



## Basic Kitten Care

What do you do if you find kittens and how can you help them?

### Determine if there is a momma cat

If you find kittens, first determine whether they have a mother. Momma cats may be out for several hours at a time looking for food, so try to wait somewhere unobserved to see if she comes back. It is ideal that kittens be kept with their mothers until they are weaned (around 5 weeks old).

### Determine her temperament

If you have determined that there is a momma cat, then evaluate her temperament to determine the best course of action:

- Is momma cat tame/friendly?
- Or feral (wild/skittish)?

### Tame/friendly momma cat

If the mom cat and kittens are tame, you can take mom and kittens into your home and confine them in a large cage or a small room such as a bathroom. This prevents the mother cat from moving the kittens and she will take care of raising them until they are old enough to be socialized and placed into homes. Once the kittens have been fully weaned (5-6 weeks), the mother and kittens can then be spayed/neutered and adopted into a home. Never give a cat or kitten away for free. We recommend that you work with an adoption group for assistance to find a good home. Resources are at the end of the document.

### Feral (wild/skittish) momma cat

If the mom cat is feral (wild), leave the mom cat with the kittens. It will be less stressful for the mom to care for her kittens where you found them until they are weaned (5-6 weeks old) Unfortunately, she may move them at any time if you interfere with her too much. Make the location safe from the elements if needed. Provide the mom cat with food and water every day. After the kittens are weaned, if you choose to place them in homes we encourage you to work with an adoption group. The kittens must be friendly. If the kittens are wild they should be trapped, spayed/neutered and returned to their habitat with the mom cat. We do not encourage anyone to tame down feral kittens since there are not enough homes or space in the shelter for them. Feral kittens are not adoption candidates. Contact **Indyferal at 596-2300** to get assistance for caring for the cats and getting them spayed and neutered.

### Orphan Kittens (No momma cat)

If you have determined that the kittens are orphans establish their age, medical and feeding needs. At this point, you must act quickly because neonatal kittens are fragile. Delay can be fatal.

## Determining Age

- Under one week: Eyes shut, ears flat to head, skin looks pinkish. Part of umbilical cord may still be attached.
- 1 week-10 days: Eyes beginning to open, ears still flat. A kitten this age is smaller than your hand.
- 3 weeks: Eyes are fully open, ears are erect, and teeth are visible. Kittens this age are just starting to walk and will be very wobbly.
- 4-5 weeks: Eyes have changed from blue to another color and/or kittens have begun to pounce and leap. Kittens this age will begin to eat regular cat food.
- 8 weeks: Kittens this age weigh approximately two pounds. If they have not been exposed to humans, they will likely be feral and unapproachable.

## Health Concerns

Isolate the kittens from other cats. Kittens should be alert and warm to the touch. If the kittens are cold and listless, they must be warmed up immediately. Chilling is the major cause of death of neonatal kittens, and can happen in just a few hours. Do not attempt to feed chilled kittens as they can not digest the food. Place the kittens in a box or pet carrier with a towel-covered heating pad (set on low) or microwavable disc inside the box. If these are not available hold them against your body to warm them. Be sure the heating pad covers only half of the bottom of the box; the kittens must be able to move off the heat if it becomes too warm.

Ensure the kitten's body temperature is 100-102 degrees before you feed them.

- Fleas can cause anemia, even death in kittens. If you notice fleas, you should flea comb the kitten as soon as possible. Do not use insecticides or any other flea products.
- If stool is very firm or dark yellow, the kitten needs more formula. If stool is green, infection may be present.
- Diarrhea and upper respiratory infection (eye and nasal discharge) are serious and should be immediately treated by a veterinarian.
- If a kitten cannot suck on the bottle, she may need to be fed with a veterinary feeding syringe (no needle).
- Clean eyes and nose with warm water if needed.
- If a kitten looks ill or weak, put a little Karo syrup in the mouth; repeat every hour until the kitten eats. An ill kitten should be taken to a vet for care.

## Feeding

The following instructions are for kittens approximately four weeks old and younger.

Kittens cannot be fed until they are warmed – feeding chilled kittens is very dangerous. Do not feed cow's milk; it causes diarrhea which can lead to severe dehydration. You will need KMR or other kitten milk replacement formula, along with special bottles for feeding. The pre-mixed liquid formula is easier to use than the powdered form. These supplies are available at veterinary offices and pet supply stores.

Formula can be fed to an orphan either in a pet-nursing bottle with a rubber nipple or through a syringe. If a kitten cannot suck a bottle, he/she may need to be fed with a veterinary syringe (no needle); take the kitten to a veterinarian. Weak orphans and those that do not like the taste of the nipple do better with a syringe. Orphans eat best when held in the normal nursing position: on their stomachs with their head slightly elevated and outstretched. After feeding, they need to be burped to expel swallowed air. This can be done by holding a kitten in the palm of one hand with its head angled up at about 45 degrees; its back should be patted or rubbed with the other hand until it burps.

Depending on their age, kittens will need to be fed every two to six hours around the clock. To prepare the bottle, pierce a hole in the nipple with a pin or make a tiny slit with a razor. Make sure the hole is big

enough for the milk to get through. Test the formula on your wrist; it should be slightly warm, not hot and not cold.

## **Defecation/Urination**

After every feeding, you will need to stimulate the kitten's anal area with a moistened cotton ball. Kittens cannot urinate or defecate on their own until approximately three (3) weeks of age. Waste will be mostly liquid at this point. Keep the kittens clean and dry.

## **Weaning**

At about 5 weeks of age you can begin offering canned and dry kitten food. The kittens will begin using a litterbox as well. Only use clay litter.

At three to four weeks of age, solid food can be added to an orphan's diet. A small amount Beechnut or Gerber babyfood (chicken, turkey or lamb – no onion) can be added to milk replacer or KMR to make a thin gruel. This can be offered to the orphan in a saucer, by syringe or finger feeding. Most learn to eat on their own if offered a little of the mixture on a person's finger and are then guided to the saucer. After an orphan begins eating from a saucer, the amount of formula can gradually be reduced until only solid food is being fed. Feedings should occur 3-6 times a day (depending on the age) until orphans are six weeks of age and twice a day thereafter.

## **Housing**

When orphans are mobile, they should be kept in a small enclosed area, such as the bottom half of a crate or box with sides high enough to prevent orphans from escaping. It is important that the crate or box not be placed on cold cement or tile floor without a thick blanket or towel beneath it. If the crate or box is placed on a cold floor, the warmth will be drawn away from the orphans into the floor. The crate or box should be kept at the right temperature for an orphan's stage of development. This can be done with a heating pad, hot water bottle or microwaveable heating pad. With all of these methods orphans must be protected from burns by covering the heating source with thick towels or blankets, which also provide a non-slip surface when the orphans begin to crawl. An area within the enclosure must not be heated to allow orphans to move away from the heat source if they get too hot. The towels and blankets should be free of strings or holes that can trap or strangle orphans or cut off circulation in a limb. Straw, hay, or shavings should not be used for bedding because they can obstruct the airway, causing suffocation or be inhaled, causing respiratory infection.

## **For assistance/guidance with orphan kittens**

### **CatsHaven**

Contact Barb Wills at 925-7001 or [Barbara@Catshaven.org](mailto:Barbara@Catshaven.org). Provides guidance, tips and resources on bottle-feeding and caring for neonatal/orphaned kittens. [www.catshaven.org](http://www.catshaven.org)

### **Siamese Rescue**

Contact Katie Smith at 255-9592 or [Kathryn790@aol.com](mailto:Kathryn790@aol.com). Provides guidance, tips and resources on bottle-feeding and caring for neonatal/orphaned kittens.

### **Marty Gallagher, wildlife rehabber**

Contact Marty Gallagher at 590-9043 cell or 844-9589 Home. Provides foster care, guidance and tips for bottle-feeding and caring for neonatal/orphaned kittens.

## **On-line Resources**

**Kitten Fostering and Ownership manual** – What to do first and recipes for emergency kitten formula. [www.kittenrescue.org](http://www.kittenrescue.org) Click on Cat Care/Kitten Care Handbook.

## **Kitten Wellness and Spay/Neuter Resources**

### **North – Low- Cost Spay Neuter Clinic in Noblesville**

[www.lowcostclinic.org](http://www.lowcostclinic.org)

1712 Pleasant St., Noblesville IN 46060

Hours: M, TU, TH, F 4-5pm

(317)706-0537

Provides kitten check ups, deworming, flea treatments and vaccinations. Free exam with the purchase of a service. \*\*Offers early–age spay and neuter services (2 lb. min)

### **West - Hawthorne Community Center Low-Cost Medical Clinic**

[www.hawthornecenter.org](http://www.hawthornecenter.org)

70 N. Mount Street, Indianapolis, IN 46222.

Hours: Every Wednesday from 5-7:00pm

Directions to the clinic call: 637-4312

Questions about clinic services: 716-2291

No exam fee. Provides kitten checkups, deworming, flea treatments and vaccinations.

### **Southwest - SPOT (Stop Pet Overpopulation Today)**

[www.seespot.org](http://www.seespot.org)

612 S. Main St., Cloverdale, IN 46120

Hours: Every Monday 1pm-7pm

1- (765)795-4336

No exam fee. Provides kitten check ups, deworming, flea treatments and vaccinations.

\*\*Offers early age spay and neuter services (2 lb min)

### **South/Southwest – SNIP (Spay Neuter Indiana Pets)**

[www.spayneuterindianapets.com](http://www.spayneuterindianapets.com)

Red Barn Store (Formerly the Waverly Inn)

SR 37/SR144

Hours: Every other Monday from 5-7 pm. Call for exact dates.

(317) 727-9183

Provides kitten check ups, deworming, flea treatments and vaccinations. Free exam with the purchase of a service. \*\* Offers early-age spay and neuter services (2lb. min)

### **East –Emerson Pet Clinic**

1502 N. Emerson Av., Indianapolis, IN 46219

Hours: M-F 8am-6pm, Sat. 8 am –noon

375-1737

Exam Fee \$28. Provides early–age spay and neuter (3 lb. min.)

### **East – FACE Low-Cost Spay and Neuter Clinic**

1510 Massachusetts Av, Indianapolis, IN 46201

Hours: M- TH 2-5:15, Saturday 10am-2 pm, Sunday 11am-3 pm

638-3223

Provides kittens check ups, deworming, flea treatments and vaccinations. \*\* Offers early-age spay and neuter for kittens (4lb min)

**Spay Neuter Resources of Indiana (SNSI)** – offers low cost spay and neuter resources with several local veterinarians. [www.spayneuterservices.org](http://www.spayneuterservices.org). Call 767-7771 for details.

## **Adoption Resources for Kittens**

### **Southside Animal Shelter**

[www.ssasi.org](http://www.ssasi.org)

(317) 710-2831

### **From the Heart Rescue**

[www.heartrescue.org](http://www.heartrescue.org)

(317) 340-7947

### **Humane Society of Indianapolis**

[www.Indyhumane.org](http://www.Indyhumane.org)

(317) 872-5650 to make an appointment.

### **ARPO**

[www.adoptarpo.org](http://www.adoptarpo.org)

(317) 774-8292

### **Animal Outreach of Shelby County (Shelby County residents only)**

[www.shelbypets.com](http://www.shelbypets.com)

1- (317) 364-8745

Talk to your vet about adoption assistance thru their clinic

\* Do not give away kittens for free. Individuals known as “collectors” routinely answer “free to good home” ads. Dogfighters have also been known to obtain cats and kittens for baiting purposes.