

Socialization tips for kitten owners

Even though cats have been domesticated for thousands of years, each new kitten that comes into our world must learn about humans. Socialization is the process during which kittens develop positive relationships with other living beings. The most sensitive period for successful socialization is during the first 3 months of life, especially from 3 to 9 weeks of age. The experiences the pet has during this time will have a major influence on its developing personality and how well it gets along with people and other animals when it grows into adulthood. It is very important for kittens to have frequent, positive social experiences during these early months in order to prevent asocial behavior, fear, and biting. Kittens that are inadequately socialized may develop irreversible fears, leading to timidity or aggression. This is not to say that socialization is complete by 3 months of age; only that it should begin before that time. Continued exposure to a variety of people and other animals, as the pet grows and develops, is an essential part of maintaining good social skills. It is also extremely important that the kitten be exposed to new environments and stimuli at this time (e.g., sounds, odors, locations, sights, and textures) to reduce fear of the unfamiliar that might otherwise develop as the pet grows and ages.

Kitten socialization

It is essential that every kitten meets as many different types people as possible in a wide variety of situations, but be careful not to overwhelm it. Begin with calm introductions to one or two people at a time. If the pet handles this well, then add more people, increased noise, and a variety of activities. It can be beneficial to ask each person who meets the kitten to give it a small piece of food or a tiny treat. This will teach the kitten to look forward to meeting people. It will also discourage handshyness, since the kitten will learn to associate new people and an outstretched hand with something positive. Kittens that are wary of taking food or physical contact from strangers may be enticed if the treat is tossed to the kitten or if the visitor is given a play toy to engage the kitten in a game of chase.

In particular, it is essential to ensure that the young kitten has plenty of opportunities to learn about children. They can seem like a completely different species to the young kitten since they walk, act, and talk much differently than adults. Kittens that grow up without meeting children when they are young may never feel comfortable around them when they become adults. Similarly, since different people can act, look, sound, or even smell different, the more variety in the kitten's life, the better. Lack of experience with a variety of people, especially young children, is a common cause of social fear, avoidance, and biting.

You should also take your kitten to visit friends' homes to interact with them and with their pets. The ideal home is one with calm children and calm pets that don't go out to parks or other areas where they might pick up disease organisms and bring them back home, or in which the pets have had relevant vaccinations and appropriate parasite control.

Avoid unpleasant experiences

The young kitten's interactions should always be supervised to ensure nothing happens that might make it afraid of people. Go slow with socialization exposure, and if the pet ever seems anxious, take some time out and then re-expose it to people in slightly calmer situations.

In addition, be careful to avoid physical punishment or any other interactions with people or experiences in new environments that might make the kitten anxious. Harshly scolding or punishing a young pet will damage its bond with you and weaken its trust in people. Techniques such as swatting the kitten, tapping its nose, shaking it by the scruff, or rubbing its face in a mess should never be used. Pets that are raised using these methods may grow up to fear the human hand, and are likely candidates to become fear biters. In general, any interactions with people that might make a kitten anxious should be avoided, particularly during the early months of its life.

Kitten socialization classes

Although kitten socialization classes are not as popular as puppy classes, consider enrolling your kitten in one of these classes if they are available in your area. They are an excellent way to ensure multiple contacts with a variety of people and other cats and to learn more about the care, handling, and training of kittens.

Socializing takes time and patience, but the benefits are well worthwhile, so be sure not to miss the opportunity to guide your kitten through this important process. Proper socialization will help ensure that your pet grows up to be social, friendly, and well adjusted.

Best wishes for a long and happy relationship!