

Kitten Socialization

- Socialization is the learning process through which kittens become accustomed to being near various people, animals, and environments.
- Proper socialization can help eliminate behavior problems in the future and create a better bond between the pet and the family.
- When introducing kittens to new people, pets, or environments, provide praise or treats so the kitten associates a positive experience with each new stimulus.
- Do not introduce your kitten to other cats until he or she has been properly vaccinated; consult your veterinarian to determine when your kitten is ready to be around other cats.

What Is Kitten Socialization?

Socialization is the learning process through which a kitten becomes accustomed to being near various people, animals, and environments. By exposing kittens to different stimuli in a positive or neutral way, before they can develop a fear of these things, owners can reduce the likelihood of behavior problems in the future and help build a stronger bond between pets and the rest of the family. The critical time to socialize a kitten is during the first 3 to 4 months of its life.

Why Is Kitten Socialization Important?

Unfortunately, behavior problems remain the top reason that pets are relinquished to animal shelters. Proper socialization will help make kittens more tolerant of changes in their environment and help prevent common behavior problems in the future.

Why Should I Consider Kitten Kindergarten?

Attending a kitten training class led by a training specialist gives your kitten an opportunity for socialization with other kittens and with children and adults. Kitten kindergarten classes are offered by some veterinary clinics and pet supply stores.

Reputable training facilities will require that your kitten is vaccinated and dewormed before attending the course to ensure that kittens aren't exposed to diseases or parasites when their immune system is still developing. Vaccinations should be given at least 10 to 14 days before the class. Before attending class, kittens should test negative for feline leukemia virus (FeLV) and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV). Kittens should also be free of potentially contagious diseases such as upper respiratory infections and ringworm. Check with the training facility about their specific requirements. Also, consult your veterinarian to determine when your kitten is ready for class.

How Else Can I Socialize My Kitten?

The goal of socialization is to expose your kitten to different people, animals, environments, and stimuli in a safe manner, without overwhelming your pet.

Do not introduce your kitten to other cats until he or she has been properly vaccinated; consult your veterinarian to determine when your kitten is ready to be around other cats.

Start by familiarizing your kitten with your touch. Whenever possible, you should handle your kitten's paws, ears, mouth, and body. Once your kitten is comfortable with being handled, it will be easier for you to trim nails, brush teeth, clean ears, and give medications.

Next, introduce your kitten to people of different ages, sexes, heights, and races. If your kitten tolerates it, allow other people to touch his or her paws, ears, mouth, and body. This will help your kitten be more comfortable with being handled by others at the veterinary clinic or grooming facility.

It's also important for your kitten to learn to be comfortable around other animals. Kitten kindergarten

Behavior and Training

is a safe place to expose your pet to other kittens, because vaccination is usually required for all participants. In general, you should avoid exposing your kitten to other cats until he or she has been properly vaccinated. Exposing your kitten to an infectious disease, such as panleukopenia (feline distemper), when his or her immune system is still developing can have devastating results.

Kittenhood is also a great time to familiarize your kitten with all the sights and sounds of his or her world, from riding in a car to being around a vacuum cleaner. Once your kitten has been properly vaccinated, you can take your kitten to places such as the grooming or boarding facility to expose him or her to different

sights, sounds, and smells. Each time you introduce your pet to a new stimulus, make sure to provide positive reinforcement in the form of praise, petting, or treats so that your pet associates a positive experience with new people, pets, or environments.

If your kitten will be indoor only, with limited exposure to other pets or environments, you may want to limit the number of pets and environments your kitten interacts with during the socialization period to minimize potential exposures to infectious diseases. Always discuss your socialization plans with your veterinarian before exposing your kitten to other pets and environments.