

Starting off Right with your New Kitten

Bringing your kitten home for the first time is exciting! Wondering what you need to do to set them up for success? A bit of creativity and kitten/cat knowledge is all you need to start off on the right paw.

First Things First

One mistake to avoid is to immediately let your kitten go free once home. Instead, create a small, safe area or room for your kitten so they feel safe while they acclimate to their new home, at their own pace.

- Before bringing your kitten home, remove any large furniture they can hide under in their room.
- Close your windows. Kittens are curious and like to climb and explore. You don't want to lose them!
- Remove the door from their carrier and leave the carrier in their room with cozy bedding inside.
 - Your cat should always feel good about their carrier. Leave it out so they get used to seeing it. Surprise them by putting new toys/treats inside and build positive associations for them.
- For timid kittens, provide a cardboard box turned on its side as a hiding spot.
- Food and water should be placed at a distance from their litter box. Don't forget to scoop the box every day!

Introducing your kitten to the resident animals¹

Resist the urge to immediately introduce your kitten to your resident pets. The slower you go, the greater the chance that they'll eventually accept each other. Let your kitten get used to you, anyone else who lives there, their primary room and their bed/toys, *first*.

Move slowly to introduce them to the resident pets using one sense at a time. For example, when ready, switch their bed with your dog or cat's bed for a few hours then trade back. After a week or so, let them see your (leashed) dog *at a distance*, through a baby-gate. Don't let your dog stare at the kitten, but distract the dog with a toy or treats to look at you instead. Considering their size difference, it's best to keep your dog leashed.

At the point you let your kitten have free roam, keep your dog and kitten separated unless you are there to supervise. Even when supervising, keep your dog leashed when your kitten is on the loose. When you're positive that your dog has not ever attempted to chase your kitten, you still want your kitten to always have an escape route (tall cat tree or safe passage under a baby-gate) if needed.

Playtime!

Kittens are energetic and wild; this is normal. They climb, jump, run and almost seem to fly. They need to learn how to be a cat, how to hunt, stalk and develop their natural instincts. Be proactive! Create a rule in your home to never use hands, fingers, feet or toes to play with your kitten! You don't want your kitten, who will soon become a cat, to think of any parts of your body as a toy. That can be a tough habit to break later. Change out your kitten's toys every few weeks and offer a variety, such as wand toys, catnip toys, milk-jug rings, brown paper bags, cardboard boxes, tunnels, ping-pong balls, etc.

Laser toys may prove frustrating for some kittens and cats. Make sure your kitten gets opportunities to physically catch and play with toys. Provide your kitten with safe vertical play options too, such as a cat tree. Make play sessions with your kitten a part of your everyday routine so they'll learn to play appropriately with you.

Handling, Brushing and Nail Trims

Early on, start building positive associations with all handling activities. For nail trims, start by simply touching one paw, then tossing a favorite toy...touch another paw, give them a treat, etc. Eventually bring out the nail clippers, but don't clip any nails just yet. Touch the clippers to one paw, toss a toy, another paw, give them a special treat, etc.

Make this fun for them so that when you do need to trim their nails it's not a catastrophic event. When you work up to actually using the nail clippers, start by clipping one nail only. End on a positive note.

Just as you did with the nail clippers, introduce your kitten to the brush slowly. Make it positive and associate the brush's feel with yummy treats or special toys. One gentle stroke of the brush, toss a toy, another gentle stroke and give them a super yummy treat. Make gentle grooming sessions brief and start by spending just two minutes at first: one minute can be spent on nail clipper introductions and the second on the brush. If your kitten is enjoying being groomed, you can increase the time.

Does your kitten avoid visitors?

There are measures you can take now to help your kitten be a well-adjusted and confident adult cat. Do you have friends who are willing to help socialize your kitten? Who would say no to this invitation?

- Kittens need to have positive interactions that include play with people other than the immediate family.
- Positive interactions should be early on in the kitten's social development and need to include children, men and women.
- Positive experiences being handled by new people and introductions to novel situations help make for a more secure cat when exposure is within 2-3 to 7-8 weeks of age.
- Remember that it's **crucial** to keep all experiences positive for your kitten!

Provide free and easy access to a clean litter box²

Kittens learn to use a litter box early on by watching their mothers model this behavior. They are hardwired to want to dig into or pull their paws across the substrate (litter). They prefer a soft, unscented litter, quiet privacy, a large box and clean litter to step into. Providing your kitten with options, including multiple locations for litter boxes, will help them choose to use their *clean* litter boxes each and every time!

Need help? Call our free pet behavior help line at (503) 416-2983.

¹To learn more about introducing your pet to others, read our handout, **Introducing Your New Cat to your Other Pets:** oregonhumane.org/training/pet-advice-help-line

²Litter box questions? Check out our handout, **Your New Cat and the Litter Box:** oregonhumane.org/training/pet-advice-help-line