

Happy Kitten, Happy Humans

Congratulations on your new family member! We love kittens and we know you do too. Kittens look at the world with wonder and a playful intent. Preventing behavior problems begins with understanding your kitten's behavior and providing appropriate experiences for their natural behaviors. Kittens need to play, explore, scratch and develop social skills. Kittens are just learning the routine of the family so be patient while your new family member learns the ropes.

Routine: To help your kitten acclimate to the schedule of your home, provide consistent and predictable experiences throughout the day. The normal pattern for a cat is to hunt, eat, groom and sleep. Play with your kitten in the morning for 10-15 minutes minimum before you leave for work and then give the kitten breakfast as the last thing you do before walking out the door. When you get home, have another play session and then give the kitten a few snack or a small portion of dinner to eat. Right before you go to bed, have a long play session and give the kitten the rest of dinner and some canned cat food.

Play time: Object play is strongest in a kitten between the ages of 9-16 weeks. During this time, kittens spend a huge amount of time exploring toys and other objects in their environment. To develop their motor skills, they will actively play by tossing and batting toys. They will test their ability to jump, twist and use fine paw motor skills. Provide a variety of toys to fulfill her natural prey and play drives. Smaller soft toys are great for grabbing and tossing across the room. Ping pong balls are perfect for batting across the floor and larger soft toy are for grabbing biting and kicking. Rotate which toys you leave out for your kitten to play with so she doesn't get bored. Purchase interactive wand toys and integrate three to four 30 minutes play sessions into your daily routine during this phase of development. Baby teeth will also be falling out at this stage so your kitten might increase biting behaviors. Be sure to have appropriate toys available in multiple locations of the home. ***Never use your hands or any other body part to play with your kitten.***

Experiences and handling: The fearless curiosity of young kittens usually begins to change around 8 weeks of age. It is around this time that most kittens are gaining independence from their mother and need to have a healthy apprehension towards new things. When first bringing your kitten home, make sure to spend several weeks introducing her to new people, places and experiences. It is important that every experience is positive. For example, invite a variety of people over to meet your kitten and provide a treat for your guest to give to the kitten. Keep the carrier out in the open and feed your kitten breakfast and dinner inside the carrier so she associates it with good things. Take her for short trips in the car to kitten play dates so she associates the car with a fun experience. Remember that the older your kitten gets the less adaptable she will be to new experiences. Be careful not to stress her out and go at her pace. It will have the opposite effect on her if she is getting overwhelmed and frightened. Start desensitizing your cat to being handled on different parts of the body by gently handling the ears, head, tail, paws, nails, and mouth. This will make nail trimming easier and help your cat not be as stressed during veterinarian visits.

Solutions to Common Kitten Antics

My kitten keeps me up all night

Your kitten needs to be worn out before you go to bed to encourage sleeping when the humans sleep. Increase play time right before bedtime and feed dinner right as you go to bed. You can also use a puzzle feeder to increase mental stimulation and make meals last longer. Make sure the kitten has appropriate, quiet toys to interact with overnight and do not give in to the kitten's attempt to wake you up. Cats are incredibly smart and will learn in as little as one experience. What works once, must work again!

My kitten is attacking my ankles

Your kitten thinks it is her job to initiate play sessions with you. She needs more interactive play time with you and at consistent times. Set an alarm to remind you that it's time for play and add regular play times into your morning and night time routine. Kittens with a buddy will usually not need as much interactive play with the humans. If you have a single kitten in the home, plan on 30 minute play sessions three times a day to start.

My kitten isn't always using the litter box

The kidneys are not fully developed until about 6 months of age. Imagine toddlers who don't know until the last second that they need to GO right now! If your kitten isn't making it to the litter box, it's because the box is probably too far away or the kitten is so distracted she didn't know until the last second. Add litter boxes to separate areas of the home. There should be one on each level of the home and on both ends of the main level. Keep the majority of kitten interaction time near the sanctuary room or add litter boxes to the areas of the home your family spends the most time with the kitten.

My kitten need to learn to use a scratching post

Encourage the kitten by dragging a string toy up the side of the scratching post. Always praise your kitten for touching or using the scratching post. Make sure the post is sturdy and placed in the right location for the kitten. Tucking that post in a corner usually isn't as appealing as placing it near your favorite chair or in an area that the kitten walks past frequently.

My kitten is hiding

Keep the kitten in the sanctuary room and do not force petting. Kittens can be shy and scared just like adult cats or human kids for that matter. Spend quiet time in the room with the kitten, try playing with a wand toy, bring the kitten canned food and treats, talk softly to the kitten and make every visit a positive one.