many shelter programs, is funded by donations.