

## KITTENS – GETTING OFF TO A GOOD START

### ***How best should I introduce my new kitten to my home?***

- Your interaction with your new kitten begins on the ride home. Cats should ALWAYS be transported in some kind of carrier in the car
- Upon arriving at home, place the kitten in a small, quiet area with food and a litter box.
  - If the kitten is very tiny, a small litter box with low sides may be necessary at first.
- Set up a safe and secure area where you can leave your kitten when you are not available for supervision.
  - This location should have a food bowl, water bowl, litter box, play toys and a resting area.

All kittens and cats will need time to investigate their new surroundings. For a new kitten this is a more manageable task if you limit the available space initially. Be sure that any area where your kitten is allowed to roam has been effectively cat-proofed, which includes anywhere the kitten can jump or climb. Potentially dangerous items such as electric cords and items that might be chewed or swallowed (such as thread, rubber bands, paper clips, children's toys) should be booby trapped or kept out of reach. After your new kitten has had some quiet time in a restricted location, slowly allow access to other areas of the home under your supervision.

### ***What should I do if I have other pets?***

The kitten should be given a safe and secure area that provides for all of its needs (as above) and introductions with the existing family pets should be carefully supervised. At the first introduction there may be no immediate problems, and reinforcement of desirable responses may be all that is required.

If there is some mild anxiety on the part of your dog then introductions should be controlled, gradual, supervised and always positive. If there is any initial anxiety on the part of the dog or kitten should soon decrease. Initially it would be best to keep a dog and a kitten separated unless supervised.

Most adult cats are fairly tolerant of kittens, so that keeping the kitten in its own area, and then allowing introductions when the cats are eating or playing, should help to decrease any initial

### ***How can I prevent problems from developing?***

The key to preventing behavior problems is to identify and provide appropriate outlets for all of the needs of the kitten. Sexual motivation can be reduced by neutering or spaying. Most of the physical activity of an outdoor cat would be focused on the hunt or on predatory and social play. A cat's interest in exploration might be addressed by providing new toys that can be batted and chased, and new areas to explore such as paper bags and cardboard boxes. Interest might be stimulated and maintained by hiding food treats or catnip in the toys, exploration and climbing areas. In addition to social play session with owners, highly social and playful cats may also benefit from having a second social and playful cat in the home.

### ***How can I teach my cat to enjoy handling?***

Depending on the personality and early experiences as a kitten, your cat may enjoy, accept, or dislike certain types of handling, from petting to bathing.

- It is critical that the human hand only be associated with positive experiences and that all physical punishment is avoided. Begin with those types of handling that the cat enjoys or is willing to accept, and provide small treats at each of the first few sessions.
- Once the cat learns to associate food with these sessions, slightly longer or more intense sessions can be practiced.
- Over time you can introduce a brush or comb so that you can help keep your cat's coat clean and free of mats.
  - Regular grooming will also help decrease hairball formation.
  - Never force this type of handling upon your cat.

### ***Are there other things I should train my cat to do?***

- Training your cat to accept the carrier without distress and fear will also come in handy over its lifetime.
  - Using food rewards, delectable food, and play toys, you can entice the kitten to enter and explore the carrier. When the cat has voluntarily entered the carrier, the door can be briefly closed and then re-opened. Each time, try to leave the kitten in a bit longer before allowing him to exit. Be sure to never allow the kitten out when it cries or scratches at the crate or he will associate those behaviors with escape
- If car travel will be frequent, short trips can be taken for practice to get the kitten used to traveling in the car. In some cases a very large cat crate can be used as a safe haven for your kitten and can also accommodate litter box, food and water.

In summary, a cat can become very demanding of attention, play and affection. Begin early to teach your kitten how to ask nicely for interaction. Obnoxious behavior such as swatting, excessive vocalization, biting and pouncing should not be tolerated. If your kitten begins to exhibit these behaviors, quickly and quietly leave the area and cease all interactions. Once the kitten is calm and quiet, call him over and resume interactions.

