



**KITTEN  
EARLY DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION**

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## Kitten 101: Early Development

Early development is as key for your new kitten as it is for any new member of your family. The most early days of a kitten's life are among the most influential. Take this opportunity to learn with your kitten as they grow.

### Related Topics:

- SOCIALIZATION
- DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR
- LITTER BOX TRAINING
- MARKING

### Early Development



To any cat enthusiast, kittens are an irresistible, adorable, sweet perfection in a furry little ball. But when adopted, their angelic appearance can soon be replaced by the realities of owning an energetic young kitten. There are ways to prevent this adoration from turning into frustration. Kittens are certainly different in many ways from their counterpart companions...puppies. However, they equally benefit from early training and a consistent, loving approach.

Gaining a better understanding of the feline species and providing for your kitten's needs with appropriate training and structure will ensure a smoother introduction of your new kitten to your family.

### Things to Do

- Locomotion
  - At 6 to 7 weeks of age kittens can perform all the gaits associated with adult movement...give them opportunity to challenge themselves.
- Eyesight
  - Though kittens are born with the eyelids closed they will open ~2wks. Keeping them as close to their mother during this period will avoid any challenges during this period.
  - Games that require your kitten to visually track on object are good exercises as their eyes begin to open and foster their natural instincts.
- Hunting
  - Hunting is a natural feline behavior. However, limiting your kittens access to prey by keeping them indoors will keep them safe and reduce this behavior from dominating.
- Weaning
  - This process should start at about 4 to 5 weeks and is usually complete by 7 to 8 weeks. Give them time and space.
- Social Play
  - Kittens are extremely observant learners (copycats!)
  - Social play should be fostered around 4 weeks and will transition to predominantly object play ~7 weeks.
  - Provide lots opportunity and tools for play.

### Things to Avoid

- Locomotion
  - Allow your kitten to explore at their own pace and avoid exposing them to situations that prematurely test their locomotive skills.
  - Breakable items should be moved out of reach.
- Eyesight
  - Avoid attempting to influence your kitten opening his/her eyes prematurely. The kitten will open their eyes when ready, ~2wks.
- Hunting
  - Cats with outdoor access often wear bells, as an early warning system for would be prey. Ensure that your kitten / cat is equipped with a break away collar to prevent being unable to free themselves.
- Weaning
  - Kittens should not be removed from their mother until weaning process is completed...meaning the kitten can and is regularly eating solid cat food.
- Social Play
  - Kittens learn from play as much as any animal. As observant learners, and natural predators, it is important to employ as many positive reinforcement techniques as possible. This solicits the positive response and reduces the risk your cat sees you as an object for hunting play!



## Kitten 101: Destructive Behavior

Destructive behavior in kittens often results from scratching behavior targeted at household items. Although destructive, this is normal feline behavior.

### Related Topics:

- LITTER BOX TRAINING
- EARLY DEVELOPMENT
- MARKING
- SOCIALIZATION

### Destructive Behavior



Your kitten is equipped with some very serious hardware for practicing destructive habits. Retractable claws and sharp teeth can make easy work of many household items. Scratching being the most common source, serves many functions for your kitten / cat. Scratching is a communication tool (leaving both scent and visual marks of the site), a way to clean and condition the claw beds, and a great way to stretch the muscles of the legs and toes.

It is important to remember that is a natural part of kitten development. Be patient and provide options for your kitten's scratching needs. If focused correctly, scratching can be a healthy outlet and your furniture will survive!

### Things to Do

- Identify your cat's preferred scratching scenario by studying your cat's habits and most importantly where they inappropriately scratch. Considerations;
  - Surface Orientation (horizontal vs. vertical)
  - Substrates & Materials
  - Locations
- Buy or build scratching posts / pads that mimic you cat's preferred scratching scenario. Considerations;
  - Any vertical posts should be tall & sturdy to prevent the object from toppling over and causing injury to family members and/or pet(s).
  - Material should allow for good grip (fabric / carpet / soft wood / rope / etc.)
- Locate your scratching 'post' / object in a place where your cat can comfortably and safely access. Considerations;
  - Near resting spots
  - Near frequented pathways
- Some additional considerations to attract and keep your cat's attention;
  - Sprinkle cat nip on or around
  - Playing with toys on or around
  - Reward with treats
  - Spray with Feliway pheromone

### Things to Avoid

- Your cat is agile and often very persistent. Do not use avers or negative reinforcement methods to deter your cat.
- Rather, to discourage your cat from scratching inappropriate targets;
  - Cover area with adhesive substrate (ex. double sided adhesive tape)
  - Spray area with a commercial repellent
  - Motion activated deterrents
  - Spray bottle with water
- Try to avoid high traffic areas where access is restrained or is at high risk of accident.



## Kitten 101: Litter Box Training

Litter box training can be among the easier activities of rearing a new family pet. Kittens are naturally drawn to using a litter box as part of their propensity for a clean environment.

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### Litter Box Training



One of the most attractive reasons to own a cat is their cleanliness. This is most evident in even the early stages of kitten development, as they begin to use a litter box.

Most kittens will naturally be attracted to a litter box for elimination. Although this very often the most consistent of your kitten's activities, interruptions is this behavior can occur. Problems tend to arise when the litter box is not accessible, clean or attractive. It is easier to avoid litter box problems than to fix it. In addition to accessibility, it is recommended that your kitten has 1, and if possible 2 litter boxes with which to use.

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### Things to Do

#### ACCESSIBILITY

- Make sure that litter boxes are easily accessible.
  - Have plenty of litter boxes. A good rule is that the minimum number of litter boxes = the number of cats + 1. (Two cats = Three Litter Boxes)
  - Place litter boxes throughout the home, paying attention to your kitten's needs in a multilayer home.

#### BIG

- Make sure that litter boxes are big enough to comfortably accommodate your full size cat.
  - Jumbo sized litter boxes, or plastic storage containers also make good options for adult cats and multi-cat households. Uncovered boxes are recommended.

#### CLEAN

- Keep boxes clean by; scooping daily and dumping / washing litter box monthly.
  - Clumping clay litters offer easy cleaning options. Most cats prefer clumping clay (sand-like) litter over other options.
  - Consult with our team if there are signs of household soiling.

### Things to Avoid

- Clustering multiple litter boxes in a single location.
- Placing litter boxes next to noisy appliances like washers / dryers / furnaces.
- Punishing your kitten for elimination discovered in the house, after the fact.
- Rubbing your kitten's nose in a mess.
- Leaving other attractive elimination options (for example: dirt in large potted plants, piles of dirty laundry on the floor, children's sandbox, etc.) accessible to your kitten.
- Keeping litterbox within easy access for the family dog...they may consider the contents a treat.



## Kitten 101: Marking

Marking can quickly become a lingering problem and extends well past the simple stain on the carpet.

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- DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR
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## Marking



Although not uncommon, marking in kittens is less of an occurrence seen among the older generation. Marking can be triggered by a variety of causes that range from medical (i.e. incontinence) to behavioral. If your companion is displaying this behavior it is important to consult a veterinarian regarding the driver.

Many times the first step in addressing this behavior, before it occurs is to have your kitten spayed / neutered. This of course is not a magic cure. If you find your kitten developing this practice, look to implement a variety of strategies to dissuade them and reduce your preventive measures to those that suit your lifestyle and produce the desired result.

## Things to Do

- Identify the triggers for marking;
  - Is there a link between marking and other activities, such as viewing cats outside your home.
- Minimize your cat's exposure to marking triggers;
  - Block views from specific windows
  - Separate your cat when specific visitors are present
- Offer plenty of healthy outlets in the form of scratching posts / pads.
- Leverage pheromones that are available commercially to encourage facial marking instead of urine marking.
- Create multiple food, water, and litter box sites throughout the living space.
- Provide several elevated sleeping / resting perches.

## Things to Avoid

- Do not punish your cat's marking; it will not solve the problem and may have the opposite result, making it worse.
- Do not ignore the activity. Try the suggestions to the previous section to isolate the trigger(s) and address them.
- Do not introduce new stimuli in to the situation in an all at once fashion (i.e. new pet). Many cats will adjust to a new pet given the room and time.



## Kitten 101: Socialization

Socialization benefits both your new kitten and the two legged members of the family. It is a key element to developing relationships between the kitten and its owner, as well as among a variety of other members in the community.

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### Socialization



The first few months of a kitten's life are critical to its health and development. A well socialized cat is one that gets along well with all different types of people and animals. This takes deliberate effort on your part, and ideally this exposure starts between 2 & 7 weeks of age.

Although kittens without socialization can still have wonderful lives, they may be less outgoing and open to new situations. The variety of new situations is just as key as the frequency at which they are exposed. Kittens with early and consistent socialization will benefit greatly throughout the many interactions and relationships in their life.

### Things to Do

- Read your kitten's body language and make each introduction comfortable.
  - Comfortable = Body relaxed, ears up, tail up, purring
  - Uncomfortable = Backing away, ears back, covering, tail fluffed or flicking, hissing
- Identify a favored reward;
  - Special toy / Treat / Petting
- Invite friends and family to visit frequently. Upon introduction, have the new person offer a favored reward. Make sure to include all different groups of people in this process.
- Gradually introduce new cats and/or dogs living outside the home using the appropriate separation and any other safety measures necessary. Be sure to introduce your kitten to other known healthy pets.

### Things to Avoid

- Overwhelming your kitten. If your kitten shows signs of fearful behavior, you have gone too far, too fast. Adjust the circumstances so that your kitten is comfortable.
- Physically disciplining your kitten by hitting, flicking its nose, or rubbing its face is a mess. These techniques may negatively impact its future relationship with people.
- Jeopardizing your kitten's safety by exposing it to other animals with the appropriate safety measures in place.