



KITTEN SOCIALIZATION

Congratulations! You have just decided to adopt a new kitten. Becoming a caretaker for a new kitten is a big decision and with the right knowledge and care, your little kitten should grow into a happy, healthy and well socialized adult cat.

Kitten Development

Hopefully your kitten was at least 8 weeks old when you got him. The first 8 weeks of a kitten's life is very important in developing the kitten's social skills with cats and people. If you are looking at adopting a kitten and he is still with his mother, please wait to bring him home until he is at least 8 weeks old. Kittens need the full 8 weeks to develop skills such as how to play properly with other cats and with toys, how to groom himself, and learning to be friendly with people.

Socialization

If you have a mother and her litter, you will be the primary one responsible for the kitten's socialization. Make sure that from 2-8 weeks old the new kittens have lots of play time with proper toys (not human hands) and get handled and petted by people so the kittens learn to be friendly with humans. Kittens that are gently handled by people 15 to 40 minutes a day during the first seven weeks are more likely to develop larger brains. They're more exploratory, more playful, and better learners. Kittens also need to be exposed to many different things during this time. In addition to different types of toys, such as "birds on a stick", mice, crinkly balls and toys that make noise or flash lights, cats need to be exposed to different surfaces (linoleum, carpet, wood, grass, etc.) and given objects to climb in, around and on top of such as empty boxes, cat trees and shelves. Introducing kittens to other types of animals during this period will give them a better chance of getting along with other pets in the home as adults. If you adopted your kitten after the 8 week old point and you aren't sure about the socialization he got, it's okay. He can still learn. The saying "you can't teach an old dog new tricks" is not true and this applies to cats as well. When your new kitten is exploring, make sure he gets lots of positive reinforcement for being brave and exploring things on his own. If your kitten starts doing things you would not like him to do, don't punish, but redirect the behavior to something positive. If he starts scratching the furniture, move a scratching post or pad to the spot he was scratching and reward him for using the post. Eventually you can gradually move the post to the area you want him to scratch. Kittens and cats can learn and change behavior at any age as long as the training is done in a positive way, so it is important that you make sure your kitten has all the needed tools to grow and develop into a happy healthy cat.

When socializing you cat, punishing him for unwanted behaviors after the fact, or even during the act can cause further trauma to the cat and may even cause him to be afraid of you. Never use a spray bottle, yell at your cat, rub her nose in urine or punish your cat in any other way. None of these things will solve the underlying issue and may even make the problem worse as the cat may start to fear being around you.