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Kitten Socialization SECRETS

BY RITA REIMERS

You've adopted an adorable new kitten, and you're already in love with that sweet face, those cute little ears and tiny paws. No matter where you got her, you were probably told that you need to continue to socialize your kitten once you get her home. Exactly what does that mean, and how do you go about it?

What is socialization?

Socialization simply means teaching kittens proper behaviors, both with other animals and with their humans, and to feel relaxed and at ease in their new home and with people. In short, socialization is the act of helping your cat feel comfortable being handled,

to be gentle during playtime and to adapt to the noises in your home and the people coming and going.

The best age to begin socialization is before the age of 12 weeks, while kittens are still with their mom and siblings. Kittens that don't get handled before the age of 12 weeks are harder

to socialize and may remain somewhat skittish for life.

Socialization is especially important if you are adopting a single kitten. Kittens typically learn from one another and their mother how to behave, to be fearless during playtime with their siblings and what hurts and is not acceptable during playtime. They also go to the litter box together when they are very young, learning how to do what Mom showed them. If you adopt a single kitten, it will be up to you to teach her how to properly behave.

How do I socialize?

Here are a few ideas to help your kitten grow into a secure cat who loves to be around people:

Adopt in pairs: One of the best ways to begin socializing kittens is to adopt them in pairs. Kittens have →

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that high-octane energy, and they can use up their hyperactivity during play with one another. Also, as I mentioned, kittens learn a fair amount from one another. During playtime, you will hear them scold each other if someone bites too hard or gets too rough.

Playtime: Break out those toys, because another way a kitten becomes more social is if you interact with her daily. One of the best ways to spend time with kittens is during playtime. Whether you have one kitten or two

(or more if you have a litter), using feather toys and fishing-pole type toys to play with your kittens will

have them looking forward to being with you. Remember, use toys to play with kittens, not your hands. My rule is "Toys are for playing, hands are for petting." Otherwise, you may end up with an adult cat who doesn't know how to control his biting.

Treats and meals: Giving treats and meals is a great way to get your cat used to you and the other members of your household. I like to precede meals with a good play session, as this mimics a kitten's natural desire to hunt. Offering the meal or treat after play makes her feel like she's had a successful hunt and has caught



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her dinner. Have everyone in the family take turns feeding the kitten, so she becomes comfortable with everyone in the household.

Friends and family: Have friends and family drop by, so your kitten gets used to other people and their comings and goings. Otherwise, you may see your kitten become anti-social and fearful of other people as she grows into adulthood. Have visitors offer a treat, pet and play with your kitten so she knows there's is nothing to fear.

Ensure security

Of course, there are other things a cat needs to feel secure in her new home:

- ✓ plenty of toys to keep busy
- ✓ litter boxes in quiet, easily accessible areas with at least two escape routes to and from the boxes, so she

doesn't feel cornered. (*Rule is one more litter box than there are cats.*)

- ✓ tall cat trees or climbing shelves
- ✓ cozy kitten cubby holes to nap in and to allow the kitten to get away from it all when she wants some alone time

It goes without saying that the most important thing your kitten needs to feel safe and secure is time and attention from you. Make the time to play with your kitten and cuddle her on the sofa every single day, and she will grow up to be a happy, well-adjusted and social cat. 🐾



Rita Reimers is a multi-cat behavior expert, author and owner of JFCATS.com, a feline health and wellness company.

Get her advice exclusively by joining Club Cattitude at RitaReimers.com. Follow Rita on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram @MultiCatExpert and on YouTube @RitaReimers.



Social superstars

There are so many reasons to socialize kitty. Here are just some of them:

DURING SOCIALIZATION, YOUR KITTEN WILL:

- Start to trust you and bond
- Build confidence and feel secure
- Learn proper (and improper) ways to play
- Become relaxed in the home and with its rhythm
- Be less skittish and jumpy around noises
- Not hide from other people, including visitors, in the home
- Become more inquisitive

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