

A LIFETIME OF FELINE WELLNESS

With proper preventative care, your pet can enjoy a long and healthy life as a part of your family. This handout lists what you can expect at each appointment here at Animal Hospital of Ovilla.

6 weeks of age

- Comprehensive physical exam
- Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) combination test
- Possible vaccinations based on risk assessment:
 - Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis Calivirus Panleukopenia (FVRCP) (1st of 4)
- Intestinal parasite exam
- Precautionary intestinal parasite treatment (1st of 3)
- Initiate flea/tick preventative
- Initiate heartworm preventative

- Refill heartworm preventative

Second semi-annual visit

- Comprehensive physical exam
- Intestinal parasite exam
- Blood screening test
- Professional dental cleaning

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9 weeks of age

- Pediatric development consultation
- Possible vaccinations based on risk assessment:
 - FVRCP (2nd of 4)
- Precautionary intestinal parasite treatment (2nd of 3)

12 weeks of age

- Pediatric development consultation
- Possible vaccinations based on risk assessment:
 - FVRCP (3rd of 4)
 - FeLV (1st of 2)
 - Rabies
- Intestinal parasite exam
- Precautionary intestinal parasite treatment (3rd of 3)
- Insert microchip for identification

16 weeks of age

- Pediatric development consultation
- Possible vaccinations based on risk assessment:
 - FeLV (2nd of 2)
 - FVRCP (4th of 4)

4-6 months of age

- Spay or neuter

10 months of age

- Comprehensive physical exam
- Intestinal parasite exam
- Intestinal parasite treatment if warranted

Beginning at 15-16 months of age

First semi-annual visit

- Comprehensive physical exam
- Intestinal parasite exam
- FeLV/FIV test
- Possible vaccinations based on risk assessment:
 - FVRCP
 - FeLV
 - Rabies
- Refill flea/tick preventative

Bringing Home Your New Kitten

What is the best way to introduce my new kitten to my home?

A new home with new sights, new sounds, and new smells can be a scary place for a young kitten, but there are things you can do to make the transition easier. Your new kitten likely left behind a loving mother, playful siblings, and a familiar environment, so he needs a little special care when being introduced to his new surroundings and new family.

Getting started

Your kitty needs to feel comfortable with you as soon as possible, so start your relationship by interacting with him on his own turf where he feels safe and secure. Spend time playing and cuddling him before taking him away from his familiar environment. Bring home the comforting scent of his current home by petting his mother and siblings if they are present. Better yet, bring along a towel and rub his family members or even the inside of his kennel to carry these *old* scents to your kitty's *new* home. Familiar smells warm the heart and steady the nerves.



Going home

The ride home should be as pleasant as possible. Place the scented towel in a cat carrier and gently place your kitten inside. If he resists, remove the top of the carrier rather than nudging him through the door. Cats prefer cozy spots so they usually like being in a carrier. By encouraging your kitten to ride within the confines of a carrier, you are providing safety and security, as well as starting a good routine that you can maintain for future car rides.

Arriving home

When you arrive at home, place the kitten and carrier in a small, quiet room in the house away from traffic. Open the door of the carrier and allow the cat some time to come out willingly. Place fresh water, food, and a litter box near the entrance of the carrier. Allow the kitty to come and go at will. If he cowers in the back of the pet caddy and refuses to venture out after 30 minutes, gently remove the top of the carrier, pick him up, and show him the food and water bowls and litter box. If the kitten is very tiny, a small litter box with low sides may be necessary at first. If possible, duplicate the type of litter material used in the previous home (see Litter Box Training).

"Give him lots of time to become familiar with this room before giving him a tour of the entire house."

All kittens will need time to investigate their new surroundings. This is less overwhelming for your new kitten if you initially limit the available space by keeping him in a single room. Give him lots of time to become familiar with this room before giving him a tour of the entire house. Gradually introduce him to rest of the one room at a time, and always stay with him when you bring him to other rooms.

Socialization and Fear Prevention in Kittens

What is socialization?

Socialization is the process during which the kitten develops relationships with other living beings in its environment.

What is habituation?

As cats develop, there are numerous stimuli (sounds, smells, sights, and events) that, when they are unfamiliar, can lead to fear and anxiety. Habituation is the process of getting used to and not reacting to those stimuli by continuous exposure under circumstances that have no untoward consequences.

What is localization?

Localization is the process during which the kitten develops attachment to particular places.

Why are these terms important?

Cats that receive insufficient exposure and contact with people, other animals and new environments during their first two months may develop irreversible fears, leading to timidity or aggression. Expose your kitten to as many stimuli (people, places and things) as possible when they can most effectively socialize, localize, and habituate to these stimuli. The first 9 weeks of life are the most critical periods in the social development of the cat.

Are cats a social species?

While they are fairly independent and can do well on their own, cats are quite social. Although feline social behavior has not been as extensively studied as for the dog, the domestic cat is much more social than has been traditionally reported. There are many situations where cats live together in groups and interact in a friendly manner. The composition of these groups differs from dog groupings. Usually they consist of mothers, daughters, aunts and grandmothers; female cats that are related. In large colonies, there may be many smaller related groups sharing the same space. Male cats will leave the group, but return for breeding. Males that have been neutered join the group in much the same way as females. Colonies of feral (wild) cats will be found in areas where food is abundant and shared, such as barns, dumpsites or around fishing ports. The cats in the group will allogroom (lick each other) and allomark (rub against each other). They will share the raising of kittens, fostering others from different litters.



Do cats have personalities?

Research has shown that it may be possible to classify cat “personalities” similar to what has been done for dogs. One such study identified cats that were shy, timid or fearful and those that were confident. The timid cats took significantly longer to approach persons and be held by them. Another study identified cats that were “shy” and those that were “trusting.” That research noted that trusting cats were trusting regardless of where they encountered people, while shy cats were more fearful the further from home they were encountered. Based on these and other studies there are two common personality types: (a) sociable, confident and easygoing; (b) timid, shy and unfriendly. Some other research has also indicated an active aggressive type as well.

What influences the development of personality type?

Studies have confirmed that, not only is personality inherited from the mother, but also that friendliness is, in part, inherited from the father.

How does the mother cat (or queen) teach her kittens?

Cats are very good at observational learning. This occurs when an animal learns a behavior by watching how another animal behaves. The queen starts to teach her kittens at a young age. From the queen, kittens learn elimination behaviors and predatory behavior. Kittens will begin to spend time in the litter box at about 30 days of age and will learn appropriate litter usage through observation of the queen and certain olfactory (smell) cues. If allowed access to prey, the queen will begin to bring them to her offspring at about 32 to 36 days of age and teach them to hunt. The kittens will begin to be weaned and eat solid food at the same age. The choice of food is influenced by the queen. Play between kittens is an important part of social development, particularly for those kittens that will be housed with other cats later in life.

What can I do to improve my chances of having a social, non-fearful cat?



Selection: The genetics of an individual cat plays a critical role in how sociable, playful, fearful, excitable, or domineering a kitten will become. The first issue in helping to ensure that a kitten will be friendly and social when it grows up is to choose an appropriate kitten for your family. Since cats have a variety of personality types, the question is whether these personality types can be determined at the time of selection. As kitten socialization begins to decline at about 7 weeks of age, selection testing may become increasingly more accurate after this age. Therefore assessing older kittens and adult cats may provide more accurate information. The behavior of the parents, especially the father, as well as the behavior of any offspring from previous litters may be of

even greater value at predicting adult behavior.

Assessment of young kittens is likely of limited value if the kittens are still progressing through the primary socialization period, and the assessment of the parents may provide just as much information.

Early handling: Kittens that are stimulated and handled from birth are more confident, more social, more exploratory, faster to mature and are better able to handle stress as they develop. Early handling of kittens decreases their approach time to strangers and increases the amount of time that they stayed with them. The more handling the better; but even 15 minutes a day will help to improve later behavior. Regular and frequent handling from birth increases the likelihood that the kitten

will relate well to people when placed into a home after weaning at 6 to 9 weeks of age. Therefore, kittens obtained from a breeder or home where they have had frequent contact and interaction with the owners are likely to be more social and less fearful as they develop.

“The greater exposure a kitten has to humans of all ages, other pets and novel situations, the better adjusted that kitten will be.”

To summarize, the two most important factors in how social a cat becomes with people are his genetic personality, and the amount of socialization he receives during the sensitive period of socialization (approximately 3 to 7 weeks of age).

Certainly, the greater exposure a kitten has to humans of all ages, other pets and novel situations, the better adjusted that kitten will be. Therefore the best options may be to obtain a kitten from a home where good socialization has already taken place, or to obtain a new kitten before 7 weeks of age and ensure immediate socialization.

How can I assist my new kitten's socialization?

Introduce your kitten to as many new people and situations as possible. If the kitten is meeting a person or other pet for the first time and remains playful and inquisitive be certain to encourage and reinforce the kitten for its actions, and repeat the exposure regularly with a variety of similar stimuli. If however the kitten is fearful or withdrawn, a more gradual introduction while pairing favored treats and play with each exposure may improve the relationship fairly quickly. Be certain that the stimulus moves slowly so as not to startle the kitten. Strangers may be able to offer treats or stimulate play using a favored chase toy. However, when introducing a kitten to other animals, the other animal should be well restrained and calm so that the kitten's fear is not enhanced, and it can be motivated to take the treats and food for the owner. There may be a great deal of individual variation, with some cats quickly adapting to new people and other pets, and others requiring a very gradual program of desensitization and counter-conditioning (see Desensitization and Counter-Conditioning and Implementing Desensitization and Counter-Conditioning).

What is the best way to introduce my new kitten to my home?

Your interaction with your new kitten begins on the ride home. Cats should always be transported in some kind of carrier in the car. By teaching your kitten to ride in a confined location you are providing safety for your cat in future car rides. Upon arriving at home, place the kitten in a small, quiet area with food and a litter box. If the kitten is very tiny, a small litter box with lowered sides may be necessary at first. If possible, duplicate the type of litter material used in the previous home (see Litter Box Training).

“Your interaction with your new kitten begins on the ride home.”

Before putting your new kitten into any new location, it is important to inspect it for nooks and crannies where a kitten might hide or get stuck. Often in a new environment, a kitten may look for a secluded place to hide. However, all kittens and cats will eventually need to investigate their new surroundings. For a new kitten, this is a more manageable task if you limit space available and initially supervise the kitten. When cats do investigate they use a random method of search.

After your new kitten has had some quiet time in a restricted location, slowly allow access to other areas of the home.

Kittens are natural explorers and will use their claws to climb up onto anything possible. In the first few weeks, slow and limited access to the home will allow exploration as well as giving you the ability to monitor the kitten's behavior. Monitor for any stimuli, rooms or areas that seem to frighten the cat, and use favored treats and play to encourage further exposure (see [Bringing Home Your New Kitten](#), and if there is another cat in the home, see [Multi-Cat Households – Adding a New Cat](#)).

This client information sheet is based on material written by: Debra Horwitz, DVM, DACVB & Gary Landsberg, DVM, DACVB, DECAWBM

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Kitten Behavior and Training - Litter Box Training

Do I need to train my new kitten to use a litter box?

Most cats by nature prefer to use a soil type surface for elimination. By providing a litter box with an appropriate and appealing substrate (material), few cats will need to be trained to use it. At about 30 to 36 days of age, kittens leave the nest to search out a loose substrate for elimination.

"The kitten learns specific areas and substrates to use by observing the mother."

The kitten learns specific areas and substrates to use by observing the queen (mother). Although some cats, especially those on their own property, will dig and bury their wastes, many cats only partly cover their feces especially if they are off of their home territory. Some cats do not bury urine or stools at all, even on their own property; these cats may prove harder to litter train.

How can I train my new cat to use the litter box and area that I have selected?

Initially, it is best that the kitten be confined to a small area with an appropriate sized litter box. This allows you to take advantage of a cat's tendency to eliminate in a loose material. As long as the kitty litter is easily accessible and is the only loose substrate available, very little effort should be required to litter box train the kitten. If you confine the cat for any length of time (e.g., if you are going to work for the day), ensure that the room has all the cat's necessities including litter box, water, food or feeding toys, scratching and play toys, and places to climb and explore.

One indoor area that might be equally or more appealing to some cats is the soil around houseplants. This can best be resolved by ensuring that the cat is prevented from getting into the houseplant, moving the houseplants into an inaccessible room, or to placing decorative pebbles or rocks over top of the soil. Kittens may need to eliminate after they eat, after they wake up and after play. At those times, you might place the kitten in its litter box and, if it eliminates, praise the kitten or give a treat.

A kitten does not need to be confined continuously, but should be supervised to prevent accidents and frequently brought back to the appropriate elimination location. If you place a little urine or stool from a previous elimination in the box, its odor should help to attract the cat back to the box. If the kitten soils in a location other than its box on the first attempt, clean up the area thoroughly using a product that is designed to neutralize cat urine odor and perhaps move a small amount of the stool or a few drops of the urine to the box to attract the cat to that area. If there is more than one cat in the home, at least one more litter box should be added (see below). By confining the kitten to an area with its own box, the kitten can establish regular litter habits without competition or threats from the other cats. This also provides for a more gradual and cautious introduction of the kittens to the other cats.

What type of litter material should I use?

There are many types of litter materials available today. These include clay litter, fine "clumping" litter, plastic pearls, silica, recycled newspapers, wood shavings and many others. Some have materials added to control odor.

"Some studies have found that clumping litter may be preferable to more cats and that scented litter is aversive to some cats."

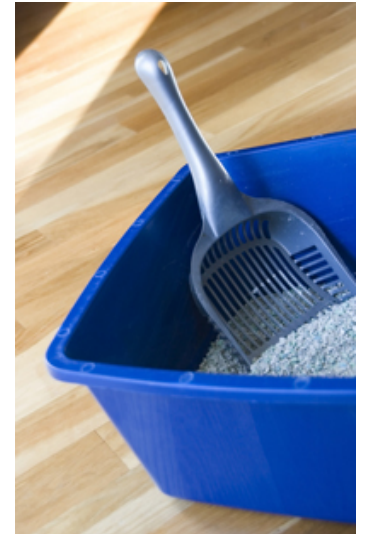
Some studies have found that clumping litter may be preferable to more cats, and that scented litter is aversive to some cats. Since kittens learn the appropriate places to eliminate by following cues from the queen, it may be helpful to continue using the same litter as used in the first home. Although the type you choose is up to you, you might wish to seek guidance as to which litter types are safest if you have a kitten that tends to eat litter (as some young kittens do).

What size and type of litter box should I buy?

Initially, the size of the litter box should be determined by the size of the kitten or cat. A very small kitten may need a box with shorter (lower) sides or a ramp for easier access. As the kitten grows, a larger box is generally more appropriate. Some owners prefer litter boxes with covers on them. This is acceptable if it is acceptable to the cat. You need to be sure that the cat can negotiate the opening by stepping into it and that the cat is not too large to fit into the opening. As the cat grows, ensure that the box still accommodates the cat's needs, increasing its size if necessary.

Where should I put the litter box?

The litter box should be placed in a location that is easily accessed by the cat, yet out of the way. Try to avoid congested household areas. The cat should have some privacy and quiet to eliminate. Laundry and furnace rooms are often used but be sure that noise associated with household machinery is not disruptive and aversive to your cat. Also make sure that the cat does not get locked out of the room at a time when it may have to eliminate. Try to put the litter box in an area that is convenient for you to check on and keep clean. Do not put food and water bowls immediately next to the litter box. If there are dogs in the home, then the litter box should be located where the cat can eliminate without being bothered by them.



How often should I clean the litter box?

One of the most important factors in ensuring continued litter box usage by house cats is cleanliness. Cats are very fastidious animals, and spend time each day making sure their coat, feet, and face are clean. One can assume that they would like a clean place to eliminate. The number of cats in the home and litter usage determines the time between litter cleaning. Fecal material should be removed after each bowel movement, if possible, and the box should be cleaned or scooped of urine wastes on a daily basis, regardless of the type of litter material. The entire contents of the litter box should be cleaned out weekly. Rinse the box with hot water and dry before replacing with new litter.

"Remember that each cat is an individual."

Some clumping litters form fairly hard clumps that are easy to scoop in their entirety and leave little residue behind. If you use one of these types of litter, you may only need to change the litter every few weeks; however, remember to refill the litter to maintain sufficient depth after each scooping. Remember that each cat is an individual. Your cat may like more frequent cleaning of the litter box to maintain good usage patterns. Some cats dislike the odor of the cleansers used to clean litter boxes, so rinse the box thoroughly after each cleaning with hot water. A number of products are self-cleaning and this can be particularly appealing to some cats. However some cats might be frightened of the motors and cleaning mechanisms in self-cleaning litter boxes.

How many litter boxes do I need in my home?

The number of litter boxes needed depends on the number of cats, the size of the home, the temperament of the cats, and whether there are other pets in the home. When there are multiple cats, multiple pans should be available in different locations, not all side-by-side in one place. Because there can be varied interactions between individuals, multiple boxes in multiple locations allow housemates to avoid one another if they so choose. Even for only one cat, two boxes may be appropriate depending on the layout of the home and the individual preferences of the cat. Some cats prefer one box for urine and one for stool. Older cats may have physical limitations that prevent them from climbing stairs easily and so a box in the location the cat frequents is needed. In general, there should be at least one litter box per cat; however, if soiling problems arise, most behaviorists advise one box per cat plus one more.

What if my kitten does not use the litter box?

Should the kitten begin to eliminate in locations other than its litter box, first review the steps above. Is the litter in an area that is appealing and easily accessed by the cat? Is the litter box being cleaned often enough? Are there enough litter boxes for the number of cats? Try and determine what is so appealing to your cat about the area that your cat is soiling. And, perhaps most importantly, is there anything about the area, box or litter that might be preventing its use (or scaring your cat)?

To determine the most appealing litter for your cat, offer two or more different litters in the same type of box, side-by-side and see which one, if any, the cat uses most frequently. Next, determine the type of litter box the cat prefers by offering two or more litter box types side-by-side (each with the preferred type of litter). You can determine the cat's preferred location by offering the preferred litter box with the preferred litter in two or more locations and determining which one, if any, the cat uses more frequently. If litter box problems persist, then additional guidance and perhaps a behavior consultation might be required.

If the cat lifts its tail and sprays urine onto vertical objects, then this is a marking behavior and would indicate that its time to consider neutering (if your cat is an intact male) or that an anxiety or territorial problem is emerging and professional guidance should be sought.

This client information sheet is based on material written by: Debra Horwitz, DVM, Diplomate ACVB & Gary Landsberg, DVM, Diplomate ACVB

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Using Reinforcement and Rewards to Train Your Pet

The best way to train your pet is through the proper use of positive reinforcement and rewards while simultaneously avoiding punishment. The goal of training is to “learn” the proper task and/or behavior. First, you must be able to get the pet to perform the desired behavior reliably. Then, add a cue or command prior to the behavior, so that it can be initiated by the command or cue alone. Of course, rewards can and should be given for any behaviors that are desirable, not just those associated with commands. Generally, the most difficult aspect of training is to find techniques that immediately get the desired response after each command. Before effective training can take place, you must first understand how pets learn and how to use rewards effectively to achieve desirable behaviors.

How does learning take place?

Learning occurs by establishing the relationship between behavior and consequences. There can be different possible outcomes of behavior, and consequences can be positive or negative. When there is a positive relationship between behavior and consequences, the more your pet performs a certain behavior, the more of the consequence it receives. If there is a negative relationship between behavior and outcome, then the more of the behavior the pet does, the less of the consequence it receives. When we increase a behavior by giving something positive, this is known as positive reinforcement. When we remove a stimulus to increase the behavior, this is known as negative reinforcement. A great deal of what a pet learns can be through negative reinforcement. For example, when a dog barks at an intruder (such as a mail carrier) the barking has been reinforced because the stimulus was removed (that is, the mail carrier left the property – the dog does not know that the mail carrier would have left anyway). Similarly, if growling or aggression leads to retreat of a person or another animal, then the growling or aggression has been reinforced. Negative reinforcement can also be used for training when a pull on a head halter or a spray of citronella is terminated as soon as the desirable behavior is observed.

What is positive reinforcement?

Positive reinforcement is anything that is added that increases the likelihood that a behavior will be repeated. There is a positive relationship between behavior and consequence. The more the pet does a behavior, the more consequence it receives and what it gets is good. This makes that behavior increase.

What kinds of things will a dog consider positive reinforcement?

This may differ from dog to dog and may vary with the time of day and between individuals. For some it may be a pat on the head, a play session, a fun toy, a walk, or a food treat. The key is to select the reward that motivates your dog. Petting and affection can be an excellent reward when the dog is in the mood for these interactions, but can be a punishment or source of fear and anxiety if the dog is not in the mood, or if the affection is being given by someone from whom the dog does not want attention.



"Cats can be trained with petting, play toys and food if we withhold these until such time as the pet is motivated."

To increase the motivation of a particular reward, it can be useful to wait until the dog appears to be in the mood for the reward, and can be further enhanced by withholding the reward. For example, if you feed your dog only one or two scheduled meals, then training sessions with food and treats should become most successful as the dog gets increasingly hungry and as meal time approaches. Most puppies can be motivated with pieces of food when hungry, but a different food or treat is often more appealing because of its novelty. In the same way, toys, play sessions and affection can be withheld until training time, so that the dog is “hungrier” for these rewards, and so that the dog learns what behaviors will be followed by rewards.

Similarly, cats can be trained with petting, play toys and food if we withhold these until such time as the cat is motivated.

The more predictable the rewards, the more likely it is that the pet will continue the behavior (see Using Predictable Rewards to Train Your Dog). On the other hand, if rewards are unpredictable (e.g., affection) the pet will not learn the desired response.

By the way, if there is no good reason to give your pet a treat, don't give one – it gives extra calories and accomplishes nothing. Consider that if these tidbits and biscuits were used as training rewards, you could motivate and train your pet to exhibit behaviors that you want him to learn by saving these rewards for the training you wish to accomplish. In fact, whenever you are giving your pet anything of value, make certain that it is preceded by a behavior that you wish to reinforce. Pets that are difficult to motivate may be hardest to train. Often these pets do better with small morsels of special treats such as hot dog or cheese, or with pieces of dog food sprinkled with flavoring such as powdered cheese.

How do I properly use positive reinforcement?



The proper use of positive reinforcement is more than just giving a treat or a pat on the head.

The timing of the reinforcement is very important. Remember, your pet is engaging in behaviors all the time. So, you need to be sure to reinforce the behavior that you want and not some other behavior. Therefore, closely associate the reinforcement with the behavior that you wish to increase. Reinforcement must immediately follow the behavior. If there is any delay, you run the risk of the pet engaging in another behavior while you are administering the reinforcement. One example is when you teach a dog to sit. You tell your dog to “sit,” and manipulate it into the position. If you are saying ‘good dog’ and giving a food treat as the dog stands up or begins to bark, you

will not have rewarded the sit. Instead, you may have rewarded the stand up, the bark or the sequence of sit-stand-bark. Another example is when you are house training your dog. You send your dog outdoors to eliminate and as soon as the dog is finished, you call the dog back into the house, dry her feet and give her a reward. What happened this time? You just rewarded your dog for coming back into the house and having her feet dried!

Should I reward my pet every time?

The frequency of reinforcement is important. The rate at which behavior is reinforced is called the “schedule.” There are several different schedules of reinforcement.

A. Continuous reinforcement: Every time your pet engages in a behavior, it is reinforced with a reward. While this may sound like a good idea, it is actually less than ideal. If you reward a behavior continuously, once you cease rewarding the behavior, it will often stop. Continuous reinforcement is useful when first teaching a new task, so that the animal learns the task that leads to a good outcome. In fact, for new tasks favored rewards, small reward jackpots or clicker training (see Clicker and Target Training) can be given the first few times, so that the pet quickly learns that these are very desirable behaviors.

B. Ratio or variable rate of reinforcement: The reinforcement does not come after each performance of the behavior but intermittently. This may mean that instead of a reward every time, the pet gets a reward every third time, then perhaps two in a row, then maybe not until the pet has performed the behavior five more times. What happens if you reward this way? Behavior tends to be stronger and last longer. This type of reinforcement is best instituted once the pet reliably knows the task you wish to teach and helps keep the pet responding at a high rate.

What type of reinforcement schedule works best for training?

Start training new commands or tasks with continuous reinforcement but switch to intermittent, variable rates as soon as your pet is responding consistently. When training pets, we often use favored rewards (or even clicker training - see Clicker and Target Training) continuously to achieve the behaviors that we want to train, and when the behavior is learned, we often switch to lesser rewards such as petting or praise, and only give a more favored reward intermittently.

What if my rewards are not working?

First, you may not be reinforcing the correct task. Remember the example of “sit” and “stand up.” Be sure that the timing of your reinforcement is correct (i.e., immediately after the behavior you wish to increase). Second, you may be phasing out your reinforcement before your pet has adequately learned the new behavior. Go back to basics and be sure your pet understands what you want it to do.

Until your dog consistently responds to the command when it is given the first time, it can be valuable to leave a leash attached so that you can immediately and gently show him what you want him to do. It is also possible that you may be repeating commands several times or in different ways, and thus confusing your pet. Another common problem occurs when you use food or toy lures to help achieve the initial behaviors. If you do not substitute a closed hand cue or move to a command, then the pet will respond to seeing the reward cue rather than the hand signal or the word.

What type of rewards should I use?

Rewards do not always have to be food. In fact, there are two forms of rewards. The first are the rewards that will motivate your dog, such as food, toys or treats, and the second are the times during the day when your dog solicits affection, attention, play, a walk or going outdoors.

"Rewards do not always have to be food."

For many dogs, owner attention, a walk in the park, or a game of fetch can be a reward. In fact, any time your dog is in the mood for some social interaction, and any time you are giving a toy, food or treat, you have the perfect opportunity to first train your dog to a command. If you do not keep track of when and where you give rewards, you may actually be reinforcing undesirable behavior (see below). What is important is that it be appropriate and motivating for your dog. Remember, you need not give a “special” reward such as food each time your dog performs a task, but always acknowledge good behavior, even if only with praise or affection.

If you use rewards other than food, you can both train your dog and ensure that you are not giving any extra calories. However, if you do use food for a reward, this is not a problem as long as you count the number of calories in your rewards, and reduce the food by an equal number of calories. Working for food is a form of social interaction as well as enrichment for your dog, so may actually be preferable to feeding all food out of a bowl (see Working for Food and Using Predictable Rewards to Train Your Dog).

Is there a wrong way to reward my dog?

Yes. We may reinforce behaviors that we do not want. Remember that positive reinforcement makes behavior increase.

There may be times when we are inadvertently giving reinforcement when the dog is exhibiting a behavior that is undesirable. Giving any form of attention to a barking dog, a dog that is jumping up, or a dog scratching at the back door only serves to reward the behavior. Sometimes people even give a bit of food, pat the dog, or play with it in an attempt to calm it down. What they are really doing however is reinforcing the problem behavior. Similarly, you may think that you are punishing your dog when you are indeed reinforcing behaviors. Examples include scolding your dog with an insufficiently harsh tone of voice, or gently pushing the dog away when it is play-biting. What is worse is that, when these behaviors are rewarded occasionally or intermittently, the behavior becomes stronger and lasts longer (see above). A reward should never be given unless it is earned.

What are other ways in which rewards can be used?

There are other situations where rewards can be most helpful. For example, it may help a puppy or even an adult dog to learn to accept new people if that greeting is always coupled with a food treat. This will help the dog learn that new people bring something good. In other cases, rewards can be used to encourage desirable behavior. Food-enhanced toys may encourage a dog to chew on them instead of the household possessions. Removal of a reward as soon as the dog exhibits undesirable behavior is another training tool known as negative punishment (e.g., stopping play when the dog bites too hard). In this example, withdrawal of the reward is used as a punishment and play biting should be reduced or cease since it leads to the reward being removed.

What type of rewards would I use for my cat?

Cats respond to training like dogs, however, they seem to need reinforcement at a higher rate than dogs to maintain performance. Food is often the best reinforcement for cats, but many will enjoy play sessions with favorite toys as well.

"Think of toys and snacks as rewards, not as treats."

Like dogs, small tidbits of human food or special cat treats with high appeal may be more motivating than regular food. Train your cat with these treats before meals, not after, and feed your cat on a meal schedule rather than free choice so that he is hungry at training times. Remember to think of toys and snacks as rewards, not as treats. It can be an extremely useful and fun exercise to train your cat to a few simple commands (come, sit, meal time). All it takes is to encourage the behavior (e.g., with a toy or food lure), reward the behavior, and once the cat will respond reliably, add a command. A leash and harness can also help to prompt the cat to get the desired response. These commands can come in very useful when you need to interact with your cat.

What is clicker training and how does it work?

A clicker or an audible tone (found on some remote collars) can be paired with a food reward by consistently sounding it just prior to giving the food, until it becomes a conditioned stimulus for food. The value of a clicker is that it can then be used as a reward to immediately mark correct responses in a convenient and precise manner, with the food being given shortly afterwards. Clickers then become the highest level of rewards for most dogs (see Clicker and Target Training).

What is target training and how does it work?

One common question is how to get a pet to display the behavior that we want to train (and reward). Target training can be a reliable method of achieving desirable outcomes. When an animal is trained to pay attention to a target, they will follow that target, allowing the handler to easily lure them into certain positions (e.g., sit) and to redirect their attention away from competing attractions.

How do I train commands?



Many people yell commands repeatedly at their pets in order to achieve compliance. In all pets, but especially those with behavioral problems, yelling or loud voices can increase arousal levels and/or aggravate anxiety – both of these consequences are counterproductive when you are trying to teach a pet to respond in a tranquil manner. Before giving a command, get the pet's attention by saying their name; then the command should be given in a gentle voice and there should be a pause to allow the pet to respond. Responses are rewarded. Non-response or undesirable behavior is not rewarded. If a dog has a head halter on, you may be able to gain compliance with some gentle pressure; if this is not possible, the situation needs to be changed so the pet can be compliant.

A dog that has anxiety or a competing undesirable response needs constant direction. When exposed to the provocative stimulus, the dog should stay engaged with the handler via a constant dialogue. For example, the handler can say "Sophie ... sit ... watch me ... stay ... watch me ... stay ... watch me." Success is unlikely if the dog is given a single verbal command such as "stay" and expected to hold that command for a prolonged period with the distraction present especially if such behavior has not been taught before.

How do I use rewards to train new behaviors?

As mentioned, when you are first establishing a new behavior, valuable rewards should be given every time for success.

When the new behavior is firmly established, the rewards can be intermittent. For pets that have particularly challenging behaviors and you are trying to change their response, consistent fabulous rewards or a handful of treats (jackpots) will need to be used for significant periods before moving to an intermittent reward schedule. Rewards should be given immediately after the task is completed. Praise should always be part of the reward package in addition to other rewards such as food treats. Always try to end a training session with success. If the pet performs the behavior perfectly, you can either stop training for the day or move on to some other form of training.

This client information sheet is based on material written by: Debra Horwitz, DVM, DACVB & Gary Landsberg, DVM, DACVB, DECAWBM

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Brushing Teeth in Cats

When should I brush my cat's teeth?

Like us, cats need daily dental care to help decrease plaque and tartar accumulation. Teaching your cat to accept the brushing of his teeth will take some training, but it will be relatively easy once accustomed to the process. Daily brushing is most beneficial and will help to establish a routine. Brushing twice a week is helpful if your schedule cannot accommodate daily brushing.

"It is best to teach your cat to accept brushing while he or she is still a kitten."

It is best to teach your cat to accept brushing while he or she is still a kitten. If you have an older cat, the process may take a little longer but it's worth the effort.

What steps do I need to follow to teach my cat to accept tooth brushing?

- Choose a quiet time and place to begin. Hold your cat securely in your lap or on a table.
- Dip a Q-tip applicator into tuna water that was stored in the refrigerator and drained from a can of tuna fish. The tuna water does not have any beneficial dental effects, but most cats like the taste.

"Human toothpaste should not be used as it is designed to foam, and is not meant to be swallowed."

- Place your cat's head at a 45 degree angle and gently pull back his lips. His mouth can be closed.



- Gently rub the applicator tip to the area where the gum meets the tooth. This is where plaque accumulates. Only the outside surfaces need to be rubbed.

"The cat's abrasive tongue tends to remove plaque from the inner surfaces of the teeth, reducing the need for brushing these surfaces."

- Do not worry about brushing the tips or insides of the teeth unless your cat is very cooperative. Most periodontal diseases occur on the outer surfaces of the teeth and this is where you should direct your efforts. The cat's abrasive tongue tends to remove plaque from the inner surfaces of the teeth, reducing the need for brushing these surfaces.



- Gradually work up to brushing all of the teeth (this will probably take several days or weeks). Make sure you reach the big teeth at the back of the mouth.



This client information sheet is based on material written by: Jan Bellows, DVM, Dipl. AVDC, ABVP

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Staying home alone

After interacting with your kitten on your turf, your scent will replace the smells associated with his old home and you will become his source of security. He will find comfort in having you around, but you can't always be with him so your kitty must learn to stay at home alone. Set up a safe and secure area where you can leave your kitten when you are not around to supervise.

This location should be large enough to accommodate a food bowl, water bowl, litter box, toys, and a resting area. Remember that cats prefer to have their food and water separated from the litter box, so designate a separate feeding area, litter box area, and resting/play area. Make sure the area is cat-proofed by removing things that may cause injury (sharp objects, string, electrical cords, rubber bands or other items that could be swallowed) and inspect the areas for nooks and crannies where a kitten might hide or get stuck. Cats are natural explorers and independent by nature, so most investigate and adjust to their safe haven readily.

Preventing problems before they start

The key to preventing behavior problems in kittens is to identify and provide appropriate outlets for all of their needs. This is especially important for indoor kittens since all of their playing, hunting, exploring, climbing, scratching, eliminating, and socializing will need to be channeled into acceptable indoor options.

Encouraging safe and appropriate play activities from the first day in your home will make life much more pleasant for you and your cat. Most of the physical activity of an outdoor cat is focused on the hunt. Indoor cats do not have to hunt for food, so interactive play that satisfies the hunting instinct makes for a happy cat. In fact, stalking and pouncing are important play behaviors in kittens that facilitate proper muscular development, so these activities should be encouraged within reason.

Provide predatory play sessions by playing together with wands, movable toys, or small lights. Chasing a toy attached to a wand or batting around a soft ball gives the cat needed outlet for his hunting instinct. The best toys are lightweight and movable. Avoid toys that are small enough to be swallowed and keep string and ribbon out of reach. These items can cause serious intestinal problems if they are swallowed.



Serving food inside foraging toys and hiding treats inside boxes or paper bags also piques a cat's interest in exploration (see Enrichment for Indoor Cats, Play and Play Toys, and Play and Investigative Behaviors).

In addition to play sessions with owners, highly social and playful cats may also benefit from having a second social and playful cat in the home provided a safe hierarchy has been established. In other words, all cats involved recognize the "top cat."

Cats climb trees in nature and lounge on the branches, so this instinct must be satisfied, too. Comfortable, accessible bedding in a quiet location will encourage the cat to sleep in his own quarters, but cats do like to sun themselves on the back of the best chair in the house.

"Safe climbing alternatives and scratching posts will help deter destruction of furniture."

Safe climbing alternatives and scratching posts will help deter destruction of furniture. One important rule of thumb is that each cat is different; you must choose the types of play and toys that are most appealing to your cat and most appropriate for your household. Try cat trees and scratching toys and posts with different types of materials and surfaces so you learn what your cat likes to climb and scratch. By providing a surface he likes and teaching him where it is appropriate to scratch, you can prevent inappropriate scratching before it begins.

What should I do if I have other pets?

Some kittens not only face a new home, they also face a new family that includes other pets as well as humans. Some kittens may show fear and defensive postures toward other pets in the home, but most young kittens are simply playful and inquisitive around other animals. In fact, existing pets that have an established territorial instinct for the home may pose more of an aggressive problem than the new kitty. If you know or suspect that your dog or cat might be aggressive toward the kitten, choreograph their introduction with safety in mind.

Keep your cat or dog on a leash or have someone hold them when introducing the new kitten. Allow the pets to explore each other and intervene only if you detect signs of impending aggression. Usually, gently correcting inappropriate behavior on the part of the new or existing pet and reinforcing desired responses will diffuse the situation, but be prepared to use the leash and retreat quickly if tensions escalate.

Planning ahead will make the introduction of the new kitten easier. Review training commands with your dog. Ask him to sit and stay if either he or the kitty becomes agitated during the introduction. Have him on a leash in case a hasty retreat is necessary. Resident cats may not respond to voice commands, but they can be placed on a leash/harness for quick avoidance of dangerous behavior.

The presence of other pets in the house makes confining the kitten to a restricted area even more important for two reasons. First, the kitten needs personal space where he feels safe and secure. Second, the new kitten should not intrude on the personal space already claimed by the existing pets. Feeding and sleeping should be in separate locations, at least for a while. With time, both the new kitten and your other pets will learn the other's behavior patterns and signals while developing mutual respect and trust. When this happens, anxiety levels are decreased on both sides. Until then, the new kitten needs a place to avoid confrontation by climbing or hiding to remove himself from the situation.

If the existing pet is an adult cat instead of a dog, there may not be as much difficulty for the new kitten. Most adult cats are fairly tolerant of kittens as long as their territory is respected and they don't feel neglected. It's important to spend quality time with both the new and the resident cat. In fact, during the transition period it is a good idea to spend *extra* time with the older cat. In addition to avoiding competition for attention, you must deter competition for food. If you follow the plan to provide the new cat with his own eating area, this should not be a problem, but monitor the older cat's bowl to ensure that the new kitty doesn't eat from it.

The introduction period will usually last one to two weeks and will have one of three possible outcomes:

- **The existing cat will remain hostile to the kitten.** This is an unlikely occurrence if competition for food and affection are minimized during the first few weeks.
- **The existing cat will only tolerate the kitten.** Hostility will cease, but the existing cat will act as if the kitten is not present. This is more likely if the existing cat is very independent, has been an only cat for several years, or if marked competition occurred during the first few weeks. This relationship may be permanent no matter how friendly the kitten is, but it is not usually harmful.
- **Bonding will occur between the existing cat and the kitten.** They will play together, groom each other, and sleep near each other. This is more likely to occur if competition is minimized and if the existing cat has been lonely for companionship.

How can I help my kitten enjoy physical contact?

Depending on his personality and early experiences as a kitten, your cat may either enjoy or dislike certain types of handling. In order for the cat to learn to accept and enjoy physical contact from people, it is critical that the human hand *only* be associated with positive experiences and that all physical punishment is avoided.

Begin with those types of handling that the cat enjoys like scratching him behind the ears. Speak to him in a kind voice while petting him. For reluctant cats, you may consider giving a treat during the petting sessions. This technique can be applied to other types of handling and can help the cat become accustomed to, and perhaps eventually enjoy, petting, grooming, teeth brushing, nail trimming, and even bathing.

How can I help my cat accept the carrier?

You probably got off to a good start with the pet carrier by following the recommendations for bringing your new kitty home. Continued crate training will come in handy over the kitty's lifetime. There will be trips to the veterinarian or vacation travel or times of home confinement (e.g. allergic guests, contractors coming and going, etc.) that require short stays inside the pet carrier.

To foster positive feelings about the pet carrier, start by leaving the carrier in the cat's feeding quarters with the door open. Place toys or his food bowl inside the carrier to entice him inside. A pleasant experience and the freedom to come and go as he pleases will give your cat a better view of the carrier.



"A pleasant experience and the freedom to come and go as he pleases will give your cat a better view of the carrier."

After he becomes comfortable entering and leaving the carrier of his own accord, close the door briefly while he is inside. Each time, try to leave the kitten in a bit longer before allowing him to exit. Contrary to your instincts, never allow the kitten out when he cries or scratches at the crate or he will associate those behaviors with escape. Instead, wait until the kitten is calm and quiet, praise him and allow him to exit.

Take a short car ride with the cat in the carrier with a destination other than the veterinary hospital. No need for the cat to always associate the carrier with medical care! With a little patience, you can help your cat regard the carrier as a safe haven rather than a prison. Feliway® might help some cats to more quickly adapt to their carrier (see Crate Training and Travel).

How do I deal with inappropriate behavior?

Cats can be demanding creatures so it's important to instill good manners early on. Inappropriate behavior such as swatting, excessive vocalization, and biting should not be tolerated. If your kitten begins to exhibit these behaviors, quickly and quietly leave the area and cease all interactions. Once the kitten is calm and quiet, resume interactions. The goal is for the kitten to learn that calm, quiet behavior warrants attention while aggressive actions do not. Make time daily for appropriate interactions with your cat that include play and petting.

Disciplining a young kitten may be necessary if its behavior towards people or property is inappropriate, but harsh punishment should be avoided. A sharp, "No!" may be all that is needed to stop your kitty in his tracks. However, remote punishment that associates the consequences with the *action* instead of the person is preferred. For most kittens, hand clapping or rattling a can of beans can divert attention and be intimidating enough to inhibit undesirable behavior when you are present.

How do I ensure that my cat is well socialized?

The prime socialization period for cats occurs between two and twelve weeks of age, so much of the cat's socialization will have taken place while he is still with his mother and siblings. During that time, the kitten is very impressionable. If he has good experiences with people, dogs, or other cats, he will likely continue to accept them. If he has no experience at all, or unpleasant experiences with any of them, he may become apprehensive or adverse to them. Therefore, during the period of socialization, we encourage you to expose your cat to as many types of social situations and influences as possible. Use positive reinforcement and make your kitty feel secure during the introduction of any new experience.

With a little work and patience, you will quickly become your new kitty's best friend and hopefully, you will gain a great friend, too.

This client information sheet is based on material written by: Debra Horwitz, DVM, DACVB, Gary Landsberg, DVM, DACVB, DECAWBM, & Lynn Buzhardt, DVM

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