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**Tips and Tricks for Foster Carers**

Thank you for fostering kittens for ?; the work foster carers like you do, help save countless lives each year. With your assistance, our aim is to help these animals learn how to become social, confident and happy and thus be able to find their forever homes.

**Behaviour Information:**

A very important aspect of fostering is to help your kittens to become happy, comfortable and confident with people. The easiest way to achieve this is through play and cuddles!

The more you interact with them in all sorts of ways, the more comfortable they will become with handling and this will make it so much easier for them to find a home.

Some things you can do to help them are:

* Sitting with them while they are eating, especially if they are really shy
* Pick them up and carry them around
* Play with toys with them e.g. wand toys and rolling jingle balls
* Give lots of pats, even at meal times
* Hand feeding every now and then, especially if they are really shy
* Pats all over – including face, mouth, paws, tail, etc
* Expose them to household noises – vacuum cleaners, television, radio

**Sound Proof Puppy App** is a highly recommended desensitization program that can be used with kittens from their neo-natal stages and up. This can be downloaded on smart phones and I Pad.

* Let them interact with different people such as friends and family so they learn to accept lots of people
* Brushing/combing



**Socialization of Kittens**

Kittens that are put into foster care need lots of cuddles and pats. They normally come from places where they haven’t had much interaction with people. If they are orphaned babies (without mum), it is beneficial for them to be handled gently by all members of your family a few times a day. Ideally when they are two to three weeks old, slow and careful handling can be done. **See Kitten Growth Chart**

If they are with mum, often mum can be protective when they are young. If mum is comfortable with you being nearby, slow and gentle handling of her babies can be done once they are two weeks old.

**Hissy and Timid Cats and Kittens**

The majority of our kittens and cats that enter our shelter often have not had much interaction with people. They have only seen humans at a distance and spent their young lives running away from people.

Our aim for them in foster care is to be able to get them to the level where they are braver and gained enough confidence to feel comfortable in a new home.

This task is an important one for our carers as it means that you are rehabilitating the kittens to be courageous enough to go into their new homes.

This can be a **very** slow process, depending on the age and the temperament and level of shyness of the kitten/cat.

It is a process called “tough love” as the kitten is learning that being patted and handled is a positive thing- they can’t be permitted to hide away. They may cringe away and try and squash themselves into the tiniest space they can find but by giving them a spacious cage that they feel safe in, they will be very limited to how much they can hide.

The cage or crate that will be their “safe haven“ has to be big enough for you to be able to reach in pick them up but small enough for them not hide away in crevices.

SDCH will provide you with a suitable collapsible crate when available.

**Please read the following excerpt from ASPCA on Socializing shy kittens**

**Using Food for Successful Kitten Socialization**

Kittens younger than 8 weeks can usually be socialized without much difficulty, while older kittens who have had no positive interaction with humans can take much longer. However, the guidelines below can help you successfully socialize kittens – and often shy adult cats as well!

Keep in mind that while these techniques are usually successful, there is always the chance that cats might not respond as well or as quickly as you hope, so you may need a contingency plan in place.

Before you start working with kittens, make sure you're on their level so you can comfortably interact without looming over them or backing them into corners. A large dog kennel might provide the right space if the socializer can sit inside; a bathroom or any small room without hiding spots can also work well.

**Food: The Great Motivator**

Food is the most important tool to facilitate the socialization process. Growing kittens have an insatiable appetite – and that fact works in your favor because it spurs them to approach and be touched. So don't put food down and walk away – make kittens interact with you to get that reward.

If the kittens are healthy, using the litter box, and will eat in front of you, you can safely begin delaying meals just enough to give you the advantage of hunger. If the kittens will eat in your presence, progressively pull the dish as close to you as possible. Stay with the kittens until they have finished eating and then take any remaining food away with you when you leave. (Always leave water, of course.)

When the kittens have progressed to eating right beside you with your hand touching the dish, start offering something tasty off your finger. Little bits of boiled flakes of chicken are favorites. Whiskas Gold (found in coles or Woolworths) or tiny bits of tuna they also love!

You can also let the kittens learn to lick from a spoon, popsicle stick, or tongue depressor if at first they want to chew your finger instead of lick it.

**Body Contact**

Initiate contact at the beginning of a session when the kittens are particularly hungry.

Start with them eating from a dish or off the finger and eventually progress to touching and petting while they are in your lap eating. Start petting in the head and shoulder area only. If the kittens run off, lure them back with baby food on the finger. You can also put a dish in your lap and let an entire litter climb on you to get it!

Expand petting and touching around the head and shoulders by touching the underbelly. Also try nudging them from one side to the other while they are engrossed in eating. Just having your hands near them and gently pushing them around is an important preparation to being picked up.

**Picking Up**

Set up two dishes and gently lift/scoot a kitten the short distance from one dish to the other, very close to the ground. If the kitten is engrossed in eating she won't mind being lifted if it goes smoothly and quickly. If not, lure her back and start over.

Sit on the same level as the kittens so the first real lift is close to the floor. Have a full jar of baby food opened and ready ahead of time. Lift under the chest with a small dish of food directly in front of the kitten's nose the entire time. Hold the kitten loosely on your knees and eventually up to your chest so your heartbeat can be heard.

Once that's mastered, try lifting while you're kneeling and then eventually while you're standing.

When the kitten is very full and getting sleepy, try gentle petting and work up to holding and petting without the incentive of food being present. If this works you should be able to try it at other times between meals.

Most feral kittens are frightened by interactive play when first exposed to humans. Start with a toy that isn't too threatening and allows distance – a toy on the end of a stick, for example. Be flexible and experiment – and then use whatever proves to be the kitten's favorite thing as a reward for new steps or to break through a plateau.

[](https://www.google.com.au/imgres?imgurl=http://i.imgur.com/UgRm5uc.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.lifewithcats.tv/2013/06/27/marigold/&docid=lA5QlWEoNDiQiM&tbnid=8SvWiCoN2i3WgM:&w=3264&h=2448&bih=904&biw=1680&ved=0ahUKEwjS8MnvxrPPAhUBxpQKHbxuCeQQMwhXKDQwNA&iact=mrc&uact=8)

If you have any concerns about anything to do with the kittens’ behaviour, please get in contact with the shelter. If picked up early, there is a better chance that problem behaviours can be addressed and improved. We are always happy to give advice to help you out.

Some behaviours to keep an eye out for include:

* Hissing or growling
* Hiding constantly
* Not using the litter tray
* Biting or scratching in an aggressive way (not playing)
* Timidness/ shyness

**Safety and Kitten Proofing**

Having a four pawed, 1- 2 month old ball of fluff running around your house can be very entertaining- for both kittens and people! It is much like having a toddler around, and the same care needs to be taken. They love getting into mischief and have absolutely no idea about what they can and can’t do. Their time with you will be a learning experience for them and for you!





For the time that you have them as your guests, make sure that any **balconies/ windows are blocked off and sharp /tiny and breakable objects are put out of their reach**. Kittens also love playing with power cords- if you can unplug them then do so, otherwise supervise when they are around them.

Rule of the thumb is: **whatever can fit into their mouth, will probably go into their mouth!**

Care may need to be taken if you have indoor plants. Not all plants are safe for cats/kittens and having them around certain plants such as lilies can lead to illnesses as serious as renal failure.

Please turn over for a handout on Toxic Plants

**Kitten Containment:**

Kittens love to run around, and even bounce off the walls (and curtains!) To ensure their safety, as well as make sure your house doesn’t end up a war zone, I have included some examples of kitten playpens- some of our foster carers find them useful if they aren’t around to supervise or if they have other pets.

[](http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=foster+kitten+set+up&view=detailv2&&id=C6E4CE1D579E43A6C495C9F268E5D5EBB7581CDB&selectedIndex=330&ccid=zFy6Ctaq&simid=608011862089403806&thid=OIP.Mcc5cba0ad6aab15e3c52ccb309439f7bo0)

[](http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=kitten+collapsible+pen&view=detailv2&&id=41A3A5FA26147F467D469F0DBE93C73F76B7DA25&selectedIndex=2&ccid=kg6y+awZ&simid=608038654084841808&thid=OIP.M920eb2f9ac1997f2b1fe8f3a1e27621eo0)

If you find that a collapsible pen may take up too much room in your home, the kittens can be kept safe and well out of harms ways in a bathroom or laundry. They are both easy to clean rooms and can be made more comfortable for your furry guests with bedding and toys.

They can be put away in either a room or play pen at night without you fearing them pouncing on your feet, and keeping you up all night.

**A collapsible pen is highly recommended if you have a shy cat/kitten or mum and bubs or existing pets. Please speak to staff if you need to borrow one as we may have some on-site**

**Feeding Kittens and/or Mums and Bubs:**

Depending on the age of the kittens, they will need feeding from several times a day to twice a day, on a combination of dry kitten food and wet kitten food. If already eating dry food, that can be left out for them to nibble on throughout the day.

Kittens and cats (and fusy eaters!) prefer NOT to have the wet and dry food mixed so it is recommended to have a double bowl with wet food on one side and dry on the other.

Our staff will note on the foster form how often, how much they will need, what they have been eating here.

If they are on Kitten milk formula, this will also be noted for you. Cats are lactose intolerant so Biolac Pink Milk formula is what we use here at SDCH.

Please avoid using Whiskas kitten milk or other supermarket varieties

It is good to get the kittens used to a variety of foods just so they don’t end up being fussy in their new homes. To encourage them onto new foods, you can start by mixing a small amount of their new food with the type that they are currently on. As high quality diets go, we recommend Hill’s Science Diet biscuits but we understand that some kittens can be finicky.

If you can get them eating the Hill’s Science Diet, it will be easier for them transitioning to that diet when they come back to us

To make sure they are increasing in weight, supervision during feed times may be needed (especially if one is gutsier than the others!) Feed them from separate bowls so that their food intake can be monitored.

[](https://www.google.com.au/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjK8YuG-ZHKAhUJEpQKHTzUBW4QjRwIBw&url=https://www.pinterest.com/pin/404690716486011310/&bvm=bv.110151844,d.dGo&psig=AFQjCNEqvqLEDYmJU7844PXDTe_khjC1fw&ust=1452057565659751)

**Caring for Mums and Bubs:**

Mumma cats play a big role in the development and care of their babies. We try and keep them together as a group to ensure that babies gets all the essential nutrients as well as social skills that they need.

During the time that mum and bubs are in your care, it is advised that mum be made to feel as comfortable and protected as possible while she’s busy….being mum!

She will need:

* Safe, secure place away from other pets
* Ensure windows are closed/ fitted with fly screens, no access to balconies
* Check that there are no spaces behind furniture or appliances that she or her kittens can get stuck in or behind
* Quiet room or area with minimal disruptions
* Comfy area to rest and feed her kittens
* A place that she can retreat for a bit of “me” time (plus a spot higher up where she can supervise her kittens playing without being tackled herself!)
* Good quality food (see your foster agreement) to ensure that she has enough energy to sustain herself as well as her babies
* Regular pats and attention (\*if she is an outgoing, confident girl)

\*some mum cats can be over protective when their babies are around.

Staff will inform you, if this is the case. If you notice this behavior, please call us for advice

Mums have the job of feeding more than one! She will most likely have a very healthy appetite and will always need food made available for her. Unless specified otherwise, kitten food is best for a mother who is feeding as this has the fat content and supplements to keep her healthy.



**Cleanliness and Hygiene**

Kitten immune systems are vulnerable at this age so they are susceptible to illnesses.

Before and after handling kittens, remember to wash/disinfect your hands. This is also a good point to remember if you have existing pets in the household.

Any equipment used for kittens (bowls, trays, bedding, crates) should be disinfected and washed between each foster visit.

**The Health of the Kittens:**

To ensure they stay healthy, please check the kittens’ weights every 1-2 days (this can be done on any set of kitchen scales). The main thing is to make sure their weights are increasing. If their weights drop at all, or do not increase, please contact the vet (contact details as below).

Please also take note of any signs of ill health in the kittens, for example:

* Diarrhoea
* Lethargy/ flatness/ inactivity
* Vomiting
* Sneezing, coughing or runny eyes
* Hair loss (even in tiny patches)
* Injuries
* Fleas
* Loss of appetite
* Anything else that seems abnormal

**If you observe any of the above signs or are ever unsure about the health of your foster kittens please always contact the shelter vet,**

Better to be safe than sorry!

[](https://www.google.com.au/imgres?imgurl=https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/e8/df/08/e8df081a36c6a0696e1b0930aeca4084.jpg&imgrefurl=https://www.pinterest.com/pin/113786328055632699/&h=524&w=736&tbnid=TXAlt2SrqTykUM:&docid=pi0NwrdOrb2wHM&ei=Cl2LVvjXKsuyjwPw-5vACQ&tbm=isch&ved=0ahUKEwj4hNKjgJLKAhVL2WMKHfD9BpgQMwhDKB0wHQ)

**On the Return of Kittens:**

**Appointments for returning kittens should be made at least a week prior.**

If kittens are slow to put on weight, they may need you longer!

Please keep in touch in regards to your availability

Emergency situations are taken into consideration and we are very willing to work with our carers.

Below are the contacts you can use if you need to bring back the kittens.

**Who to contact?**

**We encourage you to contact us, if ANY supplies of food, litter, bedding are needed so if you notice that you are running low, please call, email or text our foster care coordinator.**

**In case of after-hours emergency:**

**???**

