



SoHumane

Kitten Foster Handbook



Guidelines for Kitten Care from Newborn to 8 Weeks

SoHumane Foster Program

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Introduction

Thank you for your interest in being a kitten foster with SoHumane! Thanks to people like you we are able to give orphaned kittens a chance to find their forever homes. Our main goal with fosters is to get kittens to the appropriate age and weight to be in our adoption program. This handbook is here to help you get started on the basics of kitten care and socialization.

SoHumane will provide all basic supplies, medical care, and training to help you be successful. After reading this handbook, please let the Foster Coordinator know what type of fostering you are comfortable doing. Not everyone can do neonatal kittens and that's okay! We need a variety of fosters for kittens who need extra time with socialization, surgical recovery, and even just waiting for space at our adoption center.

SoHumane's foster program is dedicated to providing the animals in our care any extra love and attention they may need during their journey towards adoption into a forever home. The reasons an animal is sent to foster care include:

- The animal is too young to be made available for adoption
- The animal is too sick to be made available for adoption
- The animal is recovering from a medical procedure
- The animal needs socialization before being adoptable
- The animal needs a break from the shelter environment
- The shelter space is at capacity

An animal's eligibility for foster care is decided by Foster staff and Foster Coordinators.



Supplies Being Provided

SoHumane will provide you with all the supplies your foster kittens will need like a bed, blankets, food, bowls, toys, and anything extra that your foster kittens may need.

Nursing Bottles

Nipples

Play Pen

Food (weaning)

Bowls

Bedding

Blankets

Litter Box

Scale

Cotton Balls

Cleaning Wipes

Pedialyte

KMR

Heating Pad

Warmie

Carrier

Baby Rectal Thermometer

Toys

Syringes

Flea Comb

Coconut Oil

Baby Shampoo

Fecal Sample Tubes

Puppy Pads



If you need any additional supplies or need to restock, please contact SoHumane!
(541) 779-3215 • adoptions@sohumane.org

Tips and Tricks for Bottle Feeding

Bottle feeding improves with time and practice. Remember to stay patient and practice these tricks if you have fussy eaters!

- 🐾 Hold their body and head stable; you should be able to feel the kitten swallow the formula with this technique.
- 🐾 Always ensure the hole in nipple is cut at the appropriate size for the kitten. Too small a hole makes it too hard for them to eat and too large a hole can drown them.
- 🐾 Wrapping the kitten in a blanket may help them feel safer and could encourage them to eat.
- 🐾 Gentle rubbing the top of their head with a toothbrush or cloth imitates how a momma cat grooms the top of their head to prepare them to eat.
- 🐾 Make sure you're not squeezing formula into their mouth.
- 🐾 For kittens that are very young, you may consider syringe feeding.
- 🐾 Burp kittens after feeding by gently tapping their backs; the process usually takes about 30 seconds.

How to Bottle Feed

Assessing Your Kitten

Make sure the kitten has a stable temperature before feeding. The rectal temperature of a one day old newborn should be between 92 and 97 degrees Fahrenheit, and a kitten that is 2 to 21 days should be 96 and 100 degrees F. It is not safe to feed a kitten that is too hot or too cold; stabilize their temperature before continuing to feed. If a kitten is not able to swallow, it is not safe to feed.

The Bottle and Nipple

You will need to cut a hole in the nipple yourself.

There are a few different methods for how to cut a hole (diagonal, v-shaped, x-shaped), but the hole should be big enough that if you hold it upside down, formula drips out. It should not be so big that the formula flows freely.

Always test your freshly cut nipple by filling a bottle with water and tipping it upside down to drip on the inside of your wrist.

Preparing the Bottle

It is crucial that you do not feed them anything other than what has been provided by SoHumane. Never feed a kitten cow's milk or other dairy products, dairy alternatives, or human baby formula. These products can be fatal to kittens. Once opened, keep the formula refrigerated. Prepare the formula according to the manufacturer's instructions, making sure that it is fresh, clump free, and warm. Test the temperature by dripping it on the inside of your wrist. If it feels too hot or cold on your skin, the temperature will be amplified from the perspective of the kitten.

Feeding

Lay the kitten in a belly down position; the kitten should never be fed on their back. Hold the kitten's head with your non-dominant hand. Gently slide the nipple into the kitten's mouth and invert the bottle to begin the flow of formula. The kitten should roll her tongue into a U-shape and begin to swallow. Ensure that the kitten can swallow by placing a drop of formula on their tongue and feeling the throat with one finger. If the kitten appears to be swallowing, proceed with the feeding process.

Completion

After feeding, always ensure that you're cleaning the face by wiping away any formula with a warm, wet cloth or baby wipe.

Source: Kitten Lady™ Bottle Feeding Article

Potting a Kitten after Feeding

Kitten Stimulation

Young kittens don't go potty on their own. If you're raising an orphan, you'll need to help them by stimulating them before and after each feeding. Kittens need to be stimulated for the first 1-3 weeks of their lives.

Use a soft, absorbent, disposable cloth (tissues or toilet paper work great). Avoid harsh products like heavy paper towels that irritate the kitten's skin.

Techniques for holding kittens for stimulation can vary. Some prefer to set the kitten on a table, and others prefer to hold them upright with their bottom facing the floor, while some choose to turn them on their back. Find the position that works best for you and the kitten.

Hold the kitten steady with one hand, and gently rub the genital region with your soft tissue. The kitten should begin to pee. Stimulate the kitten until they are no longer peeing. Depending on the age, this may take anywhere from 10 to 40 seconds.

If the kitten needs to poop, stimulate their bottom the whole time that they are pushing. Stimulating helps encourage them to use their muscles to pass stool, so continue until the kitten has finished their business.



Keep a Consistent, Documented Schedule

Follow the weight and feeding chart in the next section to determine the frequency of feeding and monitor the urine and stool for any concerning symptoms.

Urine should be clear/light yellow in color and should occur at every feeding. Bottle kitten's poop should be solid yet soft, mustard yellow in color, and should occur at least 1-2 times a day. If you're concerned about the frequency or consistency of the kitten's poop, please contact SoHumane staff during business hours at 541-779-3215. Ask to speak to the Vet Care Department..

Cleaning Time!

Don't skip this step! Even if the kitten's skin feels dry after peeing or pooping, you still want to wipe them down afterwards to keep them clean. Kittens have sensitive skin and are susceptible to urine scald, a form of moist dermatitis caused by urine residue that burns and irritates the skin.

Source: Kitten Lady™ Bottle Feeding Article

Weight and Feeding Chart

Age (wks)	Weight (g)	Weight (oz)	Amount per Feeding (mL)	Feeding Frequency (hours)
0 - 1	50 - 150	0.7 - 5.2	2 - 6	2
1 - 2	150 - 250	5.2 - 8.8	6 - 10	2 - 3
2 - 3	250 - 350	8.8 - 12.3	10 - 14	3 - 4
3 - 4	350 - 450	12.3 - 15.8	14 - 18	4 - 5
4 - 5	450 - 550	12.3 - 19.4	18 - 22	5 - 6
5 - 8	550 - 850	19.4 - 29.9	weaning	6



Source: Kitten Lady™ Bottle Feeding Article

Milestones

Remember, all kittens are different. Because each kitten will vary in health and size, physical traits such as weight or appearance are not always a precise indicator of age. Developmental traits such as the presence of teeth will be a more precise way to determine the kitten's age. For instance, an emaciated 4 week old may be the weight of a 2 week old, but will have her canine teeth.

Newborns

Newborn kittens will have their eyes closed, their ears folded, and their umbilical cord will be attached. Their nose and paws may appear pink in color. They are not able to hear or see at this age, so they navigate toward warmth and comfort.



A newborn kitten will have a low temperature of 95-97 degrees, which will go up to 100 degrees over the course of the first week. It is critical to provide a gentle heat source to keep the kitten warm and stable. The kitten's environment should be between 85 and 90 degrees.

At 0-1 days, the umbilical cord will be attached and wet.

At 1-5 days, the umbilical cord will be attached and dry. Around 4-5 days of age the kitten will naturally lose the umbilical cord. Do not remove the umbilical cord manually.

One Week

One week old kittens will look very similar to newborns, but they won't have an umbilical cord. Around 7 days, the ear canals will slowly begin to open.



Around 8-12 days, the eyes will slowly begin to open. Do not pry open a kitten's eyes; let them open naturally. All kittens will be born with baby blue eyes, which will change to their adult eye color as they age.

The kitten should have doubled her birth weight by this age.

Very young kittens cannot regulate body temperature. During this time, provide a gentle heat source to keep the kitten warm and stable. The kitten's environment should be 85 degrees at this time.

Two Weeks

At two weeks of age, kittens' eyes will be fully open and baby blue. Their vision will still be developing.

The ear canals at this point will be open and the ears will be small and slightly rounded.

Two week old kittens will be attempting to develop coordination and movement; they will seem clumsy.



Two week old kittens cannot regulate body temperature. During this time, provide a gentle heat source to keep the kitten with a stable temperature. The kitten's environment should be around

80 degrees at this time.

At two weeks, it is safe to begin dewormer for the kitten.

Three Weeks

At three weeks of age, a kitten's first teeth will begin to emerge. The tiny teeth at the front of the mouth are called the incisors.

Three week old kittens will have ears that point upwards, like a miniature cat.

At this age, kittens will be exploring their surroundings, and they will begin exploring the litter box.

Three week old kittens still require a heat source, but their increased activity allows them to stray from it to explore when not sleeping. The kitten's environment should be around 75 degrees at this time.

Three week old kittens will be transitioning from being stimulated to go to the bathroom to learning how to use the litterbox.



Four Weeks



At four weeks of age, a kitten's teeth are continuing to develop. The long teeth next to the incisors, called the canine teeth, will start to come through the gums.

Four week old kittens are now confidently exploring and developing more coordination. They will be walking, running, and even learning how to play.

Continue providing a heat source for four week old kittens, although they will likely use it only when resting. The kitten's environment should stay no colder than 70-75 degrees.

Four week old kittens will generally be using the litter box.

Five Weeks

At five weeks of age, a kitten's teeth are still developing. The premolars will start to emerge, which means they are ready to be introduced to weaning onto wet food. Weaning is a sensitive time in a kitten's life and should be handled with care; read instructions on weaning in the next section. Water should be provided at all times.



Six Weeks

At six weeks of age, a kitten's teeth will be at the final stage of early development. The molars will begin to emerge, and depending on the kitten's health and condition, they will be getting closer to being weaned.

Seven Weeks

At seven weeks, kittens will have all of their baby teeth. Most seven week old kittens will be completely weaned onto wet food.

At this age, the adult eye color will begin to emerge. Kittens' eyes will change from baby blue to the eye color they will keep permanently. The eye color of grey, green, or yellow indicates an age of at least seven weeks.



Eight Weeks



At eight weeks old, most kittens will be eating solid food independently.

Kittens this age will have their permanent adult eye color.

Eight weeks is a standard age for the kitten to receive its first FVRCP vaccine.

Kittens who are 8 weeks and 2½ pounds are able to be spayed/neutered and adopted into loving forever homes!



Weaning Kittens

Weaning is the fun, messy adventure of helping kittens transition from nursing (or bottle feeding) to eating solid food on their own! Kittens often need extra support during this time to help ensure they're receiving the proper nutrients in proper quantity, and to keep them on track for success and independence.

The Right Time

Kittens' bodies are very sensitive to premature weaning, so be sure you are starting at the right time. Around 5 weeks of age, the kitten's premolars will begin to emerge. This indicates that they are ready to begin eating meaty textured food. However, some kittens may need a bit more time being bottle fed due to health issues, or differences in weight or size. If you see any changes in the kitten's health or energy during the beginning of the weaning process, immediately go back to bottle feeding. Contact the foster coordinator if you are unsure when to begin the weaning process.

Supplies

You will be provided wet kitten food. Kitten food is higher in calories, fat and protein that the kitten needs to help them grow. Wet food is the healthiest choice for kittens, as the moisture content will help them stay healthy and hydrated.

Transition with a Slurry

Slurry is a mix of formula and wet food, which is used to help transition the kitten from one food to the other. You may begin by just introducing a small teaspoon of wet food mixed with the formula, which allows the kitten to acclimate to the new proteins and flavors. As the kitten becomes more comfortable eating meat, you'll begin increasing the ratio so that there is more wet food present at each feeding.

Wet Food and Water

Once the kitten is confidently eating slurry on her own, switch completely to wet food. You will be given high quality wet food formulated for kittens.

At this time, it's also appropriate to introduce water. Use the dishes provided by SoHumane. It's normal for kittens to struggle with water at first, but they should be drinking confidently within 1-3 days of introduction.

Tips and Tricks for Weaning Kittens

Weaning is possibly one of the more crucial learning experiences of a kitten's life! It is your job to help them transition as smoothly as possible.

-  Every kitten is different! Use your best judgement to determine how to introduce them to wet food.
-  Blending the food and serving in a bottle can help.
-  If the kitten is not getting a full meal with a slurry, supplement with formula bottle feeding.
-  Kittens must stay healthy and well fed.
-  Remember to stay patient!

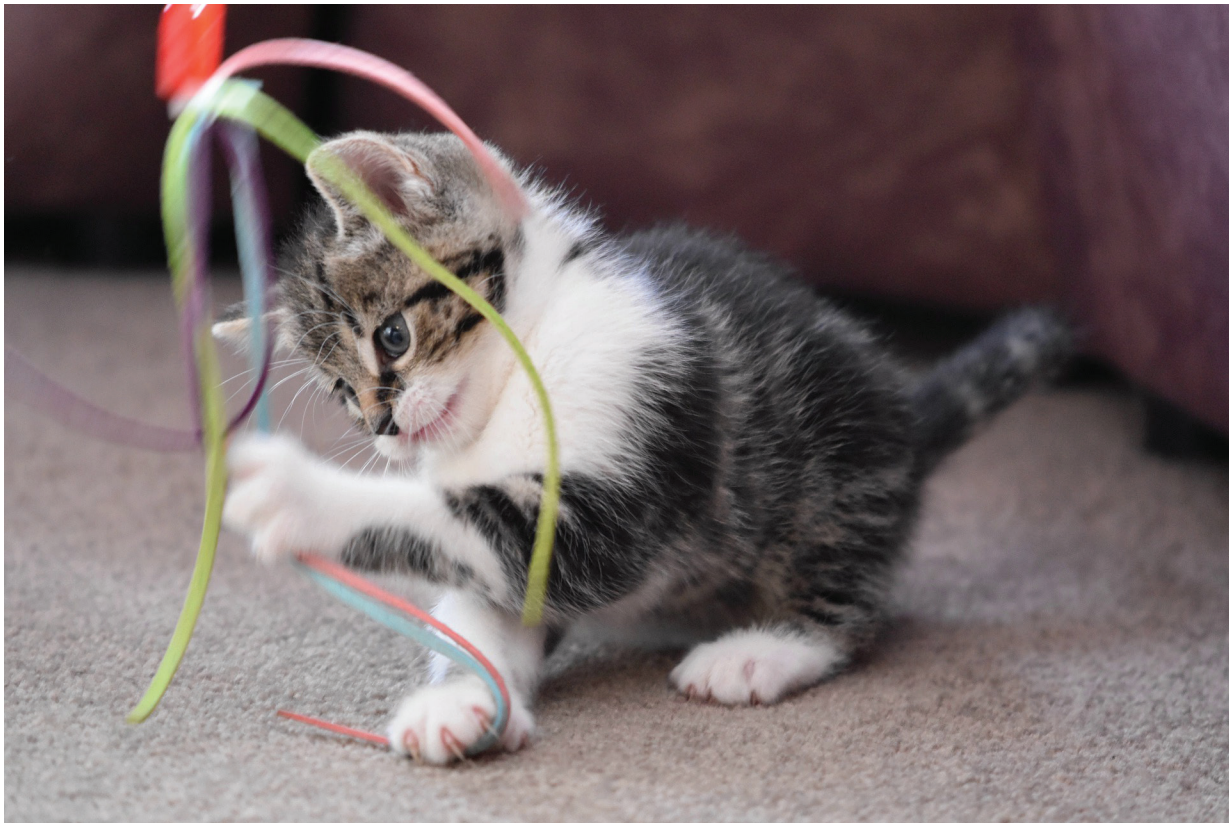
Socialization

Our kittens primarily come from rescue situations, so we are counting on fosters to properly socialize all kittens; if they are not properly socialized, they will have a very difficult time being successful in our adoption program.

The appropriate age to begin socialization is between 2-7 weeks of age. Each kitten needs about two hours of human socialization per day either broken up or all together.

Luckily, their feeding schedule requires them to have human contact on a consistent basis, but they still need attention during and after weaning. Remember that kittens should be confined, so they are not socializing with your pets in the home; they will get their social skills from you and each other (if they have siblings.)

When teaching kittens how to play, use toys, so they understand that biting and scratching hands is not an acceptable form of play into adolescence and adulthood.



Source: Charleston Animal Society Life-Saving Orphan Kitten Foster Care Guide "Socialization"

Weaned Kittens

By the age of 7-8 weeks, most kittens will be fully weaned. The kittens will still have special needs during meal time, and it's important for rescuers and kitten parents to use proper feeding protocol even with kittens who are weaned.

The Right Food

Kittens need more fat, protein, and calories than adult cats, so always check that you're feeding a high quality food formulated specifically for kittens. Wet food is the best option because it helps keep them healthy and hydrated.

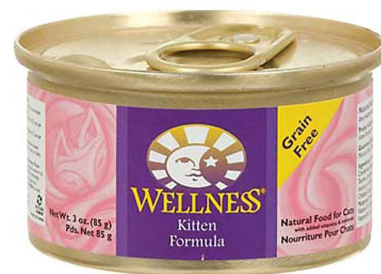
SoHumane will provide all food for fosters. Stay in communication with your foster coordinator, so we can ensure we have adequate supply for you and other fosters.

Frequency Feeding

While you may have heard of strict feeding schedules for adult cats, you don't want to withhold food from a growing kitten. Kittens over 8 weeks of age should be given a minimum of 3 meals each day, including right before bed and first thing in the morning.

Water

Hydration is an important part of keeping kittens healthy. Provide a shallow dish of fresh water at all times, and if you're concerned about the kitten not drinking enough water, mix water into the wet food to entice the kitten. If a kitten is still not drinking water or eating, contact your foster coordinator.



Source: Kitten Lady™ Weaned Kittens Article

Litter Training Tips and Tricks

Learning how to use the litter box is an important part of early feline development, but “training” is not necessarily the task at hand! Kittens naturally understand the litter box and will be drawn to use it as long as you set them up for success!

- 🐾 If you have messy kittens, try placing a puppy pad under the litter box to help catch any waste that misses the box.
- 🐾 Make sure the box you have is easy for the kittens to find.
- 🐾 Do not provide areas for the kitten to go potty where they should not.
- 🐾 Piles of blankets or clothing on the floor seem like very acceptable places for kittens to go potty, so keep the floor clear!
- 🐾 If a kitten keeps using a spot outside their litter box, place another litter box in that location to encourage them to use the box instead.
- 🐾 For kittens that are very young, you may consider syringe feeding.
- 🐾 Burp kittens after feeding by gently tapping their backs; the process usually takes about 30 seconds.

Litter Training

The Right Time

Newborn kittens need to be stimulated to go to the bathroom, so you won't start litter training until the kittens are around 3 weeks of age. Every kitten develops at a different pace, so be patient with the kitten and continue stimulating until the kitten is confidently and regularly using their litter box.

Kitten Safe Litter

Kittens learn and explore in the same way human babies do: they like to use their mouths! Because of this, the type of litter box and the type of litter must be safe for them. Kittens should not be given litter products that contain fragrances, harsh chemicals, or clumping properties. Clumping litter is common and works well for adults, but it is incredibly dangerous for kittens if they ingest this type of litter.

SoHumane will provide you with as much litter as you need. Remember to communicate when you need more.

The Box

Kittens require a litter box with an open-top that is shallow in order for the kittens to access it readily and easily.

Box Placement

The placement of the box is equally as important as the box itself. Kittens are drawn to corners or other areas away from their main dwelling area, so start by placing the litter box in a corner that is clean from clutter. Prepare for the kittens to be messy!

The Training

Kittens do well with positive reinforcement. Praise the kitten if you see them using the box properly!

If the kitten(s) uses an area outside of the box, quickly and thoroughly clean/disinfect the area to prevent scent soaking or scent associations.

Keep it Clean!

No one wants to use a dirty toilet, and cats are no different! Clean the box throughout each day to encourage them to continue forming good habits. A clean box will be more pleasant for you to clean and for them to use.

*Source: Kitten Lady™ Litter Training Article**

Medical Issues You May Encounter

It is important to understand that kittens are sensitive and very susceptible to illness. You should be prepared to care for them and watch out for anything that does not seem right. Consult SoHumane's Vet Care staff if you notice anything concerning like odd textured/colored feces or behavior/physical abnormalities related to their health.

Fading Kittens

Sometimes kittens that look and act healthy will begin to decline rapidly. They can stop growing, socializing, or crawling. They may lose weight and be fussy. When kittens start to fade, even medical attention may not get them through the next 48 hours. There are currently no specific reasons that cause this condition.

Chilled Kittens

Kittens do not have a way to regulate their own body temperature, so they need to stay at a warm temperature that would mimic his/her mother. If left cold, they can suffer from hypothermia which may lead to hypoglycemia from resulting blood sugar drop. Their internal organs will eventually begin to shut down. If a kitten is cold to the touch, hypothermia has set in. Although it is crucial that they be warmed up, they need to be warmed up slowly. Dehydration, shock, and death are possible outcomes if a kitten is warmed up too quickly.

To warm a chilled kitten, place them under your coat or sweater and gently begin to massage them to restore circulation. At home you may try wrapping a hot water bottle in a towel and placing it next to the kitten. Heating pads can be used in a crate at a low temperature as long as they are being monitored to prevent them from getting too hot.

Overfeeding/Underfeeding

Kittens can have a difficult time ingesting and digesting their formula/food. Their kidneys cannot handle excessive amounts of fluid. A kitten may have diarrhea which could lead to dehydration if they are overeating. A loose, yellow stool is a mild sign of overeating. Greenish stool is a sign of food passing too quickly through the kitten's system. Grayish stool with a foul odor indicates inadequate digestion of formula and is the most serious form of diarrhea. Always ensure you have made precise measurements of formula. Overfeeding can change the color and consistency of stool.

Underfed kittens are generally restless and they cry excessively, and they may eventually become apathetic. Underfed kittens will eventually become dehydrated and chilled. They would need to be slowly warmed while being rehydrated.

Kitten Waste

Kittens can have different colored and textured poop. Mild Diarrhea for over 24 hours is not a concern. **A healthy poop will be firm and mustard yellow in color.** Parasites like roundworms, tapeworms, hookworms, giardia, and coccidia can all be found in kitten poop:



Roundworms: a kitten may have low appetite, appear depressed, have diarrhea, become anemic, and/or pass mucus or blood in their stool. The parasite may be visible in the stool.

Hookworms: the stool appears very black and possibly bloody.

Tapeworms: these are not life threatening, but you may notice rice-looking segments around the kitten's anus. Kittens can be treated for tapeworms at six weeks of age.

Giardia: interferes with the absorption of nutrients and fluids within the intestines. It leads to severe diarrhea and a yellowish color, foamy, soft texture.

Coccidia: Kittens very commonly get coccidia, and they can develop dysentery and pass. Their stool will contain mucus and blood.

If you suspect any of these, or have general concerns about the appearance/smell of a kitten's poop, please bring in a sample ASAP using a fecal collection tube. Vet Care will be able to analyze the sample and recommend treatment.

Upper Respiratory Infection

Rescued kittens from the outdoors often have an upper respiratory infection. The severity of the infection depends on the virus causing it. Mild cases resemble similar symptoms to a human cold. Severe cases cause high fever, loss of appetite, dehydration, and eye ulcers.

Ringworm

Ringworm is the most common skin disorder seen in kittens. Signs of ringworm include abnormal hair loss in circular form. They may have a red ring on the outer edge. There may also be crusty spots where hair loss is found. Ringworm is highly contagious to animals as well as humans and is contracted through the air.

Kitten Mortality

Many factors play a part in kitten mortality. Orphaned kittens have a reduced chance of survival. Genetics can play a part. If the mother cat is sick, she cannot provide the necessary nutrients for her babies and therefore they have less immunity to diseases.

Despite the best efforts of providing emergency care, proper nutrition, attention to cleanliness, correct medical treatment, and detailed record keeping, some kittens will not make it.

It can be an emotionally disturbing experience, but it is important to understand and accept that some kittens will not survive. SoHumane is dedicated to assisting you the best we can because we would not be able to provide the kittens the care they need without your help. If you suspect a kitten may pass, or one has moved on, please contact SoHumane. Keep in mind that all we can do is surround them with love and care, and make their passing as comfortable as possible.

Momma Cat

In some instances, momma cat may be sent to foster with her kittens. Momma cat will require a quiet setting with her kittens that has an element of privacy away from the daily activity in your household. Stress may cause momma cat to neglect her kittens. Give momma cat and her kittens their own space, and leave her alone.

Because she will be in an unfamiliar area, she may need a few days to adjust. Be sure to provide her with plenty of food, water, and a clean litter box. For the first few weeks, mom will do everything necessary to care for her kittens. Leave them alone unless to feed, clean and check on them a few times a day.

Socializing momma cat is a process that should be taken slowly. You should provide the means for socialization, but make sure to let her come to you. The socialization session should be stopped if you're noticing any negative signs like tail swishing, ears flat, hissing, growling, etc.

Although it is rare, maternal neglect is possible; some kittens will die from poor motherly care. Some cats lack a maternal instinct. It is your job to inform your foster coordinator if you notice a momma cat displaying behaviors of neglect. Mom may ignore her duty to feed, groom, and respond to a kitten's cry.

Cats can be just like humans when protecting her babies! It is common for her to display aggressive behavior towards humans or other animals. Keep them separate from your pets if you have any in your home, and communicate with the foster coordinator if the aggression becomes too severe to provide necessary care.



©Warren Photographic

Source: Charleston Animal Society Life-Saving Orphan Kitten Foster Care Guide "Fostering Moms"

Frequently Asked Questions

When do I need to bring the kittens back to SoHumane?

In general, we ask foster kittens to return to our adoption center once they are at least 2 months old and 2 1/2 lbs. The length of time this will take varies from kitten to kitten, but SoHumane will give you an estimated foster time period when we contact you for potential fostering.

What if I am currently fostering and need to bring the kittens back earlier than expected? Or have plans to be out of town?

If you are no longer able to foster or will be out of town please contact SoHumane so we can make arrangements for your kittens!

What do I do if I am interested or know someone who is interested in adopting my foster kitten(s)?

Please contact our adoption center! We do have a basic adoption process that all potential adopters must go through.

What if my foster kitten(s) isn't eating/defecating?

Call SoHumane Vet Care staff

Helpful Resources

Take the time to learn from Hannah Shaw, the Kitten Lady. She has her own website with informative articles and videos that are easy to understand for your convenience!

Alley Cat Allies has hundreds of resources on their website. Check them out if you're curious!

Maddiesfund.org has a section on their website dedicated to orphaned kitten care much like the Kitten Lady.



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