



Starting Your Kitten Off on the Right Paw

We have all been to a person's house where you would never know they had a cat if they hadn't told you. The point of this handout is to address proper cat socialization and potty training in hopes of making the life of this new addition as fulfilling as it can be for both owners and the pet.

Litter Boxes: Lets get the smelliest part of cat ownership out of the way first, litter boxes. Many people believe that all a cat needs is to be shown where to go and that the cat will just take care of the rest. Although cats are very quick about figuring out where to go there are a few things we can do to both enforce proper litter box usage and help avoid problems with using the litter box later in life. So, let's start at the beginning, what kind of litter box should you use? Almost anything can be used as a litter box from actual litter boxes to plastic storage containers. The important thing to know is that any litter box should be large enough for the cat to stand and turn around in comfortably. Please also keep in mind that when a kitten is small the litter box needs to be short enough for the kitten to get into. Cats tend to prefer litter boxes without hoods, this is because of their very strong sense of smell, hooded litter boxes tend to hold the smell in which may be more pleasant for us but not so much for the cat. Now, on to types of litter, studies show that most cats prefer a sandy unscented litter. If your cat is using another kind of litter with no problems then don't change. It is very important that whatever type of litter you decide to use stays constant throughout the cat's life. It is important not to change brands or scents cats are creatures of habit and if you find a litter they use well don't change it if it can be avoided.

Now that we have a litter box with litter in it on to the next important decision, where to put it. There should be one more litter box than there are cats in a household. This means for 2 cats there should be 3 litter boxes. There should also be at least 1 litter box on every floor of the home. The best thing to remember when finding a place to put the litter boxes are that they need to be both out of the way and easily accessible to the cat, bedrooms and bathrooms usually work pretty well. Litter boxes should be away from noisy areas of the home such as laundry rooms and garages. Cats prefer to be able to always see in 2 directions from their litter box, so shoving it in a corner between the wall and the toilet is not ideal. It is also important to have litter boxes spread throughout the home and not just lined up along the wall in one room. Also trying not to put a litter box right by the food and water dishes is important. Just like us cats don't really want to eat where they go to the bathroom.

Feeding: It is generally advised that cats should be fed free choice, by placing a measured amount of food in the food bowl daily. Food should be placed in bowl at

various times to prevent you cat from always believing 6am is food time. It is also important to realize that cats in general do not drink enough water. To help with this many cats enjoy a fountain water bowl to encourage more water intake. Do not place food and water dishes near a litter box if this can be avoided. Also , on another note if you feed your cat up on a counter this will reinforce to the cat that it is okay to get on counters. They do not know the difference between the counter in your laundry and your kitchen counter. You need to also keep in mind that feral cats in the wild will chase prey 30times per day and only catch it 10 times. Some cats enjoy being fed by having small piles of food hidden around the house to try to mimic this behavior.

Play and Enrichment: Many people don't believe that cats need play time as much as dogs, and although cats can become bored a little more easily than their canine counter parts, play time is also a very important part of their life. This is especially important for cats that will remain indoors only. Cats usually enjoy a rotating supply of toys. Good toys for cats include "fishing" type toys, feather toys, and any other type of toys that move either on their own or continue to move when batted by the cat. It is not a good idea to play with hands and fingers with kittens and cats. This can cause some aggression and fearfulness of people later on in the life of the cat. Other toys that are not recommended are string, yarn, rubber bands, Christmas tinsel, Easter grass, or milk rings. Cats should be played with on a daily basis to prevent obesity later on in life. Cats and kittens need places to perch, they need a variety of levels that they can get up on and look down into their "territory". Ideally a cat should have a perch in each room so that they can survey the entire room from above. Scheduled playtime and exercise is also very important. Cats should be encouraged to do some aerobic activity such as chasing a laser pointer or a toy on a daily basis, just be careful not to let your new pet get overheated during these play sessions. For added enrichment to the indoor cats life it is also a good idea to hang birdfeeders outside of windows to mentally stimulate a cats inner hunter.

Indoor vs. Outdoor: There are many different opinions on whether cats should be indoors, outdoors, or a combination of both. The following chart shows a few things to consider when making this decision for your pet. Please keep in mind that declawed cats should never be outdoor cats, and that if you do decide to have your cat outdoors or indoor/outdoor it is usually recommended to keep them indoors for at least 1 month before letting them go outside. When you first start letting them out only let them outdoors supervised.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Indoor	-safer -generally healthier physically -generally longer life span	-not mentally stimulating enough for most cats -much smaller area than cat would have in the wild
Outdoor	-mentally and physically stimulating -generally mentally healthier -lots of natural enrichment	-not safe (cars, parasites, other animals, and infectious diseases) -generally shorter life span

Claws: Scratching is a natural part of a cat's life. They use this not only to sharpen their claws but it is also a huge part of how cats mark their territory. They not only use the scratching post to scratch they also need to see the destruction of the object to show their territory. Cats usually prefer a scratching post with lots of texture so your scratching post should be as close as possible to what a cat would use in the wild. You can make your own scratching post by using a 3-4 foot long log and splitting it in half. In order to make it you would split the log (with bark on it) lengthways. Take one half of the log and nail it to wall of other surface vertically and nail the other half horizontally. Reward kittens both verbally and with treats when scratching occurs in appropriate place. When kittens scratch on things that are not desirable, the kitten should be removed from that area and taken to their scratching post. At the scratching post take kitten's paw and rub it on the scratching post in a scratching motion, and then praise the kitten.

Socialization: We tend not to focus on socialization in cats and kittens as much as we do in dogs but getting them used to things that will happen to them in their lifetime is just as important for our feline friends. Rub and massage kitten from tip of the nose to tip of the tail including feet on a daily basis. Introduce your new kitten to a variety of people and other pets. Have people over while the kitten is still small so they get used to interacting with company in the home. Take them in the car to places other than the veterinarian, leave the carrier out with a towel or a blanket in it to have the cat used to the idea of a carrier. If the cat will need grooming later on in life take it to a groomer. Brush the cat yourself at home on a regular basis to allow the kitten to become familiar with this activity. It is also a good idea to board your kitten over the weekend at a young age in case you ever need to board them later on in life. This can help the situation be much less traumatic and stressful for the cat as an adult when the experience is somewhat familiar. Socialization is very important so please introduce your kitten to as many things as you can at a young age.

If you have any other questions or concerns please do not hesitate to ask us! We are here to try to make this relationship between you and your new addition as rewarding as possible, so come in or give us a call at (502) 348-2525 if there is any way we can help you in this transition!