

A group of diverse kittens, including orange tabbies, black cats, and grey tabbies, are looking directly at the camera with large, curious eyes. They are in a blurred indoor setting, possibly a shelter or office, with people in the background.

Foster Cat Manual

Humane Society Elkhart County
HSECFosters@elkharthumanesociety.org

Getting Started

Bringing Your New Foster Cat Home

Getting Started Transitions can be difficult for all involved -- you, your family, your pets, and most of all, for the new cat you are bringing home. Shelters are stressful, overstimulating environments that can cause cats to act out in ways they might not normally act. Even if they are coming from another foster home, it's important to keep in mind that your new pet needs time to adjust to living in your home.

Common Behaviors During Transitions:

Fear and Irritability: Cats are sensitive and it is common for them to be overwhelmed in new situations. To help your foster cat adjust to it's new space we encourage you to keep them confined to one room for the first 3-7 days, shy cats may need a longer adjustment period. By restricting the amount of "new" your cat will settle in faster and have an easier time with the transition.

Your new cat may also spend the first few days hiding, especially if they are already prone to shyness. Providing a space with appropriate hiding places will help ease kitty into comfort and confidence. Appropriate hiding spaces can be covered cat beds, cat towers, and cardboard boxes

Upper Respiratory Infections: Another reason we recommend giving cats a few days to settle in in a quiet place is that a stressed out cat can make themselves sick. Symptoms of an upper respiratory infection can be discharge from the eyes and/or nose and sneezing. If you notice these symptoms please notify HSEC.

Not Eating: It's not uncommon for a cat in a new space to not eat for a day or two - so long as they continue to drink and use the litter box as normal this isn't a huge concern. If this behavior lasts more than a few days please alert HSEC

Litterbox Issues: Another common behavior for new kitties is pottying outside of their litterbox. Make sure that they know where their litterbox is and it is near where they are hanging out for those first few days. If they have to pass by an established pet's regular spot they may be too nervous to make it to the box and find somewhere else to eliminate



Shy and fearful cats

At first a fearful cat should be confined to a small, quiet room with some hiding spots. Safe hiding spots can be boxes, pet carriers, cat trees, or blankets. Place food, water and the litter box within easy reach.

Continue to keep your cat confined until they feel comfortable and are showing signs of wanting to explore more of their surroundings. Once your cat wants to explore the rest of the house, make sure they always have the ability to return to their safe space at any time.

When interacting with a fearful or shy cat, it is best to sit quietly nearby and let them investigate you on their own terms. Never startle your cat and avoid anything noisy in the house during the introduction period. Talk softly and move slowly around your cat. Avoid staring at your cat or approaching them directly because this can seem threatening to a cat. Instead, try getting down to your cat's level by kneeling or sitting on the floor.



Never attempt to pull your cat from their hiding place or force them to be held. This will increase your cat's fearfulness and may even result in bites or scratches. When your cat is ready, they will approach you.

In addition, provide a variety of toys to see which ones they prefer. Puzzle toys that dispense treats can also engage their curiosity and provide mental stimulation. Be patient and gentle during playtime, allowing your cat to set the pace.

Positive reinforcement, like treats or gentle praise, can further encourage your cat to explore and interact. Over time, with consistent care and understanding, your shy or fearful cat will likely grow more confident and form a strong bond with you.

Medical Fosters

Creating a comfortable and nurturing space is crucial. Consider setting up a cozy area with soft bedding, toys, and scratching posts where your foster cat can relax and feel safe. Remember, your patience and dedication truly make a difference, helping these cats heal and eventually thrive in their new homes.



You play an important role in monitoring their progress, ensuring they follow their treatment plans, and providing them with the love and attention they need to regain their strength and confidence. By offering your homes and hearts, you help pave the way for a full recovery helping them find their forever homes.



Additionally, some cats might need special diets or feeding schedules to aid in their recovery. Don't worry; we are here to support you every step of the way. You'll receive detailed instructions and can always reach out to our team with questions or concerns.

Mom and Babies

Kitten food is higher in protein and fat, which the mama will need as she is nursing her young. Be sure to provide large amounts of food at least three times a day, offering both wet and dry kitten food.

Provide a shallow dish of fresh water. Please never put a deep dish of water into a space with neonatal kittens, as this can be a drowning hazard. Provide water in a low, shallow dish.

Make sure to socialize kittens and mom cat daily as this interaction is crucial for their development and well-being. Gently handle the kittens to help them become accustomed to human touch. Spend time talking softly to both the mom and her babies to build trust and create a sense of security in their environment.

Additionally, provide a clean, quiet, and comfortable space for the mom and her kittens. Make sure the area is free from loud noises and disturbances, ensuring that the family feels safe and at ease. This will help reduce stress for the mom, allowing her to care for her kittens effectively.

Make sure that the first few weeks the babies can't wander too far from mom as they cannot maintain their own body temperature. You can use a simple cardboard box or a small litter pan.



Regularly check on the health of the kittens and the mother. Look for any signs of illness or distress, such as lack of appetite, lethargy, or respiratory issues, and contact HSEC. Early intervention can prevent minor issues from becoming serious problems.



How to help kittens thrive with mamma cat

