



Kitten Kindergarten

INTRODUCTION

Did you know?

- Female cats go into heat when the weather gets warmer, with the gestation period lasting 2 months. Generally, kitten season is March 15th- September 21st.
- There are over 75 million cats in the U.S., but 1/3 never see a vet.
WHY? Cats are seen as less valuable than dogs.
- More cats are relinquished to shelters than dogs.
WHY? Primarily for behavior reasons.
- When a cat gets lost and is turned in to the shelter, only 2-5% are reclaimed by their owners (vs 30% of dogs).
WHY? The #1 reason why there are so many cats in shelters is for behavior reasons. Other reasons owners may cite include moving, allergies, doesn't match the furniture (seriously), etc, but the true, underlying reason is that the owner(s) and their cat had a **poorly formed bond**, which results in a poor perception of their cat.

So Why Should We Train Cats and Kittens?

1. **Negative Stereotype:** *cats are mysterious, aloof, unsociable, un-trainable, or wild. People feel that behavior problems are unsolvable. Cats can resort to eliminating inappropriately for even minor upsets.*
2. **To Make Life Easier for Both Cat & Owner:** *less stress during trips to the vet, trimming nails, adjusting to new pets/house guests, bathing, etc.*
3. **To Prevent Problem Behaviors:** *less chance of scratching furniture, biting, developing aggression, developing fears/phobias, inappropriate urination and litter box habits, getting into trouble, etc.*
4. **To Keep Them Out of Shelters:** *for behavior or attitude problems.*
5. **To help them get adopted!** *(for shelter cats/kittens) Trained, well socialized cats and kittens show better in kennels, are friendly and outgoing, and will be less likely to be returned for behavior problems.*

Re-Creating the Cat



By many, cats are seen as un-social, reclusive, aloof even to their owners, free-spirited, untrainable, and inconsiderate in their potty habits (pooping in the neighbors yard, peeing on your bed, spraying, etc). So now it is time for an... **Image Make-over!**

During the course of Kitten Kindergarten, we will work to transform our kittens into social butterflies, wanting to be with you and go on outings (even on leash!). Instead of being aloof, our kittens can grow up to be easy to handle. Little changes in their lives that might normally upset them will no longer be a problem. Instead of being free-spirited, our kittens will be eager to learn and participate in training sessions. And because our kittens will be socialized, it will become normal for us to take them out and make new friends. With enthusiasm, hard work and consistency, we will take our formerly reclusive, mysterious companion, and transform them into... **THE NEW AND IMPROVED "DOG!"** who is friendly, quiet, independent (not so needy), and easy to walk (but walk not needed). Not to mention already litter box trained!

3-Step Process

In order to create perfect kittens, we will be taking advantage of their young age to provide EARLY SOCIALIZATION. In this course, our kittens will learn:

1. New people, places, objects & animals are OK. No need to hide or be stressed.
2. Its fun to be handled, get your nails trimmed, be examined and given medications.
3. Good behavior, like sit, come, wait quietly in the carrier and targeting, earn rewards and are fun to do!

UNDERSTANDING KITTEN DEVELOPMENT

- Helps us understand how cats become fearful.
- Helps us understand fear-related problems.
- Helps us understand when a cat is actively fearful or anxious.
- Helps us understand how to prevent fear and unruly behavior.
- Helps us learn how to train the behaviors that we want.



NEONATE PERIOD: From birth to 3 weeks. Kittens have no fear yet because they cannot see or hear, they can only feel. They are only concerned with finding food and warmth. Kittens recognize and bond to parents and siblings. During this period, kittens may startle easily but they recover quickly.

AMBULATORY/SOCIALIZATION PERIOD: From 3 to 12 weeks of age. Kitten's eyes and ears have opened and they are beginning to move around. Now they can hear and see things and can start bonding with the animals around them and their environment. May startle easily, but they recover quickly. Be curious about new things and bond with the animals around you. After this period is over, fear of new things becomes the norm and it becomes harder to recover.



FEAR PERIOD: As movement improves, curiosity increases. However, curiosity may lead to being curious of things that may harm them, such as predators, so fear develops to keep them safe from danger. Default setting becomes "be afraid of things." This period continues throughout the rest of their life. This is why animals do not approach you in the wild to be your friend.



Consequences of Poor Socialization:

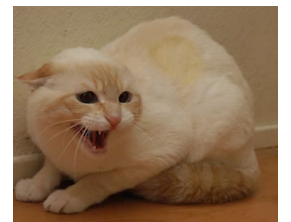
- Fear of new people, other pets, new environments, fear of handling. *Problematic if you move, have friends over, have children, cat runs away, get 2nd cat, etc.*
- Fear can lead to Hiding (flight or freeze response), Aggression (fight response), and/or Stress (potty outside the litterbox).

Recognizing Fear in Cats

Learning how to recognize fear is important because we don't want to cause fear during socialization. If kitty gets scared and has nowhere to flee to, they will hide or freeze instead.

Hiding Phase: The beginning of fear, going over threshold.

1. FREEZE: decreased movement; if eating, will stop.
2. AVERTING GAZE
3. TRYING TO LOOK SMALL: tucks in tail and feet.
4. LEANING INTO WALL: tries to look as small as possible.
5. EARS GO BACK OR TO THE SIDE
6. EYES DILATE
7. TAIL PUFFS UP: called Piloerection.



The Transition from Fear to Brewing Aggression

1. TAIL SWISHING: a wagging tail does NOT mean happy!
2. GROWLING
3. HISSING
4. SWATTING
5. BITING

Signs of Improvement: returning under threshold

1. Leans into petting
2. Eating when hungry
3. Relaxed body posture (confident kitty poses- tail up, back arched- see below)

More subtle signs of stress/anxiety

1. Hair loss
2. Back is lowered and concave (photo 1) vs. arched and confident (photo 2).
3. Increased vocalization



CAT TRAINING 101

METHOD 1

Classical Counter Conditioning: training kitty to associate all potentially fearful situations with pleasant experiences. *Example: If we have a cat that hates its crate, we can feed it him the crate to associate the crate with something pleasant.*

Examples of Potentially Scary Situations:

1. Traveling in the crate
2. Riding in the car
3. Handling & Procedures- *nail trims, being examined by the vet, taking a pill, receiving an injection, restraint.*
4. Harness and leash
5. Other animals or environments



What do all kitties like? **FOOD!** We can pair potentially scary things with food to build a positive association.

TIP: When exposing kitty to something new or potentially scary, always stay below the level where you get a negative response (threshold).

METHOD 2

Training Behaviors: are useful as a handy replacement for anything naughty that kitty might do. *Example: Sit, Come When Called, Targeting, Get Off the Counter, etc.*

Situations Where Training Can Be Helpful:

1. Meowing incessantly.
2. Jumping on you.
3. Scratching furniture.
4. Bothering other cats.

Step 1: Reward the behavior that you want.

Step 2: Remove rewards for unwanted behavior.



TRAINING TIPS:

- During handling, control the kitten's body weight so it always feels supported.
- Use proper timing.
- Train in a stepwise manner as needed. Slow and steady progress wins the race.
- Withhold food earlier in the day so kitten arrives motivated to eat.
- Good treat choices include: squeeze cheese, cream cheese, wet food in syringes or on a spoon/tongue depressor, dry treats. The stinkier the better.

PLAY TIME TIPS:

- If your kitten is too energetic or bothers the other kittens during play time, please leash kitty until he/she calms down to prevent learning bad or bullying behaviors.
- If kitty is timid, they do NOT have to play with the other kittens. Playing with toys or just sitting back in a hiding place and observing are OK too.



TRAINING EXERCISES Week 1

INTRODUCING THE CLICKER

When we are introducing the clicker, we are pairing the click with something valuable to your cat like a treat, food, praise or attention. Here's how to do it using a treat:

Step 1: Click the Clicker.

Step 2: Immediately offer your kitten a treat, within 1-2 seconds max.

Step 3: Wait for your kitten to look away, then click again.

Step 4: Repeat until your kitten looks for a treat when she hears the click.



For ease of training, we will use a target clicker to teach kitty new commands using Method 2, such as Sit, Come When Called, etc. Once kitten knows a command, you can begin weaning off of treats or food rewards.

LESSON 1: ENJOYING HANDLING

Uses: Method 1

If kitty is hungry but won't eat or starts to struggle, this indicates that the handling is too rough and you must be gentler. If kitty tolerates the handling position for a few seconds, switch to Operant Classical Conditioning, place in handling position and when they are calm for several seconds, release reward before they start struggling.

Step 1: Offer kitty treat.

Step 2: Hold kitty in new position for several seconds.

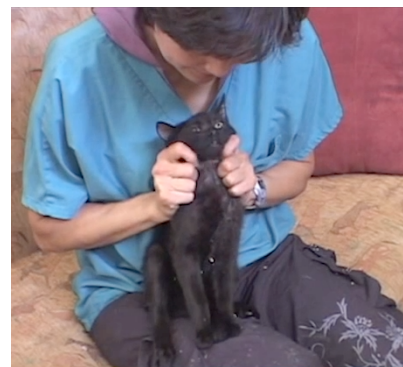
Step 3: End handling

Step 4: Remove treat.

Kitty learns: "Being held= something good! When I'm NOT being held, I get nothing. Being held is great!"

Handling examples:

- Holding in the air.
- Dangling from arms like how a child would.
- Holding like a baby.
- Scruffing the skin gently.



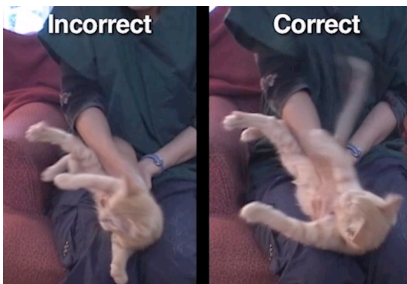
LESSON 2: LAY ON YOUR BACK

Uses: Method 1

Step 1: Be sure you can get kitty onto his back in one fluid motion.

Step 2: Offer treats while kitty is on his back.

Step 3: Gradually increase the length of time kitty has to wait before food is given so he learns to stay on his back.



TIP: Ensure that kitty doesn't get his foot underneath him, otherwise he will struggle and push off of you. Instead, place at edge of lap and roll onto the back over your thigh.

LESSON 3: ENJOYING THE CRATE

Uses: Method 1

Step 1: Begin feeding kitty in front of the crate for a day or two.

Step 2: Slowly move the food bowl further inside the crate until kitty is going inside with confidence.

NOTE: You will know that kitty is comfortable in the crate when they begin going inside to sleep.



TRAINING: SIT

Uses: Method 2

When is this useful? Teaching kitty to Sit instead of jumping all over you, begging for food or pestering guests is much more polite.

WITH Clicker

Step 1: Have treat ready.

Step 2: Wait for kitty to sit on its own OR lure into position by raising the treat 1cm over kitty's head. (note: If the treat is too high, kitty will stand up to try to reach treat, if too close, kitty will back up or turn).



Step 3: CLICK the moment kitty's bum touches the ground.

Step 4: Reward immediately.

TIP: Train the behavior first, then add in the cue word later. Only add the word "Sit" when you know kitten is going to sit.

WITHOUT Clicker

Step 1: Have treat ready

Step 2: Wait for kitty to sit on its own

Step 3: Reward immediately

TIP: Remove treat if kitten tries to paw, stand or meow for the treat, so you don't reward potentially negative behaviors.

TRAINING: TARGETING (touch the target with your nose)

Uses: Method 2

This command is useful for controlling kitty's movements, like when you need kitty to go from one location to another, to jump on or off of something, for training tricks, or for playing chase.



Step 1: Put a dab of wet cat food on the tip of the target.

Step 2: Put an inch from kitty's face.

Step 3: The instant kitty sniffs the target, click, remove target, and offer a treat.

Step 4: After several tries, remove the bait on the target.

TIP: Have target out of view and present it in a distinct manner. After the click, remove the target from view so kitty can focus on the reward.

TIP: Resist the urge to bring the target closer to kitty if they do not approach the target, otherwise kitty will teach you to bring the target to them.



HOMEWORK

Practice each lesson and training cue every day, for 15 minutes per day.

LESSON 1: ACCEPTING NAIL TRIMS

Pre-requisite: Lay On Your Back

Uses: Method 1

NOTE: You want kitty's attention on the food the entire time. You want kitty to understand that handling= treats, no handling= NO treats.

Step 1: Begin giving treat, touch kitty's foot, then stop touching, then remove treat.

Step 2: Begin giving treat, tap kitty's nails with the nail clippers, remove clippers, remove treat.

Step 3: Begin giving treat, place the clippers over the nail, remove clippers, remove treat.

Step 4: Begin giving treat, clip the nail, remove clippers, remove the treat.

Step 5: Repeat for all nails.

Weaning off Treats

Only attempt to do this after kitty has already been trained to tolerate nail trims well, over time. To wean off treats, just do one nail at a time, giving a treat after each nail. Next time, increase to two nails per treat. Then, three nails per treat, and so on and so forth until you can do an entire paw, the front paws, and all paws before giving a treat.



LESSON 2: WEARING A HARNESS

Uses: Method 1 and Method 2

Step 1: Hold harness up to kitten, hold food on the other side of the neck hole so kitty learns its OK to put its head through the harness. Continue doing this until kitten pushes its head through eagerly.

Step 2: Allow kitty to wear the harness loosely while supervised.

Step 3: Once kitty is comfortable moving with the harness on, fit it so that kitty cannot get out of it and continue letting kitty wear it around while supervised.



Step 4: When kitty is walking comfortably with the harness fitted properly, attach the leash and begin letting them drag the leash around while supervised. DO NOT leave harness and leash attached without supervision, as this can result in injury.

TIP: When taking kitty on field trips, pick an environment where you have the most control. Try to avoid areas where dogs may come up to and scare or harm kitty, areas where they are less likely to be surprised or startled etc.

TIP: DO NOT pick up kitty when he/she is scared, because kitty may re-direct onto you and scratch or bite you.



TRAINING: COME WHEN CALLED

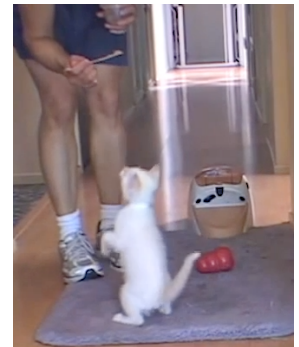
Uses: Method 2

Does kitty come running when canned food is opened? Oh definitely! So we already know that cats CAN come reliably, so we can add the word "Come" when we know kitty will definitely come running.

Step 1: Call or make a distinct sound when you KNOW that kitty will come running.

Step 2: When kitty reaches you, wait for a Sit and treat.

If you practice this a lot, you will be able to call kitty away when you know that kitty will get into trouble or if kitty is getting into trouble from far away. Also useful if kitty gets outside, you can't find kitty, you need to take kitty to the vet, to prevent kitty from running through the door, etc.



TRAINING: BATH TIME

Uses: Method 1 and Method 2

To teach kitty to enjoy bath time, we will need to work very slowly and over a long period of time. Keep ALL bath time experiences positive and below threshold. Keep these "swim lessons" short, ending them before kitty stops having fun and wants to get away, which may mean that sessions only last for a minute or two. This is absolutely okay!



Step 1: Encourage kitty to jump into the bath tub or sink on its own by putting food or toys inside. Click and treat while kitty is in the tub.

Step 2: Treat or play the entire time kitty is in the tub (a few seconds).

Step 3: Pick up and remove kitty from the tub and remove the treat.

Step 4: Repeat, slowly increasing the length of time kitty spends in the tub. Kitty should learn that being IN the tub = AWESOME things happen.

After 1-2 weeks of tub play time, we can begin incorporating water.

Step 1: Place a deep pan (a clean, open litter box works best) or a tall bucket inside the tub and place a damp towel in the bottom of the pan and repeat the first steps of Swim Lessons (1 week). Day by day, increase the dampness of the towel.

Step 2: Place a soaking wet towel in the bottom of the pan and fill pan with 1cm of water.

Step 3: When you are ready to bathe with shampoo, fill one bucket with dilute, soapy water and gently lower the kitty into the bucket. When you are ready to rinse, move kitty into a second bucket with clean water and rinse thoroughly.



TIP: Avoid showers or shower heads with spray settings or dripping water, as these may startle kitty and cause a negative association with getting wet.



TRAINING EXERCISES Week 3

LESSON 1: ENJOYING TAKING PILLS

Uses: Method 1, De-sensitization and Classical Counter Conditioning

Pre-requisite: Sit

Step 1: First, practice holding the cat's head and offering tuna. Keep the head level at first. Offer the treat before the kitten has a chance to struggle. Release the head.

Step 2: Hold the head then open their mouth to deposit the treat. Control the kitten's head until you close the mouth.

Step 3: Use a pill gun, wet cat food or tuna and place it into the cat's mouth.



LESSON 2: ENJOYING SYRINGES

Uses: Method 1

Feed kitten canned cat food out of a syringe. That way when kitty sees a syringe coming towards them, they will not be afraid of it.

LESSON 3: ACCEPTING INJECTIONS

Pre-requisite: Skin handling

Uses: Method 1

Step 1: Offer treat, grab skin/scruff for a few seconds, release skin, remove treat.

Step 2: Offer treat, grab and shake skin, release skin, remove treat.

Step 3: Offer treat, grab skin a little more, release, remove treat.

Step 4: Offer treat, grab and shake skin, poke skin with a CAPPED needle, release skin, remove treat.

Step 5: Pair food with each injection when kitty goes to the VET for shots.

TIP: Cat should be focusing only on the food.



TRAINING: STAY

Uses: Method 2

Step 1: Start in a quiet area with your kitten. Cue for a Sit and click. DO NOT give your kitten the treat yet.

Step 2: Move the treat to between your thumb and the palm of your hand, then hold your palm up as if you are signaling someone to "STOP."

Step 3: Wait for 1 second, then click and treat. Continue increasing the length of time your kitten has to Stay before rewarding.

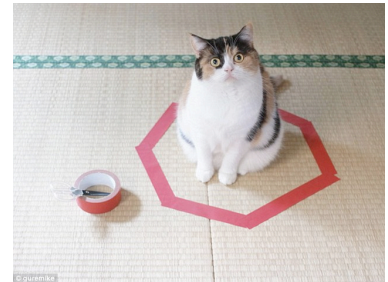
Step 4: After your kitten is holding the stay, we can begin working on distance. Start by cueing the Sit and Stay, then take one step away, immediately returning to your kitten. If your kitten stayed in position and did not get up or inch forward, click and give them the treat.

Step 5: Repeat, this time taking two steps away. Return, click and reward. Continue increasing your distance, always clicking and rewarding upon your return.

Step 5: After your kitten is Staying reliably, you can start adding the verbal command "Stay" as you put your hand up. DO NOT repeat the command.

TIP: When you are done practicing Stay, release your kitten by saying "Okay!" and encouraging them to get up and move around. If kitten is inclined to get up, try practicing with Kitten on a chair or ledge.

PRO TIP: Gradually increase the distractions that your kitten must Stay through and by practicing in increasingly difficult locations!



TRAINING: WALKING ON A LEASH

Uses: Method 2, and wet food in a syringe.

Step 1: In a happy tone of voice, tell your Kitten "Let's Go!" and take a step forward, luring your kitten to move with you by holding a treat in front of their nose. When your kitten begins to move forward, click and treat.

Step 2: Now take two steps forward, luring your kitten to walk with you. When your kitten begins walking, click and treat.

Step 3: Continue taking steps until your kitten is walking with you reliably.

NOTE: You should not be holding your left arm up causing tension on the leash.



TRAINING EXERCISES

Week 4

TRAINING: MEETING OTHER ANIMALS

Uses: Method 1

Use well-behaved dogs and other friendly animals only. Adult cats should be relaxed, calm and friendly and should not try to swat or pounce on kitty.

Step 1: Have dog do a down-stay.

Step 2: Allow kitty to approach and investigate. Keep all interactions positive, short and sweet.



TRAINING: NEW ENVIRONMENTS

Pre-requisite: Wearing a Harness and Walking on a Leash.

Uses: Method 1

Step 1: Bring kitty to a new place that is quiet, calm, and free of anything that may startle them. We want to build only positive experiences.

Step 2: Check that kitty's harness is fitted properly so that they do not slip out should an unexpected noise occur.

Step 3: Allow kitty to explore. Talk softly to your kitty, making sure to observe for signs of stress or approaching threshold.

Step 4: End on a positive note before kitty begins to stress out. This may be after only a few minutes, or twenty, the length of time does not matter, just that they are having a good time.

TIP: Bring your kitty's favorite toy to play with and treats!

PRO TIP: Start socializing kitty in environments with minimal distractions, then gradually increase the distractions and vary the environments until kitty is happy anywhere they go!



RESOLVING COMMON BEHAVIOR PROBLEM BEHAVIORS

TEACHING: QUIET (Enough meowing already!)

Step 1: Wait for an instant of quiet (watch their mouth to know when they are about to meow).

Step 2: IMMEDIATELY click and treat.

Step 3: Wait for kitty to finish his treat, then begin to count.

Step 4: After 1 second of quiet, click and treat.

Step 5: Repeat, slowly increasing the length of time that kitty has to be quiet before getting a treat.

Step 6: Vary the lengths of time to prevent patterns from forming (ex. meowing exactly 3 times before quieting down, Every. Single. Time.) Instead, ask for quiet for 1 second, then 5 seconds, then 3 seconds, then 10, then 4, etc.



TEACHING: SIT POLITELY (Off the computer, Stop pawing me)

Step 1: Remove the reward for pawing -- letting kitty touch you, petting, talking to kitty, etc. Do this by removing the body part that kitty is trying to touch. Ex. Kitty pawing arm, so move arm away.

Step 2: Wait for kitty to sit, then reward with attention.

Step 3: REMOVE attention if kitty starts the bad behavior again.

TIP: Only pet in short durations, or kitty learns to bat when you stop.



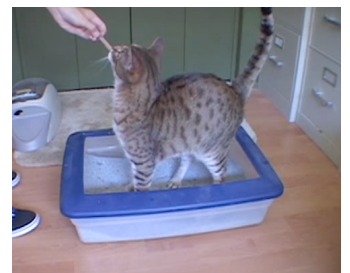
TEACHING: GO TO YOUR LITTER BOX

Step 1: Remove the lid of your kitty's litter box, if covered.

Step 2: Using your target stick, lure kitty into the box. Click when kitty steps inside.

Step 3: Reward kitty for stepping in the box.

Step 4: Repeat until kitty is reliably stepping into the litter box.



TIP: This exercise is most commonly used to build a positive association between kitty and the litter box if they have stopping using it. Often, kitties will start having potty accidents outside of the litter box if they are not feeling well, so you should consult your veterinarian first if your kitty begins having accidents out of the blue.



Socializing Your Kitten Week 4

Socialization is the process of getting your kitten used to the experiences they are likely to encounter during their life in our human world. Proper socialization is crucial to your kitten's future emotional health. By exposing them frequently to a variety of people, animals, places and situations, you will teach them how to handle new experiences calmly and to view the world as a fun, enjoyable place.

1. Safety First: Make sure that any other animals that your kitten encounters are friendly and well socialized. Taking your kitten to a park, to your friend's houses, and pet stores are a fun a safe way to begin the socialization process.



2. Take It Slowly: let your kitten set the pace during meet-and-greets; if you try to push your kitten too quickly, you might set them up for a bad or even traumatic experience. Don't force your kitten to make contact with a person or animal if he looks nervous, and don't be pushed into letting your kitten interact with someone who insists "it's OK, all cats love me!" Allow your kitten to walk away from situations that make them uncomfortable. To build positive associations, it can be helpful to bring extra special treats with you during outings that your kitten only receives from strangers, such as small pieces of cheese or chicken.

3. Keep It Fresh: Going to new places is a crucial part of the socialization process, but don't forget about sights, sounds, smells and textures. For example, if your floors are carpeted, try bringing your kitten to a location that has slick floors, and help them get comfortable with them. If your house lacks stairs, bring your kitten to a home that has some, and help them learn to use them. Let your kitten smell new things too, like bags of tea, herbs, blankets from friend's houses who have pets, potting soil, metal, wood, etc. Let them hear the sound of a baby crying, car horns blaring, fireworks going off, and other novel sounds by starting at a low volume, then increasing it little by little each day. All these experiences will help your kitten learn that the world is an interesting place and there is nothing to be afraid of.

4. Have Fun: Socialization and basic training are muscles that need to be flexed throughout your kitten's entire life. Practice your training exercises in each new place you visit, and feel free to use lots of treats and praise to encourage your kitten to investigate new things they may be hesitant about. This will show them "hey, this scary thing isn't so bad after all!"

5. Sometimes, Less is More: Sometimes, when socializing your kitten, there can be too much of a good thing. If your kitten is exhausted and moody, it's best to call it a day. When meeting new animals, especially those with unknown temperaments, it is best to keep interactions short to "keep them wanting more."

