



What to do if you find kittens

Kittens are an Epidemic!

Between the months of March and September, every shelter in the area is overrun with kittens, both orphaned litters and those with a mother. Many of these litters are either strays or ferals. Neither one has a legal owner, but this is the difference between a stray cat and a feral cat:

1. A stray cat is domesticated and accustomed to people.
2. A feral cat has lived in the wild and has been self-sufficient with little to no contact with people.

Stray cats can often be socialized and then adopted. Feral cats often cannot be easily socialized and adopted. Kittens can often be socialized and adopted even if born to feral cats.

KITTENS WITH A MOTHER CAT

- Resist your instinct to scoop up abandoned kittens right away. It may seem counterintuitive, but the best thing to do for the kittens is not to move them.
- Keep an eye on them and see if a mother cat comes for them. Feral mom cats move their kittens frequently and she might be in the middle of changing location and on her way back to these seemingly abandoned kittens. If you move the kittens, she won't be able to find them and continue to care for them when she returns for them.
- If there is a mother cat, is she nursing them and caring for them? **It's best to leave them with mom until they're weaned.** Kittens receive important antibodies from their mom's milk. Kittens begin to nibble at wet food at age 4 weeks and are fully capable of eating on their own at 6 weeks. (*Hint for determining the age: if they are nursing and their eyes haven't opened yet, they are under 2 weeks*).

Although ideally mom and the kittens could be trapped and live indoors in a safer environment—a garage or cage or bathroom until the kittens can eat on their own, trapping mom and all the unweaned kittens can be difficult, since she moves the kittens around so much. It would be easy to trap mom and then realize that her kittens aren't where you thought they were! The kittens would not only be lost, but also vulnerable, since if they are under 4 weeks, they cannot eat on their own, they either need to nurse or be bottle-fed.

If you see no visible health problems, go ahead and leave food out for the mom and just monitor her as she cares for her kittens until the babies are eating solid food and are 5-6 weeks old.

- Mom should be trapped and spayed *but not until her kittens are able to eat on their own*.
- To schedule a FREE spay for her, please visit our website for more details on the process at: www.austinhumanesociety.org/ferals
- If she is feral, she should be re-released where you found her after her spay recovery. An adult feral cat is not good candidate for adoption and made a pet. It's unlikely that she could ever be tamed.
- If surrendered to a municipal shelter, she would be at risk to be euthanized because she wouldn't be a safe pet to have in a home. If someone attempted to handle her, she might injure them.
- If she is friendly, you can contact our Receiving Dept. to schedule a time to surrender her for adoption. Please contact them at Receiving@AustinHumaneSociety.org or 646-7387 x104.

KITTENS WITHOUT A MOTHER CAT

- If there isn't a mother cat and the kittens are not yet eating solid food, they will need to be kept warm. If they are cold, DO NOT FEED until they have warmed up. Once they are warm, they will need to be bottle-fed every 2-3 hours.
- **DO NOT give them cow's milk** (this will make them sick). Instead, "Kitten Milk Replacement" (KMR) or "21st Century Milk Replacement" can be purchased at pet stores. Keep the powder refrigerated at all times. Throw out if it smells sour at any time. Kittens can get very sick if product is rancid or sour.
- Please contact your veterinarian or the AHS Foster Care Dept at 512-646-7387 x102 for more info on bottle-feeding kittens.
- After each feeding, kittens MUST be stimulated (rubbing their bottoms, underneath their tails, with a warm washcloth) to urinate and defecate, since they cannot do this on their own.
- More information on raising kittens is available at <http://www.alleycat.org/page.aspx?pid=907>

FOSTERING THE KITTENS

Fostering kittens is a very rewarding experience! If you can foster the kittens until they are 8 weeks old and weigh 2 lbs., the kittens can be placed into our adoption program. We will cover their medical care and vaccinations while under your care. You simply provide care, love, and toys! Please contact our Foster Care Coordinator at 646-7387 x102 or email FosterCare@AustinHumaneSociety.org

KITTEN SOCIALIZING 101

- When the kittens are eating solid food (at about 5-6 weeks and older), they should be trapped and socialized. They're young enough that they can be tamed and learn to trust people and become loving pets. After the age of 12 weeks (4 months), it's often too late to socialize, so it's very important to start handling them at an early age.
- To socialize, set them up in a small bathroom or cage. Separate littermates from each other so they focus on you and your interactions with them. The smaller the space, the better! Too much space will be overwhelming to them and they will hide in the hardest to reach, most out of the way place to prevent you from gaining access to them.
- If you're more comfortable wearing gloves at first to protect your hands from kitten claws when you pick them up, that's fine. The important thing is to approach and handle them with confidence.
- Wet food is your friend! Only offer them the good stuff when you're there to feed them by hand (without gloves). They'll soon learn to associate outstretched hands with delicious food— you'll be surprised at how effective this is. Chicken or turkey flavored baby food (with no onion powder in the ingredients; this is poisonous to cats) is also irresistible to kittens.
- Leave the radio or TV on for them, if possible, while you're gone for the day. Don't worry about time spent away from them. **Just being in a home and listening to domestic noises is still good socialization for them.** Even when you're not there to fuss over them, they're continuing to learn what it's like to live indoors as opposed to outdoors.
- When you can pick them up safely—scruffing is the best way to go at first—use the "kitten burrito." This is the technique of wrapping a kitten's body snugly in a towel (allow their head to peek out, though) and carry the kitten burrito around with you on your chest. Talk to the "kitten burrito," pet its head and even offer it more food off your fingers. Being wrapped in the towel will help the kitten feel safer and more secure while being handled by you, a strange and scary person.
- Play with the kittens with wands and cat dancers to encourage them to interact with the toys (and you, indirectly).

IF YOU CANNOT FOSTER THE KITTENS

If caring for the kittens and socializing them until they're old enough to go up for adoption isn't feasible for you, then please contact our Foster Care Coordinator at 646-7387 x102 or email FosterCare@AustinHumaneSociety.org