



# Foster Kitten Handbook

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a foster parent for our community's homeless kittens! You are literally a lifesaver.

This handbook will answer most questions anyone might have about caring for very young kittens. Some foster kittens will need to be bottle fed, and some can eat regular food. It depends on their age and general health. All kittens will need to be socialized (handled with tender, loving care) and some kittens will need extra help in this area as they were born in the wild. These "feral" kittens need a patient family who can handle a little hissing and spitting. The rewards that flow from teaching these terrified kittens that humans are wonderful are huge.

The medical history that you receive along with your kittens will tell you when to return them to the clinic for care. We spay or neuter kittens at two pounds and they can be adopted after they are spayed or neutered. Kittens are most adoptable when they are young and cute, so please do not delay in returning your kittens when they have reached this weight. (A kitchen scale is useful for this purpose, or we can weigh them for you.) It is hard to part with kittens you have nurtured, but know that doing so allows them to find their forever family and allows you to raise a new, needy litter!

**If you have health or behavioral concerns about your kittens, please call the clinic at 434-964-3310 or email [clinic@caspca.org](mailto:clinic@caspca.org).**

**If you have an emergency after 6pm any day of the week, please call 434-906-3848.**

Thank you again and enjoy your time with your kittens!

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## 1) Supplies

### What CASPCA will supply:

- Foster care information
- Routine veterinary care, such as vaccinations, spay/neuter, fecal exams and available prescription medications
- Support system for questions and concerns
- Carrier, if needed
- Initial food, dry and canned
- Formula, when available
- Syringes, if needed

### What you will need to supply:

- LOVE!
- A separate room for your fosters
- Litter box (low-sided for kittens to access)
- Litter (unclumping, unscented litter)
- Additional food
- Food Dishes
- Bedding and towels

### Additional helpful supplies:

- Canned pumpkin (plain, not pumpkin pie filling)
- Karo Syrup
- Pedialyte

- Cotton balls (unweaned kittens)
- Kitten baby bottles
- Bottle brush
- Shower curtain liner
- Heating Pad (without auto shut off) or Snuggle Safe disk
- Empty bottle or container to store mixed formula
- Scale
- Stuffed animals
- Clock that makes a ticking noise
- Unscented baby wipes
- Desitin

## 2) Keeping CASPCA Animals Separate from Your Resident Pets (and other fosters)

It is best to keep your foster kittens in their carrier, or a larger carrier or kennel if you have one. Keep them off the floor if possible.

### **Behavior:**

We do not know how the kittens, or mom cats will react in a new environment. This is for the safety of you and your own resident pets, until you get to know your foster's temperament. Mom cats can be quite protective over their young and may lash out at other animals' they may perceive as a threat.

### **Medical:**

We do not know the medical history of your current foster pet. We have examined the foster animals and treated any conditions we have found.

There are many contagious diseases that can be transmitted, in particular between species. We do not want your pets to get sick!

Your resident pets should be up to date on all vaccinations, to help in the prevention of disease.

### **Other Precautions:**

- Do not use toxic cleaning products or leave them in the room with kittens, including Lysol®, and wet wipes.
- For clean-ups, use diluted bleach solutions (one part bleach to 15 parts water) in small amounts.
- If kittens are in your bathroom, pull the shower curtain up and out of the way, so they don't climb it.
- Take ALL knick-knacks out of the room (i.e., perfume bottles, soap bottles, jewelry, figurines, etc.)
- Do not allow very young children to play with or help socialize very young kittens. They are not old enough to understand and react to the temperament and behavior of feral kittens.

- Don't keep kittens in a room with a reclining chair. The kittens can be injured or killed if they go inside the chair and accidentally get closed underneath.

### **Introductions with your existing pets:**

You understand that any introductions with your existing pets are done at your own risk, and that CASPCA is not responsible for the transmission of any diseases between pets, and/or any behavior issues that may arise due to the introduction.

Any introductions should be done after a quarantine period NO SHORTER than 2 weeks. All introductions should be done slowly and properly, and fully supervised until you know that your resident pets and foster pets are safe.

Introductions should be done only after all fosters are up to date on their vaccinations.

### **Interactions with other foster pets:**

If you also foster animals for other shelters or rescue organizations, or if you pet sit other animals, you must keep CASPCA foster kittens in a completely separate room. We do not know the vaccination status of other shelter or rescue foster pets, and our mission is to keep our own foster animals safe and healthy. We appreciate that many animal people have big hearts and want to help all animals, and there are many in our region in need.

Specifically, you must:

- 1) Wear gloves and change clothes between CASPCA kittens and other animals.
- 2) Not share medicines or food between CASPCA kittens and other animals.
- 3) Inform the CASPCA of how many litters of kittens from other organizations you are fostering.
- 4) Understand that we may have to refrain from placing foster kittens with you if in our medical opinion you have too many foster animals.

## **3) Common Kitty Parasites and Illnesses and when to seek vet care**

### **Symptoms the require contacting the CASPCA:**

- Abdominal pain/body held in hunched position
- Coughing, sneezing, runny eyes, or runny nose
- Diarrhea for 12 hours (see Poop section for more detail)
- Refusal to eat or drink for 12 hours
- Vomiting more than once an hour or three to four times a day
- Unexplained weight loss or gain
- Unresponsive, unconsciousness, weakness or lethargy
- Bloating belly
- Mothers abandoning/avoiding/separating themselves from offspring
- Major behavioral changes
- Signs of intestinal worms in fecal matter
- Coat changes (dullness, dandruff, loss of hair, bald patches, excessive shedding)
- Difficulty in urination, inability to urinate, blood in urine, discolored urine (brown or red) or increased urination
- Respiratory distress - difficulty in breathing, wheezing, choking

- Discolored tongue or gums
- Disorientation
- Extreme thirst, increased water intake
- Lumps and swelling
- Pupils different sizes or unresponsive to light
- Seizures
- Staggering, head tilt, inability to walk normally
- Sudden blindness or vision disturbances

## **Parasites**

All animals coming into the CASPCA are given dewormer upon intake. Cats and kittens receive dewormer for roundworms and hookworms. Diarrhea however, is a fairly common ailment, especially among kittens. Diet, stress, parasites, and various viruses and bacteria can cause diarrhea. The signs associated with parasite infections are fairly nonspecific, such as a dull haircoat, coughing, vomiting, diarrhea, mucoid or bloody feces, loss of appetite, pale mucous membranes, or a pot-bellied appearance. The vomiting, diarrhea, anemia, and dehydration caused by intestinal parasites will weaken a cat, making it more susceptible to viral and bacterial infections and diseases; thus robbing your cat of good health. Furthermore, some parasites have the potential of infecting humans. Kittens are more severely affected by diarrhea than adult animals and diarrhea can result in dehydration. To check for dehydration, pull up the skin above the shoulder blades. If it snaps back quickly, the animal is not dehydrated. If it goes back slowly, the kitten is dehydrated and needs fluids. Check for recurrent bouts of diarrhea, blood or mucus in the feces, foreign material in the feces and frequency of defecation.

If your foster animal is experiencing diarrhea please bring a fecal sample into the shelter as soon as possible so that we may test for parasites and start them on the appropriate medication.

### **Roundworms, whipworms and hookworms**

These parasites are extremely common in kittens and puppies, although they can be spread to adult animals and humans. They are spread through infected feces, ingesting infected wildlife, from mothers to offspring during pregnancy or nursing, and ingesting from live larvae in a contaminated environment. Symptoms can include vomiting, diarrhea and poor growth as well as a swollen belly. The symptoms will increase in severity and can be detrimental to an animal's health if untreated.

### **Tapeworms**

Adult fleas carry tapeworms, a common internal parasite. A dog or cat may become infected by ingesting the fleas or hunting infected wildlife. The worms are passed through the feces and can be detected in the stool on an animal's hindquarters. Tapeworms look like small pieces of white rice.

## **Coccidia**

Coccidia is a protozoan parasite that is very common in shelter environments but usually clears up rapidly in a home environment. Coccidia must be diagnosed by microscopic examination of feces, and is spread through fecal matter.

Symptoms include mild to severe diarrhea, weakness, loss of appetite, and weight loss/poor weight gain.

## **Illnesses**

### **Upper Respiratory Infection:**

Feline Upper Respiratory Infection (URI) is similar to a cold in humans. It is especially common in cats that have been exposed to a lot of other cats. URI is rarely fatal in adult cats, and usually resolves within a few weeks. Treatment generally consists of supportive care, as the underlying cause is often a viral infection. Antibiotics do not cure viral infections however, they may be prescribed to treat possible bacterial infections. As with the common cold, there is no completely effective treatment besides time and allowing the cat's own immune system to do its job.

URI is highly contagious to other cats but is not contagious to people or other species. Most cats are vaccinated against it. However, the vaccine is not 100% protective, so it's a good idea to isolate cats that are showing signs of the disease, and wash your hands after handling sick cats.

#### *What are the signs of URI?*

- Clear or colored nasal discharge
- Sneezing/congestion
- Red/inflamed conjunctiva (inner lining of the eyelids), eye discharge – clear or colored
- Ulcers/sores on the nose, lips, tongue or gums
- Fever/lethargy/loss of appetite (these may be signs of many other diseases as well)

#### *When should you contact the CASPCA?*

With rest and good care, many cats will recover from mild URI in one or two weeks. Sometimes cats need additional help. If your foster cat has any of the following signs please contact the CASPCA clinic.

- Not eating or poor appetite for more than 24 hours (12 hours in kittens less than 6 weeks).
- Green or yellow discharge from the nose or eyes (antibiotics may be prescribed for this).
- Difficulty breathing, especially panting or breathing through an open mouth.
- Depressed or unresponsive cat: a slight decrease in activity is expected, but contact the shelter if the cat is much less active than usual or than you would expect.

- Vomiting or diarrhea that lasts more than 24 hours.
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#### *How should you care for a cat with URI?*

Provide the cat with a quiet, warm place to rest

Make sure the cat is eating. When cats get stuffy noses, they can't smell their food very well and may not want to eat. Offer smelly, wet food. Warming it up often helps.

Gently clean the cat's nose and eyes with a soft cloth moistened with warm water.

If the cat is very congested, use a humidifier or put the cat in the bathroom and run hot water in the shower for a few minutes a couple of times a day. Moderate to severe congestion is often a sign of a secondary bacterial infection, so contact the shelter to discuss treatment. Up to 2-3 drops of over the counter "Little Noses" children's saline nasal drops can be instilled into congested noses 2-3 times daily for relief.

If any medicine has been prescribed, be sure and give the full course as directed, even if the symptoms seem to have gone away. If the cat continues to have colored eye or nasal discharge at the end of its treatment contact the clinic, as we may want to continue the medications longer.

#### **Conjunctivitis:**

Conjunctivitis, inflammation of the eyelid membranes, is a common ailment in cats, and is caused by many different factors: irritants such as cigarette smoke, injury, viruses, bacteria, and plant pollens. Symptoms can include cloudy or discolored discharge from the eye, blinking, and reddened, exposed, or swollen third eyelids (also called haws or nictating membranes). Don't hesitate -- you need to see your vet now so ointments can be prescribed to help the eye heal.

#### **Urinary Tract Infection (UTI):**

Cats can get urinary tract infections just like we do. Signs of this in cats will vary. Many cats will whine or yelp when using the litter box and you may find blood in their urine. They may also have 'accidents' even if they use the litter box without trouble otherwise. You may notice your cat makes frequent trips to the box but they seem to have trouble getting any urine to pass. Antibiotics are the common first step in treating UTI and will most likely clear up the problem if it is diagnosed early. Your veterinarian should do a series of test to determine the origin of the problem for proper care. In some cases the infection may spread to the kidney and complicate the situation. Kitty might be in a lot of pain. If you see any symptoms please make an appointment as soon as possible. If there is any blockage preventing your cat from using the box this can become life threatening very quickly.

#### **Ringworm:**

Ringworm is a common condition in cats. It is a contagious fungal skin disease caused not by worms but rather a fungus invading the skin's outer layer, causing patches of hair loss. It is more commonly seen in cats that are under stress from overcrowding, lack of exercise, poor nutrition, or an unclean environment. Humans can catch ringworms, so provide prompt veterinary treatment. Specific diagnosis is not always easy, and is made using a special lamp, called a Woodslamp and is followed with a culture of the area (cultures in 2 weeks). Treatments will vary according to the specific circumstances. It might be necessary to use oral medication, medicated baths, topical medication, or a combination of the three

techniques. Ringworm is highly contagious, and if you suspect that your foster may have it, contact us right away, make sure you are keeping everything sterile, change clothes between going into the room with your foster family and use a 1:10 bleach water combination to wipe all surfaces.

#### **Ear Mites:**

When cats have ear problems it is usually due to parasites or injury. Injuries can include lacerations caused by another cat's claws, attempts to ease an itch or irritation by the cat herself. If you notice your cat shaking her head or scratching at her ears, or if you see dark brown, waxy deposits in her ears, it is usually a sign of parasite infestation, ear infection, or a foreign body in the ear, such as a foxtail.

#### **4) Fleas and Bathing Kittens**

Fleas are parasites that feed off the blood of your cat or kitten. Fleas are annoying for cats, plus they cause allergies, anemia, and tapeworms. Treatment for fleas can be supplied through the CASPCA, depending on your kittens' age.

Fleas may be obvious on the body or may be hiding under legs or armpits. Or you may see the evidence as little black specks on the kitten's body. If the kitten's fur is too dark to see this, place it on a white sheet of paper and rub the fur backwards; black specks will show up on the paper. ***It is not safe to use commercial insecticides or topical flea treatments on kittens under 6 weeks.***

Comb the kittens gently with a fine-toothed flea comb. Have next to you a small bowl of warm water with a few drops of Dawn dishwashing liquid. Any fleas caught in the comb can be flicked into the soapy water where they will drown.

If the infestation is severe, bathe them very gently in warm water with Dawn dishwashing liquid. Start by gently lathering the head and work downward. (If you start by placing the rear in the water first, the fleas will run to the head, making it harder to get at them.) You can also make a ring of Dawn around their neck so that when you place the kitten in the water, the ring will trap any fleas attempting to escape to the head. Do NOT dunk the kitten completely under the water. Keep eyes, ears and nose clear.

Wet fur also makes the adult fleas easier to spot and remove with the comb.

Rinse and IMMEDIATELY DRY THE KITTEN THOROUGHLY in a soft towel and with a hair dryer on a low setting (making sure to keep your hand between the hot air and the kitten).

Even after the bath, comb the kittens daily because some fleas will inevitably escape the bath.



## 5) A Primer on Poop - Guide to the Rainbow of Poop & Urine Colors

### **Color:**

- Bloody - Actual red blood seen in stool. Grossly abnormal, must be seen ASAP.
- Mucous - yellowish/white/clear slimy substance. Indicates severe bowel irritation. Grossly abnormal and needs immediate care.
- Black - True dark black color to stool. Usually indicates bleeding high in the bowel. Severe sign, needs immediate attention.
- Brown - Normal color. Be happy!
- Orange - Usually indicates way too much bile in stool, can occur with reflux. Seek medical advice.
- Yellow - Almost always indicates bacterial imbalance in the bowel. If has diarrhea also, usually related to coccidia. Seek medical advice.
- White - Grossly abnormal color, usually indicates, severe bacterial imbalance and severe infection in the bowel. Kitten at risk of dying, needs medical attention, ASAP.

### **Consistency:**

- Dry/hard - Abnormal, usually indicates dehydration. Seek care, promptly.
- Firm - Normal, be happy.
- Formed but soft - Low range of 'normal'. If stools change from firm to soft you should seek medical advice.
- Toothpaste - Still has somewhat tubular form but falls apart once touched. Abnormal, needs medication.
- Cow-patty - Never formed but thick enough it falls into a 'cow-patty' shape. Abnormal, animal is at significant risk and needs immediate attention.
- Liquidy - Just fluid that falls out of rectum, thin and may have mucous. Abnormal, animal is at severe risk and must be seen immediately.
- The 'Squirts' - Animal has no control over bowel and watery fluid squirts out of rectum. Grossly abnormal, must be seen immediately!

## 6) Home Remedies

The home remedies are to help you in a pinch. This does not substitute coming in for a vet visit if you notice that something is wrong with your fosters.

- Pumpkin – canned, not pie filling. Assists in both diarrhea and constipation. About ¼ - 1 tsp per day.
- Karo Syrup – can be used to get sugar into your kitten's body quickly.
- Steam baths – if your kitties have a URI, running the steam in your bathroom, or other similar methods (ie humidifier or nebulizer), is helpful in clearing congestion.
- Heated canned food – if your kitties cannot breathe very well due to a stuffy nose, often times they will not eat because they can't smell their food. Heating up canned food makes it stinkier and helps them smell it to eat.

NEVER give a foster kitten human medication.

## 7) Developmental Milestones

### **Neonatal (0 – 2 weeks):**

- Kittens weigh about 3 to 4 ounces at birth (90-110g); they should double their body weight in the first week.
- Eyes open at 7-10 days (and will be blue until the kittens are 6-7 weeks old; true eye color won't settle in until the kitten's about 3 months old).
- During this stage, the kittens are completely dependent on their mother or you. Their diet consists entirely of milk, they are stimulated by their mother, they cannot regulate their body temperature and cannot groom themselves. They "swim" around a little bit, but movement is very minimal.
- Kittens are also born deaf, with sealed ear canals. By the age of 17 days, the ear canals are open and the kittens can start to hear. By 25 days, kittens will respond to sights and sounds.
- At 1-2 weeks, they begin to crawl more and acknowledge their mother and siblings.

### **Early Socialization (3 – 8 weeks):**

- At about 3 weeks, they will start walking around and pouncing.
- At 3½ weeks, the ears will start to stand up.
- At 4 weeks, they'll start to play with each other and develop teeth. They begin grooming and can regulate their body temperature.
- At 4-5 weeks they will start weaning & be ready for "gruel" (a combination of water or formula with canned kitten food). Progress to canned food, then introduce dry kibble around 5 weeks. Also supply fresh water.
- At 3-5 weeks, a litter box should be introduced. Control of bladder and bowel function begins. The act is learned from a mom cat, or will need to be taught by you.
- CASPCA begins the vaccine schedule at 4 weeks.
- This is the sensitive period for social learning. Social play begins and increases steadily. Many social skills are learned, and the ability to teach the kittens is possible, as their brains are still developing and their instincts have not fully developed. Kittens learn how to interact with humans by observing their mom.
- Object play begins and increases. Climbing and running begin. Capable of complex learning. Scratching and predatory behavior begins.
- At 8 weeks and 2lbs. kittens can be spayed/neutered & are immediately ready for adoption.

### **Weight Chart:**

Kittens should gain about ½ ounce every day or 4 ounces per week. Weigh them at the same time every day with a kitchen or small postal scale. Lack of gain or weight loss beyond 24 hours is cause for alarm and a visit to the vet. Their bellies should always be rotund! You can check to make sure a kitten is properly hydrated by pulling up the skin at

the scruff of the neck. If it bounces back nicely, hydration is good. If it doesn't bounce back, or goes back down slowly, arrange to bring them in to the clinic for fluids.

Age	Weight
At birth	90-110 g
1 week	180-220 g
2 weeks	270-320 g
3 weeks	350 g
4 weeks	450 g
5 weeks	550 g
6 weeks	650 g
7 weeks	750 g
8 weeks	1.7 – 2.0 lbs (800-900 g)

## 8) Active or “Regular” Kittens

Some kittens just need foster homes until they are old enough to be spayed or neutered. They are already eating solid food. For these guys, you just need to keep feeding them. It's best to start kitten-proofing before you even get your new kitten. Start by getting down to a kitten's eye level. Get on the floor of your home. Notice any potential hazards that a kitten could get into. Raising kittens requires creativity. Just like a human child, kittens can make toys out of just about anything.

### **Food:**

HAVE FOOD AVAILABLE AT ALL TIMES. KITTENS WILL NOT OVEREAT. Make sure the food is fresh; check / change it every four-six hours and before you go to bed and when you get up. If you give dry food, moisten it, because kittens can't chew dry food well until about 8 weeks. Start by offering a good quality canned kitten food, mixed into a thin paste with KMR or Gerbers or Beechnut baby food (chicken or turkey). Make sure that there are NO onions or garlic in the ingredients!

- Remember that changes in diet can quickly cause diarrhea, so keep an eye on your kitten's stools. Diarrhea can be life-threatening to a kitten if left untreated; usually, a dose of one or more types of antibiotics prescribed by your vet will get them back on track.
- You will be provided with a bag of Science Diet Kitten Chow.
- Feed this to your mom cat (if you have one with the kittens) as well, to provide her with the extra nutrients that she needs.
- Kittens should be fed kitten food until they are one year old. Mom's should eat kitten food while they are nursing.
- As a foster, you agree to provide your kittens/cat with a name brand, premium diet.
- If you choose to change the brand of food for your kitties, make sure to gradually change them over to whatever brand you are switching over to. Do this over the course of about a week, by mixing the new food with the old food, starting with a

25:75 ratio, and gradually changing over to 50:50, 75:25, then 100% new food. You may notice some slightly soft stool as their bodies are getting adjusted to the new food.

### **Household hazards:**

- Finding household hazards takes some creative thinking. Imagine what items around your home a kitten could find attractive enough to turn into a play toy. Here's a list of potential kitten hazards.
- Falls - Yes, kittens love to look out the window and check out the scenery. But, they don't necessarily have nine lives. Falls from high windows and perches can mortally injure a cat or kitten. Make sure open windows have screens to prevent kittens from falling.
- Electrical Cords - Cords look like inviting toys for kittens. Kittens love to chew and bite thorough cords. However, they may be in for a jolt. Put feline-repellant bitter sprays near cords to deter kittens from chewing.
- Small coins - Kitten can choke on small coins that have been dropped. Pick up small items off of the floor.
- "The Kitchen" - Kittens are curious and affectionate creatures. They love to "help" you while you cook or put away food. Just be careful to make sure that your kitten hasn't accidentally gotten locked in the refrigerator. (Yes, it happens!) Also, make sure your kitty does not jump on a hot stove and burn its paws.
- Mice - Mice are a kitten's perfect play toy and treat. They're great for games of chase and they fun for kittens to chew on. However, mice carry diseases that can make you and your kitten very ill. Don't allow your kitten to play with mice and please don't allow your kitten to become your household mouse trap.
- Toxic Plants - We all love to have a well-decorated verdant home. However, some plants are downright dangerous to felines. Check plants around your home to see if they are kitten-safe. Some of the most toxic plants are in the lily family.
- Toxic Foods – There are also several foods that can be toxic to your kitties, such as onions and garlic. Check online for a complete list of items to avoid!
- Drowning - Although most kittens do not love baths and being submerged in water, many kittens are fascinated by running water. Watch your kitten around bath tubs, fountains, or any areas of running water. Keep your toilet lids down if you are keeping your kittens in a bathroom.

### **Tips:**

- Kittens, once they are out and about, are very quick. Remember to shuffle your feet when you are with them to avoid stepping on them as they are extremely fragile.
- Give your kitties time to acclimate to your home. It may take a bit of time for them to settle in.
- Wear pants around your kittens. Until they are about 3-4 weeks old, their nails do not retract, and are "little daggers of love". Some kittens like to climb your legs, so the pants are helpful in protecting your legs.
- Play with your kittens' paws to get them used to having their feet handled. If you feel comfortable clipping their nails, do so. The earlier they get used to it, the easier it is

to do as they get older. Any staff member can show you how to clip nails properly. Do NOT clip them if you don't know how to or if you feel uncomfortable.

- Feel free to rename your kittens! They become part of your family. If you let a staff member know, we can put the name in our system. When making appointments, however, please remember to use the name and number they were given at the CASPCA.

## 9) Bottle Babies – Care and Feeding

Kittens, before they are eating on their own (before 3-4 weeks old), and without a mother present will need round the clock care. Very young kittens will mostly sleep and eat.

### **Warmth:**

Newborn kittens cannot regulate their own body temperature. They have little body fat and immature circulatory systems. Without outside warmth, kittens can only maintain a body temperature of only about 95°F (35°C). It's up to either cat mom or surrogate mom (you!) to insure that the newborn does not become hypothermic.

Hypothermia can have devastating effects on newborn kittens. Newborns can develop potentially life threatening low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) due to the decrease in body temperature.

Keep the kittens in a place in your home that is warm, draft-free, and isolated from small children and your own pets, particularly cats. **Place the kittens on a heating pad on the LOW setting under a heavy towel.** Be VERY careful to place adequate padding between the kittens and the heating pad to avoid burns. Be sure to tuck the towel under the pad so the kittens cannot crawl between the towel and the pad.

Place kittens and pad in a box, cat carrier, or other confinement that is large enough for the kittens to move off the pad if they become too warm.

### **Feeding Intervals:**

< 1 week old = every 2 hours

1-2 weeks old = every 3-4 hours

3-4 weeks old = every 5-6 hours

5-6 weeks old = every 6-8 hour

### **Formula:**

KMR – found at pet stores. Do NOT feed cow's milk, it is not nutritious enough for kittens, and often also causes diarrhea, which can be extremely dangerous in kittens. Powdered form is less expensive than the premixed cans.

Do not change the formula brand once you have started to avoid intestinal stress.

The kitten and the bottle must be warmed for feeding.

### **Feeding Guide:**

[15cc = 1 T]

1 week old / weight 4 oz 32 cc formula/day 6 feedings/day

2 weeks old / weight 7 oz 56 cc formula/day 4 feedings/day

3 weeks old / weight 10 oz 80 cc formula/day 3 feedings/day

4 weeks old / weight 13 oz 104 cc formula/day 3 feedings/day

5 weeks old / weight 16 oz 128 cc formula/day 3 feedings/day

A plastic water bottle (such as the 16 oz size) is perfect for shaking/mixing the formula, storing the day's supply in the fridge, and also for ease of pouring into the small nursing bottle. Both powdered KMR mixed with water and an opened can of premixed KMR is to be stored in the refrigerator.

- The opened can of powdered KMR should be refrigerated as well; it is good for 3 months if kept cold. If kept in the freezer, an opened can of powder lasts 6 months.
- To save time, make up a 24-hour supply and keep it refrigerated. Any formula left over after 24 hours should be thrown out.
- Formula should always be fed warm (approx. 101 degrees F). Warm the formula in the bottle in a pan of water.
- Do not microwave the formula; although you may microwave the water in a glass cup before placing the bottle in the water. Test a few drops on the back of your hand to make sure it is warm but not hot.
- **DO NOT ALLOW THE FORMULA TO BOIL.** Any formula that boils must be thrown out, as the protein has been destroyed.
- Only heat as much formula as you think the kittens will drink. **ANY HEATED FORMULA REMAINING SHOULD BE DISCARDED.** Reheated formula can cause a bacterial infection.

### **Feeding the Kittens:**

Nipples come without holes. Take care in creating a nipple hole. Use the smallest cuticle scissors you have and start small; once the hole is cut too big, it cannot be corrected. The hole is perfect when you hold the bottle upside down and it goes drip – drip – drip. Gushing out might cause the kitten to aspirate the formula; a hole too small will keep the kitten from getting any formula at all.

***To feed your kitten, place it stomach down on a towel or other textured surface to which it can cling.*** This is similar to the position when nursing on the mother. Kitten positioning for feeding is very important; this is where the crucial surrogate-mom bonding happens.

Grasp the kitten gently under its armpits. Gently open its mouth with the tip of your finger, then slip the nipple between its jaws. You may have to wiggle it, and squeeze out a bit of milk so the kitten gets the idea. ***NEVER TURN THE KITTEN ON ITS BACK TO FEED. KEEP BOTH THE KITTEN AND THE BOTTLE IN AS UPRIGHT A POSITION AS POSSIBLE.*** Hold the bottle at 45-degree angle, keeping a light pull on the bottle to encourage vigorous sucking.

**NOTE:** OVERFEEDING A KITTEN CAN LEAD TO DIAHRREA WHICH CAN CAUSE DEHYDRATION AND BE FATAL. UNDERFEEDING CAN ALSO CAUSE DEHYDRATION AND CHILLS WHICH CAN BE FATAL. Be alert to your kitten's needs.

If the kitten is sucking effectively, the ears move in rhythm to the sucking. Open the mouth gently with the tip of your finger and slip the nipple in. Once your kitten gets the hang of it, they will search out the nipple enthusiastically! You will feel a real "vacuum effect" when the kitten gets into suckle mode. To keep air from getting into the kitten's stomach, hold the bottle at a 45-degree angle, keeping a light pull on the bottle. The kitten should be allowed to suck at its own pace. If a kitten refuses to take the nipple or won't suckle, try rubbing it vigorously on its forehead or stroking its back. This replicates the activity of a momcat's cleaning and can effectively stimulate the kitten to nurse. Sometimes you will hear a "clicking" noise which means the kitten's nursing instinct is in gear and should be ready for the nipple. Sometimes a kitten is simply picky; there are two kinds of nipples out there, one shorter and one longer, so you might have to make sure they don't prefer one or the other. Take your time; some kittens nurse slowly.

The kitten will let you know when it has had enough simply by refusing more. Or bubbles will form around its mouth. Burp the kitten on your shoulder (like a baby), tapping with your finger on its back. Try the bottle twice more to see if the kitten will take more after burping. If feeding multiple kittens, try feeding them several times, taking turns. Feed the first kitten until it stops nursing, feed the 2<sup>nd</sup>, etc. Then go back to the first and repeat this round robin. Usually after 2-3 nursing turns, a kitten has had enough for one feeding. Sometimes the kitten will get a grip on the nipple and the nipple will collapse in its mouth. Then gently twist the nipple to release the kitten's grasp, which will then allow air to enter and the nipple to expand again.

Weigh the kittens daily to be sure they're gaining weight, and keep a record. Weight gain may skip a day or two, then jump a bit. They should gain about 4 oz. per week. A kitten's instinctive need to suckle (frustrated by the lack of a mother's nipple) may cause the kitten to suckle its littermate's ears, tail or genitals, causing irritation. Try to satisfy this oral need by caressing each kitten's mouth with your finger or a soft cloth. When kittens reach 12 ounces (about 3-1/2 to 4 weeks of age), feed every 6 hours. It is now about time to wean the kittens off the bottle and onto solid food. Double check that the heating pad is still functioning and that the towels they are laying in are clean and dry before placing them back into their designated area.

### **Stimulating your kittens to eliminate:**

Before and after each meal, place a cotton ball, facial tissue or soft towel over the kitten's genitals and jiggle gently to stimulate urination and a bowel movement. Slightly dampen the cotton ball with warm water. DO NOT RUB; this will cause the area to become raw and sore. (The mother typically cleans this area herself before they're litter trained.) Kittens should (and almost always will) urinate during each stimulation. They should defecate at least once a day. One trick is to slowly count to 60 while you're stimulating a kitten; at that point, you'll know if they're done or if something's on its way out! By about 3 weeks of age, a kitten should be able to eliminate without help.

### **Hygiene:**

As with all newborns, hygiene is extremely important. The spread of germs is an ongoing threat to kittens. To keep this spread to a minimum, make cleanliness a high priority.

If you're feeding more than one litter, keep the litters separate from each other – preferably in different rooms. Feed each litter with separate bottles and nipples. Use different lap towels for each litter. Wash your hands before you handle each litter. You might also want to change shoes when you enter each room, and use a separate apron or other garment for each.

Keep all feeding equipment extremely clean. Sterilize all utensils before each feeding. Wash bottles, nipples, storage bottle and bottle brushes, etc., in hot soapy water and rinse well. Bottles and nipples can also be placed in a pan of boiling water to sterilize them.

Be sure to clean the plastic mixing/storage bottle thoroughly each 24 hours. If a film appears inside the bottle, use either a bottle brush made specifically for kitten bottles, or put 10-15 grains of dry rice in the bottle, with a drop of dishwashing liquid and a small bit of water; shake vigorously. The rice against the bottle will remove the film.

Keep the kittens clean and dry. The mother cat keeps them scrupulously clean. There is no excuse for a kitten with feces on it. Do not be afraid to give a kitten a bath or wipe with a wetted washcloth.

When wiping your kittens clean, use short strokes like a mom cat would use. This keeps their fur clean, teaches them how to groom and gives them the motherly attention they crave.

The towels in the kittens' box should also be kept clean. You might not notice soiling on the towels, but the kittens will urinate and they should not lie in urine-soaked beds. Sometimes you will need to change the towel with each feeding. You might find you will be doing more laundry for the kittens than your own family, but cleanliness is important to the health of these babies, so keep the towels clean!

## 10) Nursing Mothers

Nursing mothers will do most of the work for you! They feed, bathe, stimulate and socialize their kittens. Kittens learn through observing their mother.

Your main responsibilities will be to observe everyone and make sure everything is going right.

Are all your kittens eating? You may need to give a particular kitten some one on one time with mom. If you do so, make sure to keep the other kittens warm while mom's away. If mom is still not working with her kitten, you may have to supplement that particular kitten with some formula.

Some moms may be very protective of their babies. Start slowly. When you bring her home, give her a chance to get settled in. You may just want to sit next to your mom and litter and observe at first. Blinking your eyes towards mom shows that you do not have any aggression towards her. Start by softly petting mom. Once she seems comfortable with you (this may take some time), then start petting her kittens. Slowly start to pick up the kittens, but do not remove them out of mom's eyesight. You will gradually work your way up to being able to handle her kittens with her trusting you with her precious ones.

Most moms, after a while, need a break! Allow mom to get away from her kittens. If you have them crated, have a door open that the kittens cannot get out of to allow mom to get away for some quiet time or one on one time with you. If you are using a box, same thing.

## 11) Raising Single Kittens



Provide the kitten with a surrogate mother or sibling, such as a stuffed toy to snuggle up to or artificial fur to sleep on. You will find that the kitten will knead this like it does its mother. Kittens need emotional closeness. Hold the kitten after feeding for a while until it drops off to sleep.

Let the kitten snuggle against your warm skin.

Rub and pet the kitten with short strokes, as its mother would with her tongue. Talk to it for several minutes.

Mothers and siblings help a kitten learn discipline and socialization. Introduce the lone kitten to other kittens as soon as possible so they learn to interact and play.

Most bottle fed kittens are very affectionate toward people. But if a kitten starts to become a biter at about 8 weeks, hold it in your hand and firmly tell it “NO!” Then put it down and withdraw your attention for some minutes.

## 12) Weaning Your Kittens

No matter if you have a mom or bottle babies, you will want to help with the weaning of the kittens. This is the DIRTY stage, be prepared for baths! (See how to give a bath in the section on fleas)

Start weaning the kittens at about 4-5 weeks of age. Individual kittens in the same litter may wean at different times, so don't be discouraged if one or two refuses to leave the bottle at first. Some take up to 8 weeks – often those kittens who crave the one-on-one attention they get from the bottle. You will know that a kitten is ready for the weaning process when it is (a) biting its nipple often and forcefully, and (b) able to lick formula from your finger.

- Place a shower curtain liner underneath a large towel or towels to catch the inevitable mess while your kittens are learning to eat.
- Start by offering a good quality canned kitten food, mixed into a thin paste with KMR or Gerbers or Beechnut baby food (chicken or turkey). Make sure that there are NO onions or garlic in the ingredients!
- Use your finger, a spoon, or syringe, to gently place a bit of the gruel into your kitten's mouth. They will usually like it and want to lick more off your finger.
- Slowly take your finger towards their food bowl, guiding their head to the food.
- The kittens will climb in the food at first, and will end up with food all over themselves, and you, so be prepared. KMR left on the skin can cause irritation, so wipe them clean with a baby wipe, soft damp cloth, or give them a bath. Make sure they are dry when you are done.
- You may need to continue supplementing their food intake with a bottle (or mom) while they are learning to eat. You can also start by offering just formula in a saucer to teach them to lap out of a dish.
- Over the course of about a week, slowly reduce the amount of formula to food ratio, until the kittens are eating only solid foods.
- Plain fresh water should be available at all times to the kittens, starting at 3-4 weeks. They may walk in it at first, that is normal, until they learn what it is.

- Some kittens grasp the concept right away; others take days. Keep bottle feeding while weaning to make sure they get enough to eat. If you give dry food, moisten it, because kittens can't chew dry food well until about 8 weeks.
- Remember that changes in diet can quickly cause diarrhea, so keep an eye on your kitten's stools. Diarrhea can be life-threatening to a kitten if left untreated; usually, a dose of one or more types of antibiotics prescribed by your vet will get them back on track.
- Kittens will learn to start grooming themselves and their litter mates by licking food off.
- You will be provided with a bag of Science Diet Kitten Chow. Feed this to your mom cat as well, to provide her with the extra nutrients that she needs. Kittens should be fed kitten food until they are one year old. Mom's should eat kitten food while they are nursing.
- As a foster, you agree to provide your kittens/cat with a name brand, premium diet.
- If you choose to change the brand of food for your kitties, make sure to gradually change them over to whatever brand you are switching over to. Do this over the course of about a week, by mixing the new food with the old food, starting with a 25:75 ratio, and gradually changing over to 50:50, 75:25, then 100% new food. You may notice some slightly soft stool as their bodies are getting adjusted to the new food.

### 13) Litter Box Training

LITTER BOXES NEED TO BE CHANGED / DUMPED EVERY DAY. At about 3 weeks of age, a kitten should be able to eliminate without help, and you can start litter training.

- Set up a shallow litter tray that the kittens can climb in and out of easily – like an aluminum one-use baking rimmed cookie sheet. Or the cardboard bases that cases of canned food come on. You can get these in pet stores.
- Clay litter is best; but clumping litter is OK if it is the wheat or corn variety. When kittens climb in and out of the litter tray with feet wet from water or food, the clumps get between their toes and can be ingested. The corn or wheat won't hurt them, but minerals or other ingredients can.
- If the kittens poop outside the box, pick it up and put it in the box for training, so they learn what it's there for.
- After feeding, place kittens in a clean, shallow litter tray. Encourage them to scratch in the litter.
- Leave a litter pan available to them at all times at this age.
- Expect accidents! This is also the stage in which lining their area with the shower curtain liner helps keep your home clean.

## 14) Socialization

### **Basic Play:**

Before 15 weeks, your kittens are sponges for information. The more you play with your kitties, the more socially adept they will be later in life. Frequent gentle handling and play with varied people, including men, women, and supervised children, makes them more social later in life. (However, be careful. Children love kittens and sometimes hurt them by accident. Please always supervise your children with your foster kittens.)

Enrich your kittens' environment with toys. Bat-a-birds and laser pointers are two great interactive toys, especially with kids, since it keeps hands away from batting paws. They do love the silliest things as well, such as boxes, paper bags, bottle caps, toilet paper rolls and the little ring around the milk jug. Just make sure any toys are big enough that they do not fit into the kittens' mouth, but small and light enough for them to carry around. You can also get food foraging toys (20% of food through the toy), like the little balls with the holes in them that deposit treats. These give the kittens something to do and stimulates their brain. Do not allow them to play with plastic bags, string, wires, etc. All these can cause damage to your kittens.

### **Shy kittens:**

- Depending on their age and shyness level, give kittens an initial two-day adjustment period before you begin interacting with them too much.
- Move slowly and speak softly around the kittens. If you wear shoes indoors, consider slippers or socks around the kittens. Don't play loud music or musical instruments.
- Let the kittens be a part of the household action. Leave a TV or radio on after the kittens have been in your home for a few days, so they become accustomed to human voices and sounds. If exposure to other pets is not an issue, set the whole crate in a busy living room with a TV playing.
- For young kittens, a ticking clock wrapped in a towel sounds like a mother cat's heartbeat and is very soothing.
- Kittens will respond to positive experiences. Reward positive behaviors, like the kittens approaching you for attention or after a good play session, and prevent negative experiences like scolding or confrontations with other pets.
- Gauge each kitten's ability to learn and become accustomed to you. Evaluate each individually—don't go by set rules.
- Be patient! Spitting, hissing, and hiding are all expressions of fear; do not mistake these signs for aggression.
- If a litter of kittens are slow to socialize, consider separating them. Isolating the kittens forces them to rely on people. If you can't, make sure you spend quality time alone with each one. Litters can be put back together after a short adjustment period.
- Don't try to rush the socialization process. Be patient, and monitor the progress of each individual kitten.

### **Feral kittens:**

- House the kittens in dog crate and place the crate in a quiet, kitten-safe room.
- Provide security for the kittens by covering the crate with a sheet or blanket.
- Kittens need a safe zone (such as a shoe box with blankets) inside the cage.
- Do not try to handle the kittens.
- Try not to stare at the kittens for prolonged periods. Look away frequently so you're less threatening to them. Do not allow young children to play with or handle feral kittens. They are not old enough to understand and react to their temperaments and behaviors.

### **Socializing with food:**

- Providing the kitten with food creates an incentive for the kitten to interact with you and forms a positive association, ensuring that she connects you with the food she loves so much.
- You may keep dry kitten food out all day. When you feed wet food, stay in the room while the kittens eat it, so they associate you with food and begin to trust you.
- If the kittens are very timid, try to first give them food on a spoon.
- Over time, gradually move the food plate closer to your body while you sit in the room, until the plate is in your lap and the kittens are comfortable crawling on you to get to it.
- Pet and handle the kittens for the first time while they are eating, so they have an incentive to stay put. Start petting around the face, chin, and behind the ears and work up to petting all over.
- Gradually work up to holding kittens, making sure to reward them with some canned cat food or chicken-flavored baby food on a spoon. Human baby food, especially chicken flavor, is a special incentive for kittens. (Make sure the baby food has no onion—it's toxic to cats.)
- Don't offer food to kittens on your finger or allow kittens to play with your hand or bite or scratch you. A bite from even a young kitten can be painful and dangerous and it teaches the kittens that biting is acceptable behavior. This rule is especially important when raising single kittens without siblings.

### **Socializing with touch and play:**

- It's important to get kittens used to being handled at a young age, so they are used to this interaction when they grow up.
- Devote at least two hours per day for successful socialization. You can do a few long sessions or several shorter sessions.
- Get down to the kittens' level and play with them; particularly kittens eight weeks and younger.
- Take time to socialize each of the kittens individually. Handling them away from the group can speed up the socialization process by making them more dependent on you.

- Use toys to entice kittens to play as soon as they are interested, usually around three to four weeks of age.
- If a kitten is particularly feisty, papoose her in a towel with only the head out and hold her while doing things around the house.
- After kittens are comfortable enough with you to fall asleep on your lap or purr in your presence, they can move from the initial confinement space to a larger, kitten-proof room. (A bathroom is good)
- If there are other friendly animals in your household, exposing kittens to them after the initial separation period will only help the kittens' socialization, and broaden the scope of potential adoptive homes they would do well in!

### **Precautions:**

- Even a scratch from a kitten can hurt. Make sure to take precautions to keep both you and the kittens safe.
- Feral kittens can hurt you if you are not careful; wear gloves or protective clothing if you feel it is needed.
- Don't take chances. Sometimes you have to scruff kittens by the back of their neck to gain control. Learn how to safely scruff a kitten as shown in the photo. Use your entire hand and gently but firmly grasp the fur on back of neck without pinching, pull the cat up, and immediately support her hind legs.

## 15) Fading Kitten Syndrome:

Fading Kitten Syndrome is a life threatening emergency in which a kitten “crashes” and begins to fade away. The first four weeks of life can be the most perilous time for young kittens. Some kittens may have suffered birth trauma or other physical conditions that cause them function below the level of their siblings.

Fading kitten syndrome (FKS) is spectrum of disorders. The common denominator in all of the disorders is that they cause a failure to thrive in kittens. FKS is best described as a feline version of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

In a litter of kittens, you may notice one or two kittens not behaving like the others. They may not take to nursing from their mother. And may be smaller than their siblings. The mom cat may even reject the kittens in order to focus on her healthy offspring. Because fading kitten syndrome does not have one single cause it is important to look at a multitude of factors that can contribute to failure to thrive in kittens.

### **Symptoms:**

Low Body Temperature – the kitten feels cool or cold to the touch

Extreme Lethargy - not getting up, unable to stand, not responding when pet

Gasping for breath

Meowing/Crying out

**What to do:**

Step 1- Get them warm:

Create the “burrito” towel. Immediately wrap the kitten up in a towel like a burrito leaving their face exposed only. Then wrap a heating pad turned onto \*low\* around the towel - duct tape it or secure it around the towel so it stays wrapped around them. Don't let the heating pad touch them directly as it can cause burns. Make sure the 'burrito' towel is between their skin and the heating pad.

Step 2- Get their blood sugar up:

Once you get the heat on them, get a bowl or Tupperware and a few tablespoons sugar in hot water. You may also use Karo Syrup. Stir it up so you get a sugar water solution- you do want it to be as strong as possible while still pretty runny. Using a syringe or your finger give 3 drops every 3 minutes into the mouth. If they aren't swallowing, try not to get it down the throat, try to get it on the tongue or gums. Set an egg timer or use the stop watch on your cell phone to make sure you are doing it at least every 3 minutes. Every 5 minutes or 10 minutes will not work, it must be every 3 minutes.

Step 3 – Contact CASPCA:

Contact the clinic or the after hours phone to bring the kitten in as soon as possible. We DO NOT recommend you rush them to the vet for many reasons. You have the motivation to sit right there with them and make them your top priority. A vet clinic has many patients it is helping and can't give your kitten the 100% undivided attention you can give them.

Your kitten will continue to be cold/hypoglycemic on the way to the vet, in the waiting room, in the hospital while they try to determine what is wrong, etc. Most kittens won't last long enough for them to start the treatments there. Keep in mind, it can sometimes take hours for them to come out of it and start acting normally again. Once they do come out of it, make sure you contact the foster team to discuss what could have possibly caused them to fade in the first place and make sure we have the kitten on all the right medical treatments for any illnesses they have that may have caused it.

## 16) Losing a Kitten or Kittens

The death of kitten is an upsetting experience. No matter how it died, your kitten has become part of the family. You've bonded with them. You've spent time and effort training your kitten. Unfortunately, kittens are fragile and can have a high mortality rate.

If you have young children, they may be particularly upset about the loss of a kitten. They may have just begun to learn about raising kittens. And this experience may be their first exposure to death and loss. Your other pets may have bonded with your kitten, as well. Like humans, they may become depressed about the loss and display signs or grief, such as poor appetite and lack of interest in playing.

If you experience difficulty coping with the loss of your kitten, there is help available. CASPCA staff, volunteers, and other fosters have gone through this loss as well, and are here to help you through it. Don't hesitate to reach out for help!

Do NOT blame yourself – the mortality rate is quite high with young kittens, in particular those without a mom. Remember... Make raising kittens a fun experience! **Any kitten you've ever fostered was given a second chance at life BECAUSE of YOU!**

**THANK YOU for all you are doing for our community's homeless kittens.**