

Bringing Your Kitten Home

Congratulations on adopting your new kitten! Let's give your kitten every opportunity for success in her new home. As tempting as it might be, do not give your kitten the run of the house. Your house is just too big and all that space will be stressful for her.

Cat Behavior Information

Classes: Marin Humane offers Cat Workshops for first-time and experienced cat guardians for **free!** Sign up on our website at marinhumane.org/catclasses

Handouts: Check out our website for handouts on a variety of cat behavior topics and training:

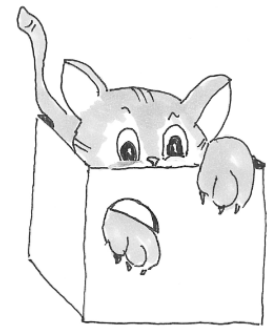


Advice Line: Have a question about your kitten's behavior? Call 415.506.6284 to speak to our Feline Behavior Team.

The Safe Room

Confine your kitten to a small "safe room" when you bring her home, such as a bathroom, extra bedroom, or den. The best safe room for a very shy kitten would likely be a bathroom that isn't used (small enough that you can easily reach her). The ideal safe haven is quiet and easy to close off with a door. This new safe place allows your kitten to make a gradual transition to her new home. If you can, block off hiding spaces that you cannot control (closets, below dressers, or under beds), but **do** provide a controlled hidey spot (see below). Other animals should not be allowed in the safe room.

Visit your kitten often to talk to her, give her slow blinks, feed her, give her treats, and play with her. She will need to stay here with the door closed until she is completely comfortable with you and her new room, which could take days or weeks. When she is comfortable, you can gradually let her explore the rest of the house, but always make sure she has access to retreat to her safe room. Also, to help keep her safe, close windows and toilet lids, store plants out of reach, keep hair ties and small objects stored away, tie up window blind strings, secure or cover electrical cords, and check washing machines and dryers before closing them.



What items should be in the "safe room"?

- Play-alone toys (jingle balls, soft mice, Kickaroos)
- Scratching post or horizontal cardboard scratcher
- Wet food 2-3 times a day, including morning and evening
- Water bowl—stainless steel or ceramic are best!
- Food bowl with dry kitten food (free feed; use 2 bowls if you adopted 2 kittens)
 - It's best to wait until your kitten has acclimated to her new home before transitioning her to a new food. Then transition her slowly by mixing the current and new foods over the course of a week.
- Litterbox with litter (placed as far away from the food, water, and bed as possible)
- Cat bed and a **controlled hidey spot**: Cubby bed, hidey box, cat carrier, or chair with a towel draped on it
- Interactive toys (fleece wand, Cat Catcher wand) should be stored away unless you are actively playing

Time, patience, predictability, and routine are top of the list in helping your new kitten adjust to her new home. Resist the urge to give her too much room too soon.

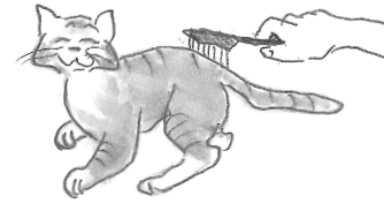
1. When you bring your kitten home, take her to the safe room and set the carrier on the floor.



2. Open the carrier and let her decide if she wants to come out to explore. She may come bounding out or it may take a few hours. If you adopted a very shy kitten, see our [Shy Kittens](#) handout.
3. Visit often for feeding, litterbox cleaning, and playing, but let your kitten decide the pace of the interactions. Limit the number of visitors who visit at once, so she isn't overwhelmed. Teach children to interact slowly and gently with quiet voices and show them how to play using the wand toy.
4. When she is comfortable (coming up to greet you, eating, and using the litter box), you can gradually let her explore the rest of the house one room at a time (close off other rooms). For a confident kitten, this may be after only a couple of days. Always let her retreat to her safe room whenever she needs to. Remember, shy kittens may need to be in their safe room for several weeks before they are ready for more space. If you have other pets, sequester them in another part of the house while your new kitten explores. For tips on introducing your kitten to your resident pets, please see our handouts [Successful Cat to Cat Introductions](#) and [Cats & Dogs – Living Happily Ever After](#).
5. Until she is more mature, confine your kitten to the safe room whenever you can't supervise.

Bonding Time:

You are the “giver of all good things!” Begin by leaving dry food out for your kitten. At least twice a day, give your kitten wet food. Stay in the safe room with her while she eats the wet food and she will soon associate you with the yummy food. Use talking, food, treats, playtime, and grooming (if she likes brushing) to bond with your kitten. Also keep in mind the best time for petting and grooming is when your kitten is all tuckered out after playtime. She will enjoy grooming much more when she is not trying to chase down a jingle ball or bunny kick a Kickaroo.



Play wand toy! She is a youngster with loads of energy! If you don't meet her activity needs, she will find things to do herself (like climb the curtains). There are a variety of toys and puzzles available to engage your kitten, but your kitten may find homemade toys of cardboard boxes, paper bags with handles removed, and treats hidden in toilet paper rolls just as interesting. However, nothing can replace interactive wand toy play with you! Your kitten may love the feather wand, Cat Dancer, Cat Catcher, ribbon wand, and Kickaroos. Always keep safety in mind. Choose kitten-safe toys and put wand toys away before leaving the room. A kitten can get a wand toy wrapped around her neck or other body part. Consider a second kitten to give your kitten a playmate and keep her entertained. Please see our handout [Two Kittens Are Better Than One!](#) and if your kitten is very mouthy when playing, please see our handout [Raising Well Behaved Kittens](#).

Create a Routine

Cats love routine and are creatures of habit. They are crepuscular (most active at dawn and dusk) and we can use their love of routine to our advantage. Shape good habits from the start and be consistent!

- Feed your kitten at the same times every day.
- Play with her **at least** 3 times a day 15 minutes each (cats are most active in the morning and evening).
- Talk to, pet, and groom your kitten every day, but consider how much interaction she actually enjoys.
- If your kitten is keeping you up at night, play with her for 30 minutes before you go to bed to tire her out (in addition to her other play sessions). Then give part of the evening meal after playtime. Also, establish special locations for play—not the bedroom! See our [Early Morning Feline Antics](#) handout.
- To prevent door-darting, set up a hello/goodbye station **AWAY** from the door. Make this happy place (perhaps a cat tree) where all departures and greetings take place. Leave treats there when you leave. Then when you get home, walk directly to the cat tree, leave more treats, and pet your kitten **there**.

Kitten Proofing Your Home

- Keep plastic bags in drawers away from your kitten.
- Keep strings, dental floss, yarn, thread, hair ties, rubber bands, tinsel, electrical wires, cords, necklaces, and anything similar out of your kitten's reach.
- Manage household hazards: Close windows and doors to the outside. Are your screens secure? Supervise children and teach them to be careful opening/closing doors when they leave the house.
- Plants: Many plants (especially bulb plants like lilies, onion, and garlic) are poisonous to cats.
- Poisons and Chemical Rub-Off: Human medication (especially aspirin, acetaminophen, and NSAIDS) are toxic to cats. Other medications, insecticides, rodenticides, paints, and chemicals can all poison your kitten. Household cleaners that are ammonia or phenol based are particularly dangerous. Cats are fastidious groomers and will lick up any chemical residue on their fur or paws (including hand lotion).
- Toxic human foods include grapes, raisins, chocolate, onions, avocados, and alcohol.
- Block unsafe hiding places and access to places your kitten may get stuck—behind stoves, washers and dryers (always check inside before operating), refrigerators, even small holes in the wall. Kittens have been known to get into cupboards and the walls by squeezing through plumbing openings for pipes.

For a list of items toxic to your cat, visit:

www.aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control

Animal Poison Control Center: 888.426.4435

Litter Boxes

Do:

- Scoop the box every day, preferably 2 times a day. Keep the litter box immaculate!
- Empty the litter box and clean the entire box using mild (unscented) dish soap every 3-4 weeks.
- Use unscented clumping clay litter (or non-clumping for very young kittens).
- Remember: Big spaces need more boxes. Little kittens won't go far to potty.
- Have at least one litter box per cat and keep a box on each floor in two-story homes.
- Place the litter box in a quiet area and away from food/water bowls and kitty's sleeping areas.
- Make sure that when your kitten grows up, the box is at least 1.5 times the length of your cat (room to turn around, dig, and cover). Your kitten will outgrow her original kitten size litter box like a puppy outgrows his puppy collar. Also, cats tend to prefer uncovered boxes.

Don't:

- Do not use scented litter. It smells good to you, but smells bad to cats.
- Do not use a litter box liner or put the litter box near noisy appliances.
- Do not leave waste sitting in the litter box. Nobody likes a dirty bathroom!
- Do not place the box in a high traffic, noisy area or an area that is hard for your kitten to access.
- Do not use strong chemicals or disinfectants to clean the box.

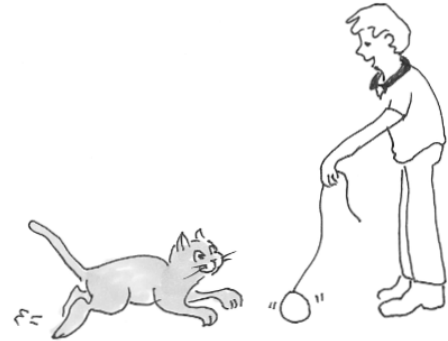
Have Litter Box Issues? Call the Cat Behavior Advice Line at 415.506.6284 or email catbehavior@marinhumane.org

Kitten Playtime!

- Play is using your kitten's natural prey drive in appropriate ways. Get an assortment of "prey" toys to vary the game—toys that look like or mimic movements of rodents, birds, and insects. Mimic various prey behavior with wand toys by swinging them up in the air, dragging them on the floor, or hiding them. Give your kitten time to **engage** her mind and **plan** her attack rather than just swat at the wand.



- Never use your hands to play or encourage your kitten to play bite your fingers. **Preempt** your kitten's play biting with a Kickaroo. Use a wand toy or throw balls across the room away from your body to direct your kitten to appropriate play **before** play biting happens.
- Make it fun! Allow your kitten to make satisfying "captures." If using a laser toy, provide a treat or food at the end of the game—it's frustrating for kitty to never actually catch her prey.
- End play by winding down to lower the energy level. You can end the play session with a treat to simulate a successful hunt.
- Put all interactive wand toys away between play sessions as they should be reserved for playtime with you. Leave out jingle balls and furry mice that are safe for solo play.



Environmental Enrichment & Training

Keep kittens indoors and provide lots of stimulation with environmental enrichment! **Environmental enrichment is a necessity!** Boxes, food and treat puzzles, cat shelving, wand toys, small toys, packaging paper, and ripple rugs all work your kitten's mind and body. Catios, clicker training, or adding a kitty buddy to the household can also increase stimulation. For more ideas on how to improve your kitty's quality of life, see our [Cats Just Want to Have Fun](#) handout or attend our [How to Train your Cat](#) workshop!

Kitten Socialization

- **Consistent, gentle handling:** Spend 2 or 3 brief sessions every day handling and petting your kitten. If she struggles, try pairing handling with a yummy treat.
- **Positive reinforcement:** Use treats or something else your kitten loves and gradually work toward gently petting her all over (except the tummy—often that's a no touch zone). Get her comfortable with touch for nail trims and vet visits.
- **Do not over pet:** If she becomes irritated with petting, she may resort to swatting, nipping, or bunny kicking. Keep sessions brief using positive reinforcement and stop the session on a high note of enjoyment rather than waiting for signs of distress.
- **Guest time:** Allow guests to interact with your kitten as long as they comply with the "rules." Give your guest a wand toy to play, but let your kitten decide whether or not to approach your guest and play.
- **Quality sleep:** Always allow your kitten uninterrupted sleepy time. Just like kids, their seemingly boundless energy requires recharging through sleep.

Kitty Behavior – Pro Tips!

- Reward and pay attention to behaviors you like.
- Redirect behaviors you don't like (scratching furniture, etc.) to appropriate objects (scratching posts).
- **Preempt** pouncing on your ankles with a wand toy or Kickaroo.
- Use management to avoid situations when your kitten might engage in a behavior you dislike. Set her up for success by restricting her access to the place, person, or object.
- Never use physical punishment. The kitten doesn't understand the correlation. She may see you as unpredictable and scary. Squirting your kitten with a water spray bottle may stop unwanted behaviors while you are in the room, but it does not prevent the behavior when you leave. A better method is to determine **WHY** your kitten is doing that particular behavior and mitigate the behavior. You can do this by **resolving her unmet needs** and redirecting, training, or managing the situation by limiting access.

- **Over-stimulation:** As your kitten grows, watch her body language to determine her tolerance level to petting. Cats give signals (annoyed meows, ears twitching/back, tail swishing, back rolls, looking back at your hand, etc.) to let you know that they have had enough petting. If you keep petting, they may resort to more obvious signals to tell you to stop—hissing, striking, or biting.

Veterinary Visits and Medical Issues

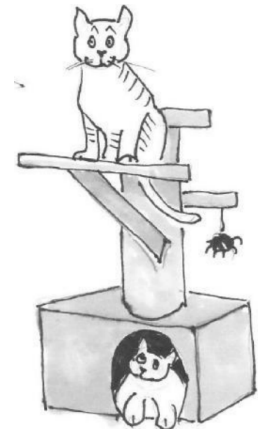
Your kitten may need additional vaccinations after adoption. Please consult your vet for annual checkups, vaccines, deworming, and flea control, or if you see any of these issues:

- Not eating, drinking, or using the litterbox regularly
- Diarrhea, vomiting, or losing weight
- Lethargic/stops playing or excessive vocalization
- Sneezing/eye discharge/nasal discharge
- Stops grooming or coat/skin looks unhealthy, or shaking her head/scratching
- Straining in the litterbox, urinating in small amounts, or blood in the urine

Microchip: Your kitten's microchip is under the skin between her shoulder blades and the number is being registered to you with the contact information you provided. Please notify Marin Humane and the microchip company if your contact information changes.

Multi-Cat Households and Cat to Cat Introductions

Slow introductions are especially important if there are other cats in your home—for both your kitten's safety and the acceptance of the kitten by your resident cat. Be aware of the size difference between your kitten and adult cats and supervise play at all times. Give your adult cat a break from the kitten if he gets tired or annoyed by the energy level of the kitten. The following are tips on cat introductions, but we strongly recommend reading our full handout [Successful Cat to Cat Introductions](#) on our website. Introductions should take place **after** your kitten has completely adjusted to her safe room. Please allow 2-4 weeks or more for this process and ensure your kitties are calm and relaxed with each step **before** moving to the next step. Moving too fast may result in a negative interaction that greatly increases the introduction time.



Scents and Changing Spaces: Your kitty has 900 times as many scent receptors as you do! Start a scent intro by switching some of their bedding or toys. Pair giving the scent item with treats, so both felines learn that good things happen around the other's scent. If you have multiple resident cats, start with the cat who will be the most open to a newcomer. Next, change spaces: sequester your resident cat in a room and let your new kitten explore the house. When the kitten returns to her room, close her in and let your resident cat explore the kitten's scent all over your house.

A Crack in the Door: Next, begin the physical introduction. **GO SLOWLY TO AVOID DISASTER!** Open the safe room door just a crack and secure it (for example with rubber door stoppers). Drop treats or give food to start making it a positive experience, but don't feed them their regular meals there (they should keep their normal feeding routine). You can also do wand toy play. This is easier with a person on each side of the door, so you may want to enlist a friend or family member. The focus here is not on the other cat, but on the good things (food or play!) happening in each other's presence. Over time, the kitties will associate the good things happening with the other feline (positive associations). When the kitties are comfortable with the cracked door, gradually open the door and use a baby gate to block the doorway. Keep the play sessions short, reward the kitties with a treat, and stop the play on a good note (before any negative interactions). If things are going well for some time, gradually increase the amount of time you play and eventually remove the baby gate. At

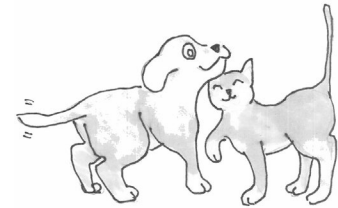


each step, watch for hissing, growling, flattened ears, hair on end, or other unhappy behaviors. Close the door immediately if that happens and go back to scent exchanges/changing spaces. Remember, this may take time.

Supervised Time Together: Now it's time for the kitties to spend some supervised time together without a barrier, but you must be vigilant. At the slightest indication of **potential** bullying, stalking, or hard-staring, distract the kitties with a toy or treats to prevent a negative interaction. This is crucial! You must be prepared to distract and redirect if needed. Continue play time and end on a good note with treats. Gradually extend the time of the visits. It may be a while before the cats can be unsupervised together, but it's worth it! Also make sure you have plenty of resources for both cats, including lots of food/water bowls in separate areas, litterboxes, scratching posts, cat trees, high places and cubbies to sleep in, and toys. You want the cats to feel that there is plenty for everyone. Also see our [Multiple Cat Households](#) handout.

Your Kitten and Your Dog

Again, **slow introductions are a must** and should be done after your kitten has adjusted to you and your home. Your kitten should be over 6 months old, confident, and easy-going. Without proper and controlled introductions, your kitten could very easily become injured. You want to avoid triggering the flight response in your cat and the predatory response in your dog. It may take months before you can safely leave your pets alone, depending on **your pets' temperaments** and **your degree of commitment to management and training**. Some dogs have a strong prey drive and just can't live with a cat. A dog should be well-trained and well-managed with a low prey drive. The dog should **not** be allowed in the kitten's safe room. If you haven't taken a basic dog training class, such as our Family Dog 1 or Small Dog 1 Training, we highly recommend it so you can understand and use the basic cues when introducing your pets.



- **The dog needs to learn NOT to chase the cat:** Be a keen observer and learn your dog's arousal signals.
 - **Control the dog with tie-downs/crates/leashes when the cat is around.** Close doors & use baby gates.
 - **Practice attention and redirect the dog if he stares at the cat.** This is the start of predatory behavior.
 - **Preparation:** Provide high places for your kitty in each room to get away from the dog (shelves, furniture, solid cat trees). It's best to have 2 ways up/down so she doesn't get trapped in one place.
 - **Start with Scents:** Pet the dog and kitty with socks and let the other sniff it. Repeatedly pair this with treats to create a positive association with the smell. Watch the kitten explore the house while the dog is on a walk. When she is back in her safe room, let the dog smell her scent all over the house.
 - **The Safe Room Door:** With the door cracked and secured by door stoppers, slowly walk your dog on a leash by the doorway several times each day. Praise and treat him (and the kitten) for calm behavior. The focus is not on the other animal, but on the good things that are happening in the other animal's presence. Repeat this with the door gradually opening, but blocked by a baby gate. This is best done with two people—one person working with the dog and the other working with the kitten. At each step, watch for hissing, growling, flattened ears, hair on end, or other unhappy behavior from your kitten. Close the door immediately if that happens and go back to scent exchanges. Remember, this may take time. **Let your kitten set the pace of the intro!**
- **For the next step,** please read our handout [Cats & Dogs – Living Happily Ever After](#) on our website at marinhumane.org/cathandouts/.

Feline Resources: We are here to help! Marin Humane's Behavior & Training Department teaches [cat workshops](#). Sign up on our Cat Behavior page at MarinHumane.org/catclasses. We also have Cat Behavior Consultants for private training or [consultations](#) (phone, online or in-home). Call us at 415.506.6284 or email CatBehavior@MarinHumane.org. View our full list of handouts at MarinHumane.org/cathandouts/.