

Fostering Under-Socialized Kittens:



Many kittens come to the shelter found outside, or lacking the socialization needed in their first few weeks. Signs of under-socialization in kittens are hissing, swatting, scratching, biting, attempting to run away/move away from human contact, or frozen in one place or refusing to come out.

Continuing Socialization in a Foster Home:

- Use a limited, confined space- a small, quiet room without lots of furniture. A bathroom is the best room in the house for a scared kitten.
- These kittens benefit from regular, focused attention throughout the day and a consistent home routine. Spend 15-30 minutes at a time sitting with and trying to engage the kitten with treats or toys.
- Provide a carrier (left open) or a box with a blanket draped over it for an accessible hiding place. Hiding is a coping strategy for scared kittens and cats. They need to feel safe in your home before they can improve. Be sure to refer back to the "Are You Prepared" page in your Foster Manual for how to kitten-proof a room.
- Move slowly and talk softly when approaching the foster kitten. Sit down on the ground as you move closer to them.
- When initiating contact, start trying to pet the kitten at the beginning of meal times so they are less likely to move away. Start petting them with one finger and start at the shoulder/head/chin area.
- Use toys to build confidence, for exercise and as a way to bond. Use interactive toys you can be a part of like dangle toys, wands, strings. Once the kitten is playing, this will help them to get used to human movement, and to associate you with something positive.
- Once playing, gradually introduce the kitten to more people one at a time over several days.
- Plan to spend 2-3 hours a day engaging with your foster kitten.

Do:

- Wait until your kitten room is set up before opening the carrier
- Give them time- days to weeks to settle and try various techniques or strategies.
- Leave soft music or the tv on low to let them adjust to noise for 1-2 hours at a time.
- Get the kitten used to being handled once they are approaching you.
- First offer food at the end of a chopstick or spoon so they are not overwhelmed by your touch.

Don't:

- Bring your under-socialized foster kitten to meet any of your current pets and family members on the first day.
- Open the carrier while inside the car.
- Give the kitten free rein of the house, or keep them in a high traffic area of the house, like a living room.
- Keep them in a crate.
- "Flood" them with interactions. Many people think that handling the kitten is desensitizing them. This is teaching the kitten "Learned Helplessness" and is not what we want for our kittens.

If you don't see improvement after one week, try these next steps and reach out to your Foster Care Coordinator:

- Try offering more canned food- the stinkier, the better. If still not taking the food from you or eating, try warming the food up in the microwave- this will make it more enticing. Make sure not to make it too hot!
- Try meat-flavored baby foods like ham, turkey or chicken, and cat liquid treat supplements like Delectables Bisque and Friskies Gravy Sensations- these are higher value treats and can be invaluable as enticements.
- Try hand feeding, or spoon feeding if they are still too nervous to approach or take treats from you.
- Utilize Feliway pheromone sprays or plug-ins- your Foster Care Coordinator can supply you with these per request.
- Provide a perch at least three feet off the ground- this can be a cat tower, a chair- anything the kitten can climb on to. Cats are natural tree dwellers, and this will help them to feel more comfortable.
- Try introducing any resident cats slowly- refer back to the "Intro to Other Pets" page in your foster manual- to see if the kitten will pick up on social cues from another confident, people-friendly cat.
- Many people think multiple fearful kittens in the same litter should be separated. NEAS does not advise this tactic as this causes more undo stress.

Progress will depend on many factors- some of which we as fosters can't control- past experiences, what the mother cat was like, how long the kittens were without human contact, and will take time and patience. Don't hesitate to reach out to the foster department with any concerns or for more tips.

