



Under-socialized Kittens

Because of their lack of experiences with humans between 3 and 7 weeks of age, under-socialized kittens may take longer to become trusting and affectionate than kittens that had positive experiences with humans early on. They may hiss, spit or strike out - or may simply attempt to run away. Under-socialized kittens need time and gentle commitment to help them learn to trust.

When you take your kitten home:

- **Confine to a sanctuary room for at least 14 days—the smaller the better.** Bathrooms are often ideal. This room should have everything your kitten needs, including bedding, litterbox, food and water, and a few safe hiding places that you can access easily. Too much space is overwhelming for these kittens, and they can get “stuck” hiding behind furniture. Smaller rooms ensure that the only “hiding places” available to the kitten are ones that you can access easily (such as a box, or a carrier covered with a towel or blanket).
- **Use food to make friends!** Whenever you visit, begin the interaction with a high value treat. High value treats include all meat baby food, Nulo sticks, Greenies, Temptations, Bonito flakes, etc. The goal is to associate you with something they like. Try to make a routine; predictability can be a huge part of helping kittens feel secure.
- **Move slowly and talk softly** when approaching the kitten. Get down closer to their level when possible.
- **Use toys to build confidence**, for exercise, and as a fun way to bond. The best toys are the interactive kind, like cat-dancers or even shoelaces. This type of toy should not be left alone with a cat or kitten. Also make toys like Ping-Pong balls or paper balls available for solitary play. Remember—hands should *never* be used as toys!
- **Once comfortable with handling, handle the kitten often.** As they grow more comfortable with you, get them used to being handled and petted all over. When they’re older, you will want to be able to trim their nails- get your kitten used to having their paws handled at a young age.
- **Gradually introduce the kitten to the rest of the home under your supervision** after they’ve grown to trust you. Do this in stages—for example opening the bathroom to the entire bedroom at once may not be advisable. Even if they begin confidently, they could panic and hide somewhere inaccessible. Make sure to kitten-proof any new rooms first. Use barriers to direct your kitten’s path if necessary.
- **Gradually introduce your kitten to new people.** Make sure to instruct your friends on approaching slowly/offering food. We want meeting people to be a positive experience. Make sure not to traumatize the kitten by putting them in a situation that is beyond their capacity - such as a loud dinner party!
- **REMEMBER: Socialization takes time.** Try to give the kitten at least a few “training visits” a day, more if possible. Don’t be discouraged! Cats commonly take at least 2 weeks to transition into a new environment.

Checklist for effectively Kitten-Proofing your home:

- ✓ Block off all hidey holes (under fridge, under beds, between cabinets, behind furniture, etc)
- ✓ Check that all windows are closed, or that screens are secure. If possible, use Pet Screen (kittens climb screens)
- ✓ Make sure any toxic substances are stored in an inaccessible place
- ✓ Make sure any chewable cords are bound up or inaccessible (cord covers can be helpful)
- ✓ Make sure any plants are out of reach and/or are non-toxic to cats
- ✓ If necessary, place barriers (baby gates, exercise pens) in strategic places to limit your kitten’s adventures to acceptable areas of the house (can be very useful during the initial exploration)
- ✓ Make sure there are no high areas your kitten could get “stuck” on or fall off of

For a more detailed step by step guide helping fearful kittens gain confidence, see our “Hisses to Kisses” handout in the Behavior Resources section at www.eastbayspca.org