

# Kitten Season Survival Guide



**Tools & Tips to Keep You Calm  
and Move Those Kittens Along**

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Depending on what part of the country you're in, you're likely either riding a kitten season wave or bracing for impact! We've gathered some posters, forms and other resources to keep your fur unruffled as you:

- Understand your intake
- Message your need to the public
- Use kitten showers to engage supporters and fulfill your wish list
- Provide the right medical and daily care
- Build socialization skills to make kitties irresistible
- Know when (and how) to move kittens into foster care and homes
- Provide your fosters the basic information they need to keep kitties healthy

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## (Simple) Math is Your Friend: Calculate Your Intake

A little math can do big things in the shelter. And the good news is that it's fairly simple—no need for calculus or trigonometry here! You'll want to evaluate your shelter's capacity for care and compare available resources to the population of cats in your shelter in order to eliminate any gaps.

To get the most bang for your buck, look at intake numbers a few different ways:

- Separate strays from owner surrenders, because in most cases you'll have different holding periods. If that doesn't apply in your jurisdiction (e.g. there is no holding period for cats) or if you don't accept strays, don't worry about this step.
- Separate kittens from adults. Generally the ASPCA uses a cutoff of five months.
- Look at the real number for each month, rather than using annual intake and assuming it's equal across every day of the year. It's always a good idea to look back at several years—particularly if your shelter is seeing a trend of increasing or decreasing intake.



You can put information into Excel—it's easy to organize, and you can use calculations in the spreadsheet to make the math easier. Below is an example of one shelter's intake\* over the course of a year for cats and kittens. This is a pretty big shelter that takes in approximately 10,000 cats annually:

### Feline intake by month

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Stray cats	201	225	195	240	225	225	255	300	270	255	225	255
Stray kittens	105	105	150	285	450	510	525	615	495	450	270	180
Surrender cats	120	105	150	165	180	165	180	180	150	195	105	120
Surrender kittens	15	30	30	45	30	45	60	90	45	75	30	60

*\*The numbers were rounded slightly to make the math we'll tackle below easier—but this is a very accurate representation of this shelter's intake.*

## (Simple) Math is Your Friend: Calculate Your Intake *(continued)*



For starters, it's always interesting to take a step back and look at the numbers—maybe even make a graph to help you visualize the highs and lows and what the year actually looks like. Now we're focusing on the numbers, but looking at all the info is crucial. For example, what programs might you add or change to better support people and animals in your community when you consider how many come in as strays and how many are brought in by their people?

Our next step is understanding what the numbers mean on a daily basis, so take each month's intake and divide by 30. We know some months have 31, 28, or even 29 days, but for the sake of the math and the nominal difference it makes, we just use 30 for each month.

Here's what this looks like, using just the stray cats and kittens as an example:

### Average daily intake

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Stray cats	7	7.5	6.5	8	7.5	7.5	8.5	10	9	8.5	7.5	8.5
Stray kittens	3.5	3.5	5	9.5	15	17	17.5	20.5	16.5	15	9	6

Now we're getting somewhere! At a glance we can see that this shelter generally takes in 7-10 adult cats every day, with some variation depending on the time of year. But check out the difference for the kittens! They typically handle only four kittens a day in the winter months, but a whopping 21 kittens a day at the peak of Mount Kitten.

Determining this ahead of time followed by some key action steps—proactively adding or modifying programs and appropriately allocating resources—puts the organization in a much better position to be able to meet the needs of the animals in their care and to find positive live outcomes for as many as possible.

## Season's Greetings: Make the Message Clear

Do your supporters (and future supporters) know what kitten season really means? An image like the one below, shared on social media, is a powerful way to share serious facts: The need is great and the public's help is crucial. And while kittens are undeniably adorable, the bigger picture isn't so pretty.

# KITTEN SEASON

KCHA admits 2,000 kittens and puppies annually from March – October.  
Help make a difference.

## BEAT THE HEAT

Spay/Neuter cats before kitten season!

- Pick up a low-cost coupon at KCHA:  
\$40 females, \$30 males
- Trap community cats for TNR

## FOSTER A LITTER

Help kittens grow before adoption!

- Attend a Kitten Foster class: March 15, March 22, March 29
- 5:30 pm - UC Geary Student Union, room 301
- Email [stacia@adoptcharleston.com](mailto:stacia@adoptcharleston.com)

## KITTEN SHOWER

Donate supplies!

- Saturday, March 19, noon – 5:00 pm
- Milk replacer, bottles, cat carriers, small blankets and towels, heating pads
- Wish List: <http://tinyurl.com/givetoKCHA>

## FIND KITTENS? DON'T PANIC!

- Mom is probably hunting for food or a safer nest.
- Watch the kittens from afar for a few hours to see if mom returns.
- Kittens are unlikely to survive if brought to the shelter without mom.
- Unsure if you should intervene? Call us!  
(304) 342-1576 ext. 119



For more information about how to help kittens, visit:  
[www.adoptcharleston.com](http://www.adoptcharleston.com)

*Courtesy of Kanawha-Charleston Humane Association*



## Season's Greetings: Make the Message Clear *(continued)*

### Tips for Messaging Kitten Season:

- Use books, movies, television shows, etc. that are currently in the public eye to grab attention
- Put your own spin on a common phrase, such as “We’re expecting”
- Take advantage of the most photogenic models in the world: Kittens
- Don’t pull punches—make your message strong (For example, Morris Animal Refuge used a graphic of an actor from a popular epic television saga with the quote “Brace Yourself, Kitten Season is Coming.” From that eye-catching start, the shelter added important facts: “It sounds adorable! It isn’t. Find out how you can help.”)
- Be sure you have permission to use images—if you grab something from a meme generator, take note whether the meme creator gives rights to use the images

Wait, those aren’t kittens! No, but of course adult cats need homes year-round, and the more space you can free up, the better for your incoming hordes.



*Courtesy of Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation*

## Kitten Showers: The Kind of Request That Leads to ‘Yes’

Most people get requests on a regular basis from people and institutions that need help. In a kitten shower request you’ll be asking for specific items—maybe even via a registry, as below—and, of course, cash is always needed.

You’re already equipped with the perfect way to make your ask stand out—because really, who could say “no” to that face?

Here, and on the next page, are a few more examples of inviting kitten shower messages:



Courtesy of McKamey Animal Center



Courtesy of Asheville Humane Society

## Kitten Showers: The Kind of Request That Leads to ‘Yes’ (continued)



Courtesy of Louisville Metro Animal Services

### Tips for Throwing Successful Kitten Showers:

- Your team can be small as long as you have a clear punch list of tasks such as marketing/graphics, social media, website landing page, donation bins, email blast, press release
- Post lots of baby kitten photos on social media—you can’t have too many
- Work the media, and let reporters and photographers know the pics will be amazing and the stories adorbs
- Make your wish list equivalent to a baby registry by telling people exactly what you need
- Partner with local businesses, such as pet supply stores and vet clinics—see if they’ll promote your wish list or set up a place where shoppers can purchase and drop off items for you
- Have a place to store your gifts once people drop them off, like a playpen in the lobby
- Since some people prefer to give cash, make that an easy option on your website—then let them know what their money will buy
- For shower food, hit up staff and volunteers with culinary talents, and reach out to businesses for donations



Courtesy of Jacksonville Humane Society



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## Healthy & Happy: Medical Care, Grooming and More

You can quickly and easily determine age and sex of your incoming kittens with these resources (print them out and post them in strategic locations); from there a few steps will help keep your newbies in optimum health.

▶ **Tip:** Click on the poster images on the following pages to go to [ASPCApro.org](https://www.aspca.org) to download and print the PDFs, or print the full page posters found on the next two pages.

# How Old Is That Kitten?

## 4 questions to ask when estimating a kitten's age:

### 1. Are the eyes open?

Kittens are born with their eyes closed, and they don't open until about **8-12 days of age**.

### 2. How much do they weigh?

A kitten's weight in pounds roughly corresponds to his age in months, and he will gain weight at a relatively predictable rate until about 10 weeks of age. As long as a kitten is in good body condition, you can safely guess that a **1-pound kitten is about 4 weeks old** and a **3-pound kitten is about 12 weeks old**.

### 3. Are they walking and playing?

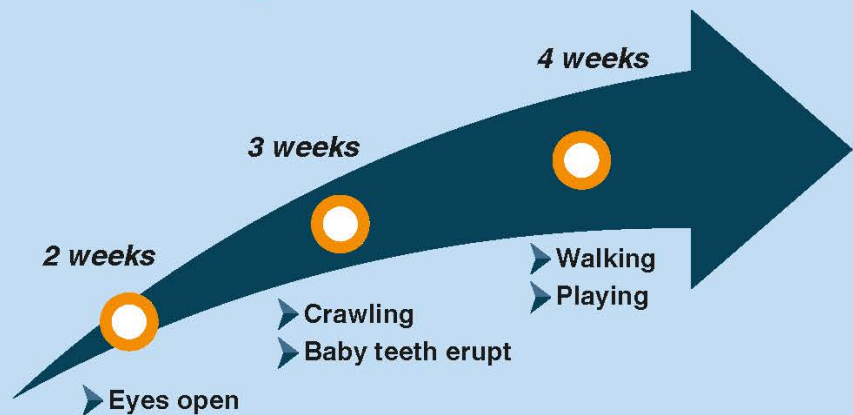
Most kittens start walking around **3 weeks of age**, but take a little longer to gain their coordination. You can be comfortable saying a kitten who is walking pretty well and playing is at least **4 weeks of age**.

### 4. How do their teeth look?

Baby teeth start to come in around **3 weeks of age** and permanent teeth at 3-4 months. The middle incisors are the first to come in around 12 weeks, with the second and third incisors following at about 14 and 16 weeks, respectively.



## Developmental Milestones

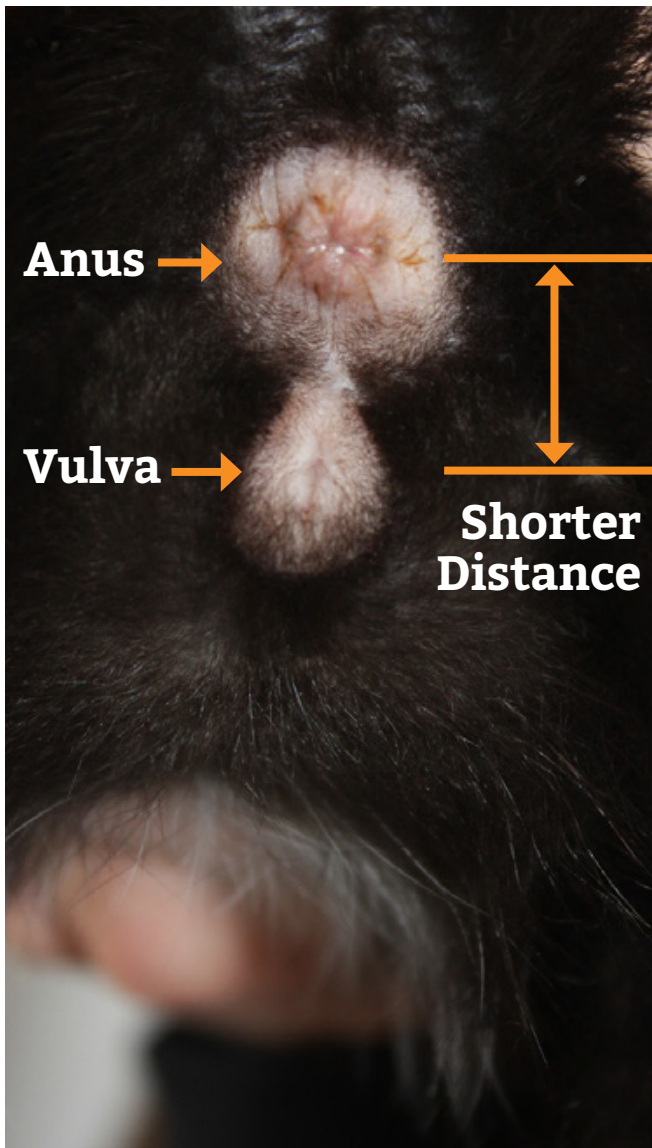


# Is It a Male or Female Kitten?

It can be difficult to distinguish between male and female kittens, especially when they are just a few days old. The most reliable way is to look at the shape of the genital opening and the distance to the anus. When you have a litter of kittens, it can be particularly helpful to compare littermates.

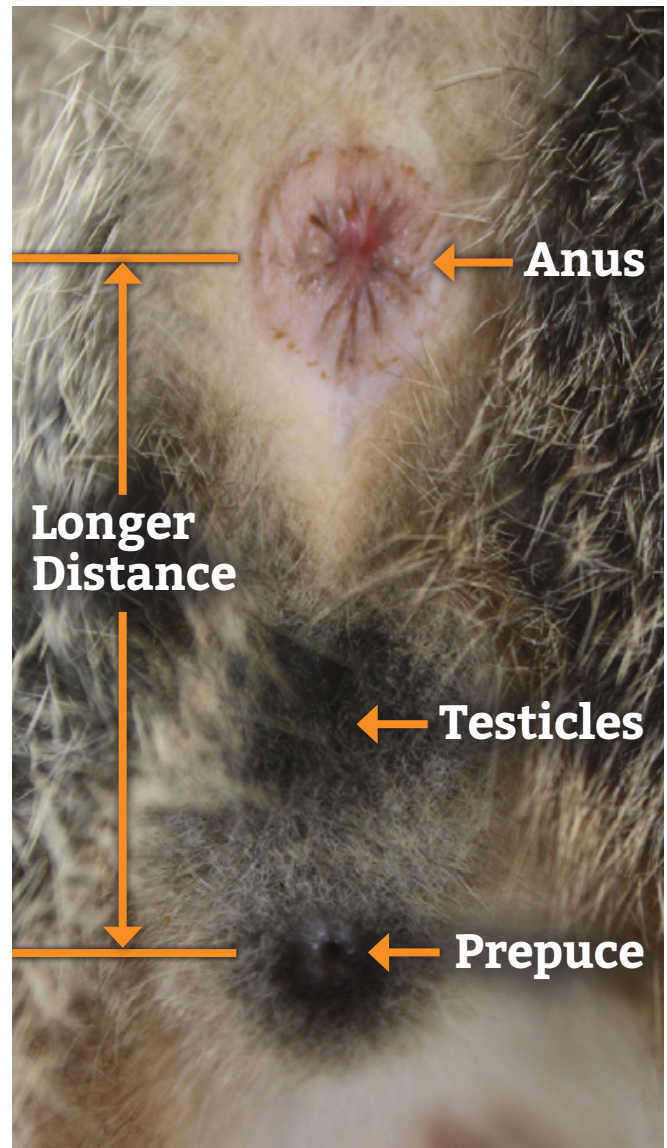
## Females:

The genital opening appears as a vertical slit and is located directly below the anus.



## Males:

The penis appears as a small round dot and is a greater distance from the anus, with the testicles located in between.



*This distance guide can also be used for adult cats.*



## Healthy & Happy: Medical Care, Grooming and More *(continued)*

### Brush, Feed, Repeat

Bottle feeding itty bitty kitties? Here's a tip from the ASPCA Kitten Nursery: A toothbrush acts as a mother cat's tongue—and since mamas typically groom their kittens while they're nursing, the brushing stimulates them to better take the bottle.

Just be sure to use only one toothbrush per litter and discard once kittens are eating on their own.





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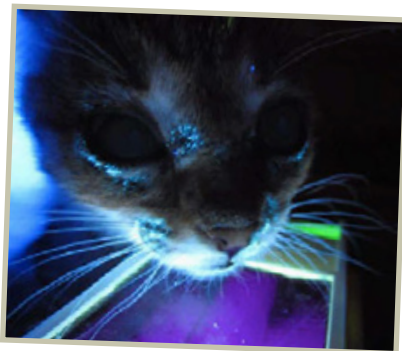
## Healthy & Happy: Medical Care, Grooming and More *(continued)*

### Bathing Beauties

Bathing little ones is important in preventing skin infections and removing feces that might accumulate in a kitten's rear and result in blockages.

It's also a great way to get fleas off of youngsters who are too young for the topical treatments—and is safer than some of the alternative powders or other insecticides.

Be sure to keep them from getting cold and have cozy, warmed towels ready to receive them!



### Shine a Light on Ringworm

A Wood's lamp exam, which helps to identify ringworm-positive animals, should be performed before foster care—and it's worth it to invest in a good lamp.

If you just take five minutes to do this, you can often avoid sending a contaminated animal out into the world.

## Testing for FeLV/FIV?

The most common screening tests for the feline leukemia virus (FeLV) and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) can be performed quickly and easily in the shelter using a blood sample, and many commercially available kits will detect both infections with a single test. Each shelter's policies regarding FeLV/FIV testing should be based on available resources, the population of cats being served, the potential impact to population health, and the program goals.

If you decide to test for either or both viruses, it's important to remember that (for a variety of reasons) kittens in the same litter may have different test results from each other or from mom. Don't assume that the results of one kitten are representative of those for the entire litter.

In some cases, one or two kittens will test positive for FeLV while the others test negative, but there is no way to know an individual kitten's status without testing individually. It is also important that only a single kitten's blood sample be tested at one time; "pooled" samples should not be used as this can also give inaccurate results. For example, if samples are combined from three kittens, but only one kitten has FeLV viral particles circulating in his bloodstream, the result may still be negative.

This happens because combining multiple samples dilutes each one, increasing the risk that the test won't be able to pick up the low amounts of virus present.



## More Health Resources

[Vaccination in Shelter Animal Populations](#)

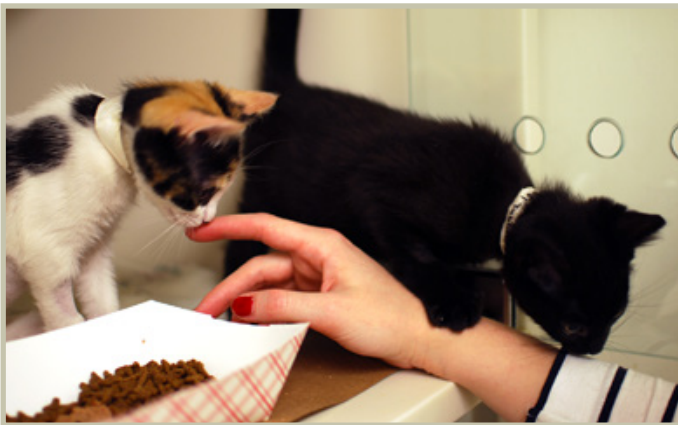
[All About Feline Panleukopenia](#)

## Hi There! Nice to Meetcha: Teaching Socialization Skills

Some simple food-centered tips can help you with socialization so your littles are ready to charm the socks off potential adopters.

Kittens younger than 8 weeks can usually be socialized without much difficulty, while older kittens who have had no positive interaction with humans can take much longer. However, the guidelines below can help you successfully socialize kittens—and often shy adult cats as well!

Keep in mind that while these techniques are usually successful, there is always the chance that cats might not respond as well or as quickly as you hope, so you may need a contingency plan in place.



Food is the most important tool to facilitate the socialization process.

If the kittens are healthy, using the litter box, and will eat in front of you, you can pull the dish as close to you as possible. Stay with the kittens until they have finished eating and then take any remaining food away with you when you leave. (Always leave water, of course.)

When the kittens have progressed to eating right beside you with your hand touching the dish, start offering something tasty off your finger.

You can also let the kittens learn to lick from a spoon, popsicle stick, or tongue depressor if at first they want to chew your finger instead of lick it.

## 8 Steps for Feeding That Will Help Socialization

1. Initiate contact at the beginning of a session when the kittens are particularly hungry.
2. Start with them eating from a dish or off the finger and eventually progress to touching and petting while they are in your lap eating. Start petting in the head and shoulder area only. If the kittens run off, lure them back with baby food on the finger. You can also put a dish in your lap and let an entire litter climb on you to get it!
3. Expand petting and touching around the head and shoulders by touching the underbelly. Also try nudging them from one side to the other while they are engrossed in eating. Just having your hands near them and gently pushing them around is an important preparation to being picked up.
4. Set up two dishes and gently lift/scoot a kitten the short distance from one dish to the other, very close to the ground. If the kitten is engrossed in eating she won't mind being lifted if it goes smoothly and quickly. If not, lure her back and start over.
5. Sit on the same level as the kittens so the first real lift is close to the floor. Have a full jar of baby food opened and ready ahead of time. Lift under the chest with a small dish of food directly in front of the kitten's nose the entire time. Hold the kitten loosely on your knees and eventually up to your chest so your heartbeat can be heard.
6. Once that's mastered, try lifting while you're kneeling and then eventually while you're standing.
7. When the kitten is very full and getting sleepy, try gentle petting and work up to holding and petting without the incentive of food being present. If this works you should be able to try it at other times between meals.
8. Before putting them in a cage in an adoption center or at an adoption event, make sure they have been exposed to and responded well with a few different socializers.

**Tip:** Before you start working with kittens, make sure you're on their level so you can comfortably interact without looming over them or backing them into corners.



## Hi There! Nice to Meetcha: Teaching Socialization Skills *(continued)*

### What's My Name?

When you have a high volume of animals entering your shelter (hello, kitten season!) and your creativity is ebbing, it can be tough making sure everyone is named at intake.

At the ASPCA Adoption Center in New York City, our staff assigns names to nearly 4,000 animals each year, so the task of coming up with yet another moniker is always front and center. Here are some tips from our crew to assist you in the naming process.



### Ask for Suggestions

The ASPCA uses a suggestion box as a fun and efficient way for staff and volunteers to share ideas for names. They aim for names that:

- Are easy to pronounce
- Contain three or fewer syllables
- Can be related to by adopters
- Are simple to remember



### Pick a Theme

Themes come in handy for naming litters or multiple animals who come in from hoarding or cruelty cases. Examples include gems and stones (Ruby, Sapphire, Jade); colors (Burgundy, Violet, Indigo); inspiration from nature (Rose, Lily, Aster, Clover, Buttercup, Daisy, Dahlia, Parsley, Sage, Rosemary, Thyme); and even pastas (Linguini, Tortellini, Macaroni). The possibilities are endless!

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## Hi There! Nice to Meetcha: Teaching Socialization Skills *(continued)*

### Select Real People

Use names that your adopters can relate to—you can even mine your own adopter database for first names. That helps to ensure that the kitten names reflect the diversity of your own adopters.

### Mine the Baby Lists

Use the Internet to stay on top of modern, trendy baby names, since the most popular names change from year to year. You'll find plenty of websites and blogs devoted to the subject. P.S. You can search for lists of top pet names, too!



## Packing Up: Prepping for Foster Care and Beyond



As shelters scramble to keep up with the flow of tiny felines moving out the shelter doors and into foster care, a spreadsheet is crucial. Why? We know that young kittens are susceptible to disease, and by keeping a simple spreadsheet to track the number of days each kitten waits to be moved into foster care, you'll easily identify and investigate any increase in wait time. And that could be a red flag that an increase in the incidence of disease is not far behind. An added bonus is that you will end up with a great tool for planning the number of foster homes you'll need for next year.

### Use these four pieces of information to track Length of Stay of kittens waiting for foster pick up:

1. **Kitten ID number**
2. **Kitten age (in weeks if possible)**
3. **Intake date/time**
4. **Moved to foster care date/time**

Track it in an Excel spreadsheet (or use your shelter software to look at the information) daily. Do the simple math: Moved to Foster Care date minus Intake date = Length of Stay until moved to foster care.

Keep an eye out for any increase in length of stay and pinpoint (and address) the cause of the bottleneck. Keep those kittens moving!

**Tip:** Print out the form on the next two pages and give it to your foster volunteers—the information they provide can be used online and for kennel write-ups.

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# Kitten Biography Sheet

Foster parent: \_\_\_\_\_

Kitten's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Kitten's description (coloring, short or long coat, etc): \_\_\_\_\_

**Please answer these questions with as much information as possible (lots of detail), and then return it to the Foster Coordinator. Thank you!**

**1. What makes your kitten delightful/special?** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. What are some cute things your kitten does that are endearing or could make people want to meet him/her?** \_\_\_\_\_

**3. What kinds of routines and activities does your kitten like most?** \_\_\_\_\_

**4. What help or special needs does your kitten require?** \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Is your kitten OK with:**

**a. Most other dogs / cats** \_\_\_\_\_

**b. Some other dogs / cats (if so which kinds?)** \_\_\_\_\_

**c. No other dogs / cats (please describe)** \_\_\_\_\_



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6. How social is your kitten with new people? \_\_\_\_\_

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7. How social is your kitten with known people? \_\_\_\_\_

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8. Describe the ideal home for your kitten: \_\_\_\_\_

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9. If you were writing the bio on your kitten, what would it be *(you can view the website of available pets for an example)*: \_\_\_\_\_

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### **For the Foster Coordinator to fill out:**

1. Short synopsis of the kitten's background \_\_\_\_\_

2. Issues to be mentioned \_\_\_\_\_

3. Special needs and/or considerations \_\_\_\_\_

4. Ideal environment for the kitten \_\_\_\_\_

5. Other specifics \_\_\_\_\_

### **Intake Coordinator comments:**

1. Provide background on the kitten's circumstances and/or history before coming into the shelter

2. Other specifics \_\_\_\_\_

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# More Resources to Give Your Foster Families

[Feline Foster Care Guide](#)

