

Fostering Cats with challenging behaviours

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Introduction-welcome to the team

Each year thousands of cats arrive at The Ten Lives shelter. Some are found roaming (stray or feral) and others are surrendered.

There are many reasons for an owner to surrender a cat. Sometimes it is due to challenging behavioural issues that the owners are unable (or unwilling) to manage. Some of these behaviours can be resolved simply by being in a different environment that suits their individual needs (e.g. living in a single-cat household, quieter home, providing more enrichment etc). Other behaviours are more challenging to understand and manage. This is why we require your help as foster carers.

At Ten Lives we aim to give all cats/kittens a second chance and see if we are able to resolve challenging behaviours. The ultimate goal is to help them to find a home/family suited to their individual needs.

We sincerely thank you for taking on a cat/kitten with challenging behaviours.

What is required of me (to foster challenging behaviours)

To become a foster carer for cats with challenging behaviours we require you to be;

- Observant
- Follow our modification regime/ guidelines
- Patient
- Honest
- Practice positive enforcement (No negative punishment)
- Communicate with Ten Lives and attend Vet appointments as scheduled

Observant:

We will ask you to observe the cats' normal behaviour and body language closely and keep daily records in your diary. Your observations and record keeping is vital. This information is what we will use to try and understand/interpret their behaviour. Without this information we cannot attempt to resolve problems.

Follow our modification regime/ guidelines:

We will provide you with guidelines for modifying the challenging behaviours. We need you to follow these instructions closely. Please book an appointment with the Vet Team if you cannot adhere to the requirements or you wish to discuss the cat/kittens progress prior to a scheduled appointment.

Remember to keep the cat/kitten isolated from other pets for 2 weeks- unless explicitly requested otherwise. Introducing them to other animals is a stressful process and may impact on our modification regime and your observations of their personality.

Patience:

Behavioural challenges often take longer to manage/ modify, than medication to resolve illness. It will require at least 2 weeks in foster care and can be up to a few months. Some behaviours will change daily, but for those which take time we ask you to stick to the modification regime as planned. Avoid rushing the process.

Honesty:

The best outcome for a cat with challenging behaviours is to find a home that is suited to their individual needs. Even if your cat is displaying undesirable behaviours, it is always in the cats' best interest to be honest with us. Some undesirable behaviours are a symptom of a medical issue and some are due to stress/anxiety, therefore open discussion is vital so that we can address the issue.

If you have followed our modification plan and the behaviours cannot be resolved, you have not failed the cat. Personalities and behaviour are shaped from every interaction they have had since the time they were born. Sometimes despite all of your hard work and care, we cannot undo what they have learnt.

Practice positive reinforcement:

Cats learn best through positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement is giving a reward (something that is desirable for the individual) to increase the likelihood of the desired behaviour recurring.

It is important to remember that the reward must be valuable to each individual and this may vary between cats. You want the reward to be of high value to them. For some this is food, for others it may be affection or play.

Rewards should be given promptly, ideally within 3 seconds. This is to avoid inadvertently rewarding a different behaviour.

Reward and reinforce all desired behaviour.

No negative punishment

At Ten Lives we do not condone the physical or verbal punishment of our cats. Punishment may deter your cat from learning the desired behaviour and can ruin your bond with them (and their trust of people in general). Physical and verbal punishment can cause fear and/or fear aggression and even make behavioural problems worse.

Ignoring or redirecting undesirable behaviour is the best way to stop it. For example, if a cat/kitten bites you when you play with them, stopping the play (and redirecting them) will teach them that play stops when they do this.

Communicate with Ten Lives and attend Vet appointments as scheduled

We will provide you with a date for your cats' next appointment. It is vital that you return for the scheduled appointment so that we can assess if our modification plan is effective. When concerns are addressed early, we can make adjustments as required. Many behaviours become much harder to resolve over time (especially with kittens).

(Definitions) What makes a cat domestic, stray or feral?

Cats arrive at Ten Lives from various backgrounds. To describe their level of socialization we use the terms domestic, stray or feral.

Domesticated:

A cat who has been accustomed to people and enjoys human touch and interaction. They get all their essential needs from humans, e.g., food, water, housing, play, affection.

Stray:

A cat who has, or had, some interaction with humans during their life. They may have become lost or were abandoned and no longer has regular interactions with humans. They get some of their essential needs from human, usually food.

A stray cat may be socialized enough to allow people to touch them. If they do not receive regular positive interactions with people, over time they may become wary or frightened. In some situations a stray cat can become a pet cat once again.

Feral:

These are cats who don't get any of their essential needs from humans. A feral cat lives, feeds and breeds without any help from humans. They have not been socialized with humans and are therefore fearful of our presence. They are not suited to a domesticated life, doing so would cause them great distress.

What is socialization

A "socialized" cat is one who is accustomed to and enjoys companionship with people. To socialize a cat means to familiarise them to human touch, human spaces, and human sights, smells, and sounds. ¹

See page X for socialising feral kittens

What causes a cat to have challenging behaviours?

Cat behaviours and personalities vary due to genetic predisposition and their environment (nature and nurture). Sometimes owners provide us with history that helps us to understand their behaviours. Other times we can only interpret the behaviour that they are displaying in the shelter and foster home environment – so we are unsure of the cause.

¹ <https://www.alleycat.org/resources/feral-and-stray-cats-an-important-difference/>

Nature

'The development of the physiological systems (involved in the stress response) starts before kittens are even born. For example if a mother is stressed during pregnancy or receives poor nutrition then her litter may be more prone to developing stress (non-adaptive)'.² Similarly, if the mother is unsocialised (feral) and fearful of humans, once born the kittens will mimic her behaviour.

Nurture

Some behaviours arise from experiences and their environment. Cats vary greatly in how well they cope with stress. Some cats who have lived with a constant stressor (e.g. another cat, dog or busy home environment) become chronically stressed. This period of prolonged stress may change their normal behavioural response. As a result of constant fear or anxiety, some cats may act withdrawn or aggressive, even once these stressors are no longer present.

Can all challenging behaviours be fixed?

There are many factors that impact on whether challenging behaviours can be fixed. These include;

- Genetic predisposition and environment (nature and nurture)
- Their background- feral, stray, domesticated
- Their age- (socialisation is much harder after 10 weeks).
- Our capacity to care.
- Our resources- inc. time, number of foster carers, space etc

If you have followed our modification plan and the undesirable behaviours cannot be resolved, you have not failed the cat. Personalities and behaviour are shaped from every interaction they have had since the time they were born. Sometimes despite all of your hard work and care, we cannot undo what the cats/kittens have previously learnt.

What happens if my foster cat is not adoptable?

Sadly not every cat that enters our shelter has adoptable behaviour. Cats with adoptable behaviour are cats that somebody would be willing to care for and provide all the needs, for the length of the cats' life.

Some of the challenging behaviours that make cats less adoptable include;

- Aggression towards people
- Aggression towards other animals
- Timidity/ nervousness/ constant hiding
- Inappropriate toileting (urinating or defecating outside of the litter tray)

² <http://www.icatcare.org:8080/advice/problem-behaviour/stressed-cats>

Challenging ethical situations

Sometimes despite all efforts from Foster cares and the Ten Lives Team, the kindest thing for our cats is euthanasia. These decisions are never made lightly and all appropriate options are considered. Every euthanasia decision is discussed between multiple staff members until all are in agreement. We consider a broad range of matters including responsible rehoming for the cat and potential adoptees, and the quality of life for the cat.

Sometimes the decisions are easier to accept, for example a cat who is physically suffering and medical treatment cannot alleviate their pain or suffering. Occasionally we are faced with challenging ethical situations. These decisions are emotionally hard for everyone involved- everyone who has cared for or met that individual cat- the whole Ten Lives community.

Grief and taking breaks

At Ten Lives we greatly appreciate that you dedicate yourself , often making sacrifices, to help the cats in our care.

Fostering is highly emotional work. Foster cares find it to be joyful and rewarding experience but sometimes it can also be incredibly challenging.

Ten Lives provides access to a confidential counselling service for all staff, volunteers and foster carers. If you need assistance, advice or would like to discuss challenges associated with any aspect of foster care, please contact;

Newport & Wildman – Employee assistance program

1800 650 204

admin@newportwildman.com

Understanding Cat body language

The best way to understand the cat in your care is to learn to read body language. Body posture, ear position, tail movement and changes in their eyes are good indicators of a cat's state of mind.³ However, these signs need to be read collectively- assess the whole body AND the situation.

Behavioural signs of an anxious/fearful cat

- Tense posture
- Crouched body position
- Dilated pupils (large round black pupils)
- All four feet flat on the ground
- Tail tucked close or under the body
- Head and neck pulled in close to the body
- Ears flattened back against head.
- Whiskers down



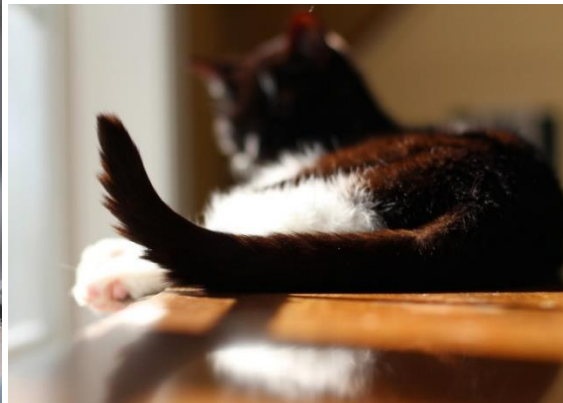
³ 1.

Rodan I, Sundahl E, Carney H, et al. AAFP and ISFM Feline-Friendly Handling Guidelines. Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery. 2011;13(5):364-375. doi:10.1016/j.jfms.2011.03.012

Behavioural signs of frustration

Signs of frustration are often rapid and occur in short bursts. They may change body posture several times in a short space of time

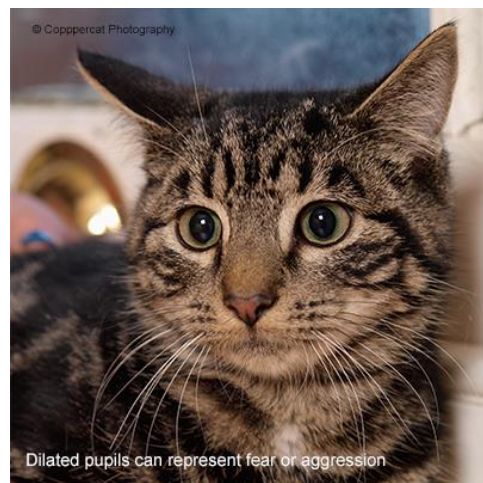
- Tail thrash/thump- vertically
- Tail swishing from side to side
- Skin twitch or ripple
- Rotation of ear(s) to the side
- Meowing loudly or persistently
- Increased grooming
- Urine spraying or pseudo-spraying



Behavioural signs of aggression

The following body language is a warning sign from your cat that they are agitated. If provoked further this may escalate into aggression.

- Tail Twitching and flicking it back and forth.
- Tail Bristled, this is to make themselves look larger to ward off the perceived threat.
- Ears Back
- Ears Flat (a sign of a scared and defensive cat also).
- Whiskers flattened back against their face.⁴



⁴ <https://www.jacksongalaxy.com/blog/aggression-in-cats/>

Greeting an adult cat- & the 3 second rule

How to make a good first impression;

- Let the cat come out of their carrier on their own. Never pull a cat out of a carrier.
- Make your body as least threatening as possible, such as sitting on the floor.
- Avoid directly facing the cat. Try looking beyond the cat rather than staring at them.
- Outstretch your hand with a loose fist towards the cat.
- Wait to see if the cat accepts your greeting. If the cat sniffs your hand, it's a sign that they feel confident enough to interact more.
- if they rub their face against your hand, this is a sign that they may be comfortable with being stroked.
- If so, stroke or gently scratch the cat a couple of times (on the cheeks or under the chin)-
- Stop, wait, and observe for 3 seconds-. This is the 3 second rule.
- If they rub against you it is a sign that they want more interaction.
- If not, that cat is telling you that they have had enough interaction and they want a break.
- By allowing the cat to initiate more contact before continuing to pet them, they will have more trust in you, and likely to want more contact as time goes on.



It's important to recognise what kind of interaction your cat prefers. Some cats will happily spend hours on your lap, being picked up and held. Others do not feel safe being picked up and prefer a simple chin rub or pat (we affectionately call these 'paws on the floors' cats').

If you get to know what your cats' preference is, you can avoid overstimulating them. Some cats will bite or swipe when they are overstimulated, as a way to get you to stop.

Misunderstandings....Touch the belly at your own risk

Most cats do not like their belly being rubbed- if your cat does you are very lucky. Most cats will bite, grab your hand or kick you with their back feet.

When a cat stretches out in front of you, they are showing you that they feel comfortable with you. It is a sign of trust and feeling relaxed, rather than an invitation to touch it.

Nervous/ timid/ shy cats

A nervous (or anxious) cat, will take longer than a confident (bold) cat to adjust to unfamiliar situations-such as your home. They may run and hide whenever someone enters the room or in response to loud or sudden noises. Many nervous cats spend a lot of time hiding, either under the bed or in a wardrobe. They do this as a form of survival, staying very quiet until the perceived danger has passed.

How to help a nervous/anxious cat adjust to your home

- Before bringing them home. Examine your room and block entry to places that are potentially hazardous or you would be unable to extract them from in an emergency.
- Prepare everything they need such as food, fresh water, litter trays and hiding spots before they arrive. Remember to keep these easily visible but as far away from each other as possible in the room. Cats appreciate having their food source, water source and litter trays separated.
- Try spraying some Feliway on bedding at least 20 minutes before their arrival or consider purchasing a Feliway diffuser and running it for 24 hours prior to their arrival.
- Set up a quiet 'safe' room for them. Keep them confined to this room until they show signs of being relaxed or more confident. Only once they are showing these signs should you allow them to explore the rest of the house.
- Never force a cat out of their carrier. Place their carrier on the ground- near a hiding spot and allow them to exit in their own time. They may wish to stay in there for some time. This is ok. They are observing their new surroundings and will come out when they feel it's safe to do so. Sometimes leaving the room and shutting the door for a few hours will help.
- Provide a good hiding spot in which your cat feels safe but can still see the room. This spot allows them to adjust to the sights, sounds and smells from a safe spot.

- Create and keep a routine for feeding, cleaning etc. A predictable schedule helps them to cope.
- Initially pretend your cat is invisible. Allow it to move around the room without being the focus of your attention.
- Avoid direct eye contact until they are feeling confident/ relaxed. This can make them feel threatened, until they get to know you.
- Talk softly to the cat as you come into the room and while moving around. Doing so means that they always know where you are and thus less likely to be startled.
- Spend time sitting in the room on the ground. Sit down some distance away from them, side on. This makes you appear less threatening. (Take a good book or your phone to occupy you, as they may not come out).
- Food treats can be used to create positive associations and develop a bond between you. Offer small amounts of treats (different to their regular food) to encourage them to spend time in close proximity to you.
- After a few days of settling in, you may offer opportunities to play with you. A wand toy is perfect to allow your cat to enjoy the game without feeling you are too close. Move the toy near them but not in their face.

When your cat is confident and happy in their safe room, you can start to let them explore other rooms. Always keep the safe room open for them, they may want to retreat back to there if they become overwhelmed.

Signs that your cat is feeling more confident include;

- Coming to greet you when you enter the room
- Eating well
- Using all the space in the room
- Openly playing with toys
- Openly grooming
- Kneading and purring
- Bunting and cheek rubbing (against you or the furniture)

Inappropriate toileting (or litter tray aversion)

Inappropriate toileting is urinating or defecating anywhere outside of the litter tray. The first step is to rule out a medical condition- so please book your cat in for a vet appointment.

A cat straining to urinate is a medical emergency.

If we have ruled out a medical condition, it is vital that we address the situation immediately to prevent it becoming a regular habit.

Possible behavioural reasons for litter tray aversion:

Animals don't repeat behaviours unless they serve a function. If your cat is toileting outside of the litter tray there's a valid reason for it, from their perspective. Your cat is trying to solve a problem in the best way they know how. It is our job to investigate and try to understand what is the 'problem' that the cat is trying to solve.

Consider some of the following factors, if your cat has litter tray aversion:

One litter tray per cat + 1

There should be one litter tray for every cat in the house—plus one extra. If you have one cat, you'll need two litter trays; two cats, three litter trays etc.

For litters of kittens (3-6 x kittens) we recommend at least 3-4 litter trays.

location

Consider the location of the litter tray, from your cats' perspective.

Is there anything negative about the location of the tray? If your cat thinks that bad things happen when they go to the litter tray. . .they will stop using it. This is your cat's way of finding a solution to the problem.

Litter trays also define your cat's territory. Where possible consider placing them in different locations in the home.

Too dirty

Cats are very clean animals and will find somewhere else to toilet if the litter tray is dirty. Some will not use a litter tray if it has been used- even by themselves. This is why we recommend 1 tray per cat plus 1. In addition, deep clean the litter tray more frequently, avoid using strong smelling detergents.

Too scary

If a cat doesn't feel safe in the litter tray, they will not want to return there. Consider keeping it in a place where the cat can see what's going on from all angles, and won't get ambushed by another pet. If you have a dog or another cat that ambushes them, try placing a litter tray up off the ground.

Too noisy

Think carefully about where you place the tray and avoid placing it in high-traffic or noisy areas e.g. near a washing machine, television or where children are running around- loud noises can be frightening for your cat.

Too uncomfortable

Cats prefer open top litter trays that aren't covered. A closed in or confined litter tray might be uncomfortable for your cat to be able to turn around in. This is especially true for older cats who often suffer from arthritis. Litter trays should be easy to get to and use. Make sure the litter tray is large enough for your cat. Faeces or urine down the edge of the tray or right beside it is an indication the tray is too small for your cat.

Too inconvenient

Avoid placing the litter tray in a hidden or hard to reach location in the home e.g tucked between or underneath furniture, hidden in cupboards or upstairs. When your cat's bladder is full, they'll appreciate having a litter tray conveniently located and easy to access.

One bad litter box experience can cause a cat to abandon it.

Reminders/ tips to try

- One litter tray per cat plus one extra.
- Make sure the litter tray is away from their food and water. A cat won't want to use it if it is too close to their food or water.
- If your cat is toileting outside of the litter tray, clean the area with an enzyme cleaner. Then place the trays where they were toileting.
- Litter trays should be placed in areas where your cat spends the majority of their time (If your cat loves to hang-out in the living room, then ideally that's where one of the litter trays should be).
- If you have multiple cats, don't place the trays side-by-side or right next to each other.
- Their litter tray should have multiple exits. Cats don't like to feel cornered-in. If you have multiple animals in your home, and they're approached while in the litter tray, they don't have an escape route and this causes stress.
- Try different substrates, the softer the better (some cats will avoid hard litter types). Avoid scented or dusty litter.
- Don't use clumping litter for kittens (under 3 months old) as it's a risk to them if ingested. It should only be supplied to kittens over 3 months of age and who have been using a litter tray for so time.
- Try a larger litter tray (larger trays can be made from storage containers)
- Try a shallower litter tray, that's easier to get in to.

- Reduce or increase the amount of litter (ideal is around 2 inches max)
- Check that there are no strong odours near by

How to clean cat urine

- Blot up as much as the urine as you can before applying anything. Do not scrub!
- Soak the affected area with an **enzyme cleaner**.
- Enzyme cleaners break down the proteins in urine that cause cats to continue to mark the same spot.
- Let the solution sit for the time recommended by product instructions
- After contact time blot up as much of enzyme cleaner as possible.

Aggression

There are many reasons for your cat to display aggressive behaviour. Your goal is to observe and record the events that lead up to any aggressive behaviour, to see if we can isolate the trigger (cause). With time and experience you will learn to recognize early and subtle signs of fear or anxiety and prevent it escalating to aggression. Some early signs may include;

- Dilated pupils (large round pupils),
- ears turned to the side or laid back against their head,
- twitching or flicking tail,
- whiskers angled downwards or flattened against their face.

What to do when your cat displays aggression

- STOP what you are doing. Stop before the cat feels that their only option is to 'fight' to get you to stop.⁵
- Stay calm. Avoid any large reactions—such as screaming, yelling, or pushing your cat away. Don't use any punishment (verbal or physical) as this will only escalate things.
- Remove yourself from the situation. or if that's not possible, try using a distraction to shift their attention to something that can't be hurt, such as a toy, throw pillow, or rolled-up socks.
- Never try to restrain the cat when it is displaying aggression, you may get seriously hurt.

Your safety is our priority. If you are bitten, clean the wound immediately and see your Doctor. Once your wound s been medically treated please contact Ten Lives and/or book an appointment.

If at any time you feel unsafe around your cat please book an appointment. We will always take the cat back into our care if you choose not to foster them.

Common causes of aggression

- Fear and anxiety are a common cause of aggression in cats. It can result from the anticipation of an unpleasant event based on a previously negative, fearful or painful experience.⁶
- Human punishment, rough handling, sudden or erratic movements, or loud voices may cause an unexpected fearful or aggressive reaction in a cat.
- In some cases the cause of cat-to-human aggression, may have started a long time ago. A common cause is when people encourage aggressive behaviour by playing with kittens roughly and or with their body, hands and feet.

⁵ jfm.sagepub.com

⁶ www.jacksongalaxy.com

- Pain and other medical conditions can also trigger aggression, so it is important to record all aggression so that we can investigate it.

Below is a list of common behavioural patterns when it comes to aggressive reactions.

Play aggression

Play/Predatory aggression comes from their natural hunting and killing behaviours. Play can become too aggressive if they were encouraged to play rough with humans and to play with hands and feet as a kitten. Adult cats who play aggressively with humans or other animals, may be bored and have excess energy.

To correct these problems institute regular play sessions throughout the day and ensure you never play with cats/kittens using your hands or feet.

Petting related (overstimulation) aggression

Petting-related (overstimulation) aggression can be unnerving. Some cats are more sensitive than others and may show signs of aggression if they are overstimulated/petted too much. Or if they are touched in an area they don't like to be touched. There may be a pain issue, or a bad memory, associated with these areas.

Try to read the cats body language and record the type of touch that led to the aggression. Very few cats attack without warning, but if it seems 'unpredictable' please book an appointment.

Redirected aggression

Aggression that seems unprovoked may be redirected aggression. It can occur when the cat becomes frightened or upset, but instead of fighting with the real cause, they turns on the nearest person or pet⁷. Sometimes the sight of this person or pet is then associated with that feeling and the cat continues to attack them unprovoked. In these situations recreating positive associations may help.

Fear- induced aggression

Fear-induced aggression can occur in any situation where the cat feels both threatened and trapped. The sympathetic nervous system kicks in with the "fight – flight - freeze" reflex⁸. If the cat is unable to flee, they may choose to fight.

Non-recognition aggression

Non-recognition aggression occurs when one cat has been out of the house, usually to the veterinarian. When they return home the other cat acts aggressively toward them. One theory for this is that cats rely on smell (and vision) to identify individuals.

⁷ www.jacksongalaxy.com

⁸ www.jacksongalaxy.com

When the returning cat looks the same but smells different (from anaesthesia, etc.), the conflict creates confusion and fear⁹.

Temporary separation may solve the problem; but occasionally there needs to be a complete reintroduction.

Prevention- ideas to try

The following suggestions are based on cats' biological needs. By providing them with more opportunities to express natural behaviours their quality of life will improve and may resolve feelings of frustration and boredom- (sometimes displayed by aggression).

However if you feel that your cat is dangerous and unpredictable please contact Ten Lives and/ or book an appointment. Your safety is our priority.

- Include playtime 2-3 times a day (remember to put toys away after play to keep them fresh and exciting to the cat)
- Try social play (you are involved)
- Try independent play (playing on their own)
- Trial a variety of toys (e.g. wand toy, mice, ping pong ball) *one at a time.
- Feed using a food puzzle or hiding food
- Provide horizontal and sturdy vertical resting spots (e.g. elevated and low resting places/perches, window views etc)
- Provide multiple hiding places (e.g. cardboard box, cat igloo etc)
- Try a Feliway diffuser
- Provide adequate scratching and climbing facilities
- Try leading the cat with food/ treats (e.g. getting the cat to follow an obstacle course throughout the house with food)
- Make sure that their litter tray, food and water bowls are located as far away from each other as possible.
- Provide the cat with a more predictable schedule so that they can anticipate when things might happen (e.g feeding at the same time(s), cleaning litter trays etc)¹⁰

⁹ www.jacksongalaxy.com

¹⁰ icatcare.org

Socializing kittens

Socialisation kittens is the process of learning to like, trust and interact with humans. All kittens are born being unfamiliar with humans but become *socialized* by interacting with people from an early age. The more positive interactions they have with humans at a young age, the more likely they will become friendly kittens.

The Kitten Socialization Window

The socialisation window is around 2-9 weeks when kittens are most flexible and adaptive. Kittens are naturally weaning between 5-10 weeks and are biologically predisposed to accept change during this time.

If a kitten does not become accustomed to people within this crucial window, they will grow up fearful of humans and will not be suited to, nor happy living in a home. It is not recommended to socialize a feral kitten over 4 months of age as they have passed this socialisation window.

Socialisation may extend to 12 weeks but it often takes longer and is not guaranteed to be successful.

What is a feral kitten?

A feral kitten is a kitten who has not been socialised with humans, they are unsocialised. A feral kitten doesn't always behave aggressively, they may also display avoidance.

You may be able to touch a feral kitten (who is fearful or avoidant) but our goal is that they enjoy being touched, and actively seek out human attention.

Never Free-Feed a Feral Kitten

Meal time= socialisations time. Feral kitten socialization is about creating positive experiences that the kitten will associate with humans. Food is an incentive for kittens to like human interaction. From 5 weeks of age mum starts to push them away- so they are looking for easy food. This is why using food is so important in the socialisation period.

You should interact with the kitten throughout the entire duration of each meal and remove the food after. Plan to feed them on an appropriate schedule for their age.

How to socialise kittens

To socialise kittens we have to commit to interacting with them numerous times a day. We need to see daily improvements/ signs of a quick turnaround because **a week is vital** in this small socialisation window.

- Initially confine unsocialised kittens to a large crate/play pen. So they have a safe space and don't run and hide. Place it somewhere you are frequently, So that they get used to seeing and hearing you. Only let them free roam when they are willing to approach you.
- Leave a TV, radio, or audiobook on low volume while you're out of the room to help them get used to the sounds of humans. But turn off sounds and light overnight- to allow for solid rest.

The following is a guide for you to use when socialising feral kittens. We want to see them progressing daily. However if they are not or they are overly distressed by any of the steps- you may need to slow down and practice each step for 2+ days at a time.

For kittens at the upper end of the socialisation window (9 weeks+) you may need to increase the frequency of your daily attempts, as time is precious.

Day 1: Introduce yourself

- Place the food in front of the kitten and back away.¹¹
- Stand as far away as it takes for the kitten to be comfortable eating in front of you. Try sitting at this spot, to appear less threatening.
- While the kitten eats, speak to them in a soft voice and stay visible. This is to get them used to the sound of your voice and your presence.
- Once they have had a full meal remove the bowl. If they haven't eaten much repeat this step numerous times throughout day.
- This is all that you do in the first day.

Day 2: establish trust

- Place the food in front of the kitten and back away
- Try to stand a little closer than you did the day before as they eat.
- If they stop eating, take a few steps back.
- Continue talking to them as they eat

¹¹ www.kittenlady.org

Day 3: Get closer

- Hold the food dish and see if the kitten will eat from it.
- Or if possible, try holding the food in a spoon or your hand (keeping your safety in mind)
- Continue talking to them.

Day 4: introduce touch

- Start gently touching the kitten while they eat. Focus on areas like head, ears, cheeks under chin etc. Be careful and mindful of your fingers. If they get scared they may try to bite you. If they do – Stop- and repeat Day 3
- Gradually work towards holding the kittens to prevent traumatising them
- Place hands on the side of the kitten and gently lift them up a few cms, then place them down in front of their food.

Day 5: Holding

- If they return to eating after you lifted them up a few cms, you may progress to holding them.
- Whilst sitting down attempt to pick them up. It's recommended to gently wrap them in a towel or blanket, as this held calm them whilst also protecting you from being scratched.
- Offer them food whilst they are in your arms.
- Talk to them calmly and softly
- Hold for a minute or two and then release them.
- Offer them more food.
- Repeat this daily, increasing the length of time you hold them.

Once you can move through all the sessions (with the kitten showing signs of improvement) you can begin to slowly introduce new people, other animals, sounds and other parts of the house. Remember to use food at every new introduction.

How to teach kittens NOT to bite you

At around 4 weeks of age, kittens will naturally begin to attack and practice pouncing on objects that look like prey. As a predatory species, it's a natural instinct for kittens to want to attack and chew. But we do not want them to attack people including our hands or feet. We must encourage kittens to practice these behaviours on an

appropriate target such as a toy. It is our responsibility to help kittens establish good biting behaviours from a young age.¹²

If a kitten attacks your hands or feet when you move, stop moving and redirect their attention to a more appropriate object. Never use physical or verbal punishment.

Reward Good Behaviour

Use toys to encourage kittens to stalk, chase, pounce, and catch. Once the kitten catches the toy, let them bite or kick it before moving it again. When the play session has ended, reward the kitten with a treat or meal to simulate the natural satisfaction of eating after a kill.

Actively playing multiple times a day before meals is a great way to help kittens develop their motor skills, learn appropriate habits and release energy.¹³

¹² Hannah-shaw-f1un.squarespace.com

¹³ Hannah-shaw-f1un.squarespace.com