

THIRD CLASS – PREPARATIONS PRIOR TO TRAPPING, TRAPPING AND ARRANGING FOR POST-SURGICAL CARE

HOW TO DOMESTICATE AND CARE FOR FERAL OR RESCUED KITTENS

To domesticate means “To adapt to life in intimate association with humans”

Feral and rescued kittens are the offspring of female feral cats or unaltered female domestic cats.

Since the kittens have not had an opportunity to bond with humans, they are often wary and mistrustful. Even at a very young age, their mothers have taught them ways to survive. Their instinct from being born in unprotected and unsafe places is to **run and try to get away. Though small, they can bite and scratch when frightened and under no circumstances should they be handled roughly.** It is important to minimize any exposure to scratching or biting. **A 4-5 week old kitten is quite fragile and can be easily calmed and should be handled softly and wrapped in bunting when holding.**

Feral and rescued kittens come from varied backgrounds and will have distinct personalities. The circumstances under which they were born and the ability of the mother to protect and care for them can influence their behavior. We may never know what rigors the mother went through to birth them and what they experienced in unsafe and hostile surroundings. Under the best conditions, even the rescue itself can be an extremely frightening experience. Felines do not adapt easily to any change. Persons caring for or adopting a rescue kitten or cat should educate themselves about their unique natures and needs. This is vital information for everyone to have and there are many good web sites available. **We are only covering the basics for kitten care. There is much more to nurturing and raising kittens than can be addressed in this document. Research other resources on the internet, kitten rescue organizations and books. Confer with persons who have experience. The more you know, the better it will be for the precious lives you are caring for.**

Under normal circumstances, partially weaned kittens may be taken from the mother from four to six weeks. Generally, this age is considered easiest for socialization. Kittens twelve to sixteen weeks and older have been successfully socialized. Any person attempting to work with kittens should be responsible and educated and endowed with an abundance of patience and compassion.

DOMESTICATING INSTRUCTIONS

When the kittens are first brought to their new home they should be placed in a quiet and safe area away from noise, children and other animals for minimum of 10 days in isolation. A veterinarian should also examine them. If there are other animals in the household the minimum ten-day period of confinement is necessary. This can be a bathroom, a small utility room, spare room or any place that is quiet and enclosed, **warm** and safe, **but not totally dark.** Be sure they have warm beds, food, water, litter box and toys. If the room has no windows, leave a night light on in the room during the night and a regular light on during the day. **Keeping the kittens warm and away from drafts essential to their survival, as they no longer have their mother to comfort them and provide warmth. Depending upon the age you may need a heated Snuggle Safe disc or heating pad. Be sure the kittens have a way to get off the heat and test it on your forearm for warmth. Bach Flower Remedies such as Rescue Remedy and other combinations have a calming effect on kittens and help them adjust. If there are no other animals in the household, keeping them confined in a bathroom or smaller place at the beginning until they feel secure is essential. For older & more feral kittens we recommend the Urban League Site www.urbancatleague.org The have a great video called Tough Love dealing with older ferals. www.kittenrescue.org also has in-depth instructions for domesticating, bottle feeding and neo-natal kitten care**

Place a small litter box and soft cuddly bedding into the cage. Visit them often or if they are in a room where you normally spend a lot of time, this is even better. Speak to them softly. Place a bowl of a quality milk replacement formula and moist kitten food into the cage or carrier or confined room and remain while they eat and drink to be sure they can drink the milk without assistance. Partially weaned

kittens need to learn how to lap milk without choking. If they have never had milk from a dish, you may need to dip your finger in the milk and put some on their lips or side of mouth until they understand how to drink. Stay with them until they know what to do. Keep plenty of food available, as it will be reassuring.

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Always move slowly talking to them in a low and soothing manner. Leave a radio playing soft music in the room or having a television set on **very low volume** will also get them used to human voices. Keep the liter box clean and replace the bedding immediately if soiled. **ALWAYS WASH YOUR HANDS BEFORE AND AFTER HANDLING KITTENS.**

I usually begin touching them within a few hours after they are comfortably settled, or at least the following day. Even though they may be frightened, it is important they smell and feel the soft and loving warmth of the person that will be caring for them, as soon as possible.

Select the least aggressive or frightened kitten. Securely, but gently, grip it by the nape of the neck, wrap it with a soft towel or soft bedding and place in your lap. Wrapping the kitten in the soft bunting (fleece material) is comforting and allows you more control. Move your hands slowly when handling them, as they may not have made the connection between the hands and the nurturing and bonding that takes place through them. Stroke the kitten's body while speaking in soft reassuring tones until you feel the kitten has relaxed. Slowly, pull some of the soft blanket or towel from the kitten and cuddle it next to your body. They like the feel of bare skin. Watch out for the nails on parts of your exposed chest. After you feel the kitten relax and less afraid, gently place the kitten back into the cage or carrier and go through the process with each kitten. Clipping their nails is essential.

A frightened kitten may hiss and spit at humans as their response to being taken from their mother, a trip to the veterinarian for examination and then to a strange and unfamiliar environment. The kitten that acts the most ferocious is usually the most scared, but can give you a scratch or bite and may try to escape if given a chance. Any bites should be cleaned with an antiseptic and antibiotic solutions.

Gently stroking the top of their head and chin will help the kitten to relax. Brushing and combing for fleas is also a good method to remove any fleas. Approach the kitten from behind while petting and introducing combs and brushes. Face to face contact is sometimes difficult at first. Little by little you will feel them respond and relax in your arms. Your voice, presence and tender touch will be the most comforting event in their lives, other than food.

During the period when you are taking them out of their safe place and putting them in your lap, also try to lure them out of the carrier or cage with special wet food such as chicken or Gerber's Baby food, chicken, toys such as cat dancer, feather toys, or balls. Use this time to bond with them by introducing them to the toys you have provided. They may run back into their safe place, but this will help them considerably to develop trust. Playing is an excellent way to gain their attention and overcome fear. When they respond well to having access to the safe enclosed room that contains their carrier or cage, let them out for short periods of time. A small floor scratcher or scratching post is a necessary training tool right from the start. Gently put their paws on the scratchers and show them how it is done.

Generally, within 5-10 days the kittens should have made considerable progress. They will be showing their distinct personalities. Interacting with them as they play and learn can be a fascinating experience. They should now have access to their room and can be placed in the cage only if necessary. If they seem uncomfortable in a larger space, it would be best to place them back into their cage or carrier at night for sleep. This will assure their safety during the night and also provide a cozy place for them to sleep together. Use your own judgement. If there is a kitten that seems less playful and sociable, pay special attention to that kitten and be sure it is not being left out. When you bring fresh food in the morning let them out of the carrier or cage for the day, free to roam around and play. **Always leave the carrier or cage open after they are out so they will have a safe place to retreat, if necessary. THIS**

IS VERY IMPORTANT. No matter where they are in the room, they need to have their bed and safe place available to them at all times. Never close off their safe place and leave them alone.

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If they are not already using the litter box, pick up each kitten and place them in the litter box, using their front paws to gently paw at the litter. Training to use the litter box is very important and simple. It doesn't take them long to learn. They may even choose to lie in it, so **keep the box clean. Cheap Clumping litter should never be used for kittens. We use World's Best Litter.**

Kitten-proof the room before letting the kittens out. Seal up any nooks and crannies where a frightened kitten may enter and become trapped or inaccessible to you. Bathroom sinks often have spaces between cabinets just large enough for a kitten. Block access to behind bookcases and heavy furniture. Look for anyplace where a kitten can become wedged. Be careful not to leave **OPEN TOILETS** or anything that could be climbed and pulled down on top of the kitten. Protect knick-knacks, clothes and plants (some poisonous) from curious kittens. **See Instructions How to Kitten and Puppy Proof your Home- Page 196.**

If there is one kitten who seems slower to respond, additional attention will be required. Some kittens are very shy which may not have anything to do with them being feral or rescued. It can just be the personality of the kitten as with humans. The shy ones need more reassurance. If the kittens have names, use them frequently. A small room for containment is better than a large room or bedroom. Their world has to expand at a slow rate and large open rooms tend to scare them. In bedrooms, they can hide under the bed and it could be difficult to get out without injury. **COMMON SENSE WITH WELL THOUGHT OUT CHOICES WILL ENSURE THEIR SAFETY AND YOUR PEACE OF MIND. SEEK PROFESSIONAL ADVICE IF IN DOUBT.**

FEEDING INSTRUCTIONS 4-5 WEEKS OR OLDER

KMR powder or any quality milk supplement is a must. Follow directions on the container and be sure to have it available fresh in the morning and evening with regular moist food. You may need to use a bottle for the kittens before they are completely weaned. Nursing bottles are available in pet stores. Get advice from your veterinarian as to the proper way to bottle feed or go to the below listed web site for detailed instructions. Boiled chicken breasts cut up and shredded, nutritious moist kitten food and a small bowl of kitten dry food are good starters. All of the food should be of high quality and the bowls kept clean and the food fresh. Each kitten can eat one can of wet food per day and sometimes more. This can be in addition to milk, chicken and dry food. Do not be concerned about their overeating. They are growing and need a lot of nourishment. I once asked my veterinarian how much to feed a kitten and he said, "how much can you afford"? A bowl of fresh water changed daily should also be part of their diet. When introducing the milk supplement (unless they are being bottle-fed) take your finger and dip it into the bowl and wipe on the lips or side of the mouth. You need to make sure they can lap up the milk without choking or coughing. The bowls or dishes should be low and wide for easier access. The milk builds the immune system and is essential for those kittens not completely weaned. (I personally always include it whether they are weaned or not. It has helped in bonding with the kittens). **BE SURE TO HANDLE EACH KITTEN BEFORE THEY EAT AND PLACE THEM AT THEIR DISHES WITH A GENTLE TOUCH. STAY THERE TO BE SURE EVERYONE IS EATING AND DRINKING MILK REPLACEMENT.**

Check the stools for diarrhea, signs of constipation or worms and be sure they show no difficulty in urinating, such as straining. Special attention to cleanliness of the litter box is essential, as many kittens lay in the litter boxes for reassurance. They have not made the total connection that the litter box is only for litter and prefer to play and lay in the box as part of their safe place to be.

Refer to the Kitten Growth and Development Chart on Page 214-215

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When the kittens have adjusted well and are playing and responding to you in a trustful manner, it is a good idea to encourage friends to visit and handle them as often as possible. Socialization with other persons will help them adjust more readily, especially if they are being adopted to other homes.

Kittens and older cats will dart out the front door. The signs one sees posted all over the city are usually the result of someone not being diligent or ill informed about this. Be sure to inform EVERYONE who enters your home to be on guard that there are kittens present. Cats and kittens darting out the door could prove fatal. When entering and leaving hold a folded newspaper, piece of cardboard, or towel in your hands as a barrier to prevent and discourage them from attempting to dash out the door. A squirt bottle with water left outside the door is a good deterrent to have before entering.

Check carefully before you open and close the door and advise everyone of the same technique. This will discourage the cats and kittens for a period of time, but they will try again, when you least expect it. I cannot stress enough, the importance of this precaution.

FOSTER PARENTS WHO WILL BE HELPING WITH ADOPTION

If you are a foster parent and plan to participate in the adoption process, here are some pointers. During the time you and are caring for the kittens, begin to inform your friends that the kittens are being prepared for adoption. If you plan to place them with adoption organizations, they must be contacted well in advance for their requirements. They will also be able to furnish detailed information on kitten care and getting kittens ready for adoption and offer stringent guidelines for a safe and responsible adoption. **Ask their advice, even if you are adopting to friends or family.**

When talking to prospective “parents” each home should be evaluated carefully. **We recommend indoor homes only.** Taking two kittens together is ideal. In some cases, a one cat household is not the best situation for the cat. They usually do better with a companion. Taking two kittens also allows for well-adjusted and happy kittens, as they can be friends and playmates for life. **It is extremely difficult for kittens to be separated from their mothers and litter mates. We sometimes forget, they are families.**

Refer to Ten Proven Successful Steps for Introducing a new cat or kitten into your Household-Page 102.

Mutually agreed to arrangements are an essential part of any adoption, prior to placing the kittens in their new homes. **See our Adoption Agreement on Pages 219-220. We recommend that all provisions in our Adoption Agreement be carried out before placing kittens in adoptive homes.** If you have no experience in placing kittens, contact adoption organizations and kitten rescue groups in your area. **It is essential that you be properly informed before allowing any kitten into an unknown environment. We recommend home delivery as the only way to assess that they are in a safe and loving home.**

For additional information regarding care and feeding of kittens under 5 weeks of age, please see the web sites of www.feralcat.com/raising.html and www.hdw-inc.com/tinykitten.htm

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