

Directions to Local Emergency Centers

If you have an emergency with your dog or cat after hours and we are not available, please go to the Veterinary Referral and Emergency Center in Norwalk, CT or the Cornell University Veterinary Specialists in Stamford, CT.

VREC

123 West Cedar Street
Norwalk, CT
203-854-9960

From I-95 South: Take Exit 14, at the end turn RIGHT onto route 1, at the next light turn LEFT (N. Taylor Avenue) go 1 block and turn LEFT onto West Cedar Street. VREC is immediately on your left.

From I-95 North: Take Exit 14, at the end of the ramp turn LEFT at stop sign continue to traffic light turn LEFT(Route 1) proceed to 2nd traffic light turn RIGHT(N. Taylor Avenue) take your first LEFT (West Cedar Street) and VREC is immediately on your left.

CUVS

880 Canal Street
Stamford, CT
203-595-2778

From I-95 South: Take Exit 7 – Atlantic Street. As you come down the exit ramp, proceed to the first light. Make a left at the light, onto Canal Street. Proceed on Canal Street 0.5 miles (past Fairway Market on right) to 880 Canal, which will be the last driveway on the left.

From I-95 North: Take Exit 8 - Atlantic Street. Move to the far right lane. At second light, make a right onto Canal Street. Proceed on Canal Street 0.5 miles (past Fairway Market on right) to 880 Canal, which will be the last driveway on the left.



51 Danbury Road
Wilton, Connecticut 06897
www.southwiltonvet.com
Email info@southwiltonvet.com
Tel 203 762 2002
Fax 203 834 9999

Welcome to South Wilton Veterinary Group!

We are very excited to have you join our growing practice.

Please take a moment to sort through this new client welcome folder we have prepared for you.

Many frequently asked questions may be answered as we have enclosed information on many important topics related to the proper care of your precious pet.

We have enclosed information on:

- Our Services and Doctors
- Preventative Health Care Recommendations
- Microchipping as Permanent Identification for Your Pet
- Emergency Care for Your Pet
- Veterinary Pet Insurance
- Referrals to Specialists in our Area
- Local Pet Service Recommendations
- Payment Options and Policies

If you have any questions after reviewing this material, feel free to contact us by phone (203-762-2002) or email (southwiltonvet@aol.com). You may also visit our website at www.southwiltonvet.com for further information and downloadable materials. The section entitled "Pet Education" contains many helpful handouts.

Sincerely,

The Doctors and Staff at South Wilton Veterinary Group



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Welcome to South Wilton Veterinary Group and congratulations on the addition of a kitten to your family. This handout is designed to educate you about the responsibilities that come with owning a new kitten. This handout is just an overview. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have!

Vaccinations

Kittens require 3 sets of booster vaccinations starting at about 8 weeks of age. We recommend the following protocol.

1. FVRCP (Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis Calici and Panleukopenia)

This vaccine helps prevent severe upper respiratory and intestinal viral infections. It is given to both indoor and outdoor cats once every year after the initial vaccine series is administered.

- 1st vaccine 8-9 weeks
- 2nd vaccine 11-12 weeks
- 3rd vaccine 14-15 weeks

2. FeLV (Feline Leukemia Vaccine)

This vaccine helps prevent feline leukemia virus infection which creates a potentially fatal immunodeficiency in most cats. There is no cure. Kittens must first have a blood test to determine whether or not they carry the virus before they can be vaccinated. The vaccine is given to cats who are directly exposed to other cats (i.e. outdoor cats) Your kitten's veterinarian will advise you if your cat needs this vaccine. After the vaccination series is given, it is then given once a year.

- 1st vaccine 11-12 weeks
- 2nd vaccine 14-15 weeks

3. Rabies Vaccine

This vaccine helps prevent the fatal viral disease spread by the saliva of infected animals, including most mammals and bats. This vaccine is required by CT state law for all cats.

- 1st vaccine 12 weeks
- 2nd vaccine 1 year
- 3rd vaccine Every year thereafter

Parasites

Kittens are common hosts to many parasites. We will test your pet for internal parasites by examining a fecal (poop) sample. This test can detect many of the common parasites, such as roundworms. A fecal exam should be performed annually for all indoor and outdoor cats. Intestinal parasites can cause weight loss, vomiting and diarrhea.

As it is so common for kittens to have parasites, all kittens are dewormed whether or not they show any symptoms. We do this because research shows a cat or dog with worms can spread up to 3 million eggs a day in the stool! Some of these fecal parasites are considered zoonotic, meaning they can possibly spread to humans. The elderly and children are most at risk. Occasionally, kittens can carry parasites that are not as common. These include coccidia and/or giardia and require specific treatment.

Parasites can also live on the skin such as fleas, ticks and mites. Your kitten will be examined thoroughly for these parasites. If they are found, you will receive specific information and treatments regimens.

Cats can also become infected with heartworms. Heartworms are carried by mosquitoes and are transmitted to the bloodstream via a mosquito bite. The adult parasites (worms) make themselves at home in the cat's heart and larger blood vessels. Although relatively uncommon, clinical signs include coughing, vomiting, weight loss and lethargy.

A heartworm preventative is available and is a good idea for cats who spend a majority of their time outdoors. It should be noted, however, that indoor cats are exposed to mosquitoes as well. Talk to your veterinarian if you feel your pet is at risk.

Other Possible Infections and Ailments

Upper Respiratory Infections (URI)

Kittens commonly suffer from upper respiratory infections that are mostly viral or bacterial. Common causes of these infections include Herpes virus, Calici virus, Chlamydia and Mycoplasma. Occasionally, cats can also contract Bordatella. The URI is spread quickly among kittens via sneezing or coughing. The FVRCP vaccine helps to prevent some forms of URI, however, kittens are often exposed prior to their first vaccination. They can also be exposed to other forms of the disease not included in the vaccine as there are different strains of the virus and may become sick. Treatment may

include oral antibiotics, eye medications, and antivirals. Chronic infections can develop without proper treatment.

Ringworm

Kittens and cats can be infected with ringworm, a fungal infection of the skin. Ringworm is usually found in cats that are in close quarters, for example, unkempt breeding facilities or pounds. Some breeds, Persians for example, are more susceptible to getting ringworm. All cats, however, can be carriers of this zoonotic (transferable to humans) disease. Some cats, however, show no symptoms. Treatment involves topical medications and sometimes oral medications and is often quite intensive.

Foreign Body Ingestion

Kittens are relatively playful and very commonly eat items they should not. Most often, these items include string, yarn, ribbon, tinsel and other similar, linear objects. It is best to keep any string-like object away from kittens and older cats as well. If your cat begins vomiting or having diarrhea it should be examined as quickly as possible. Occasionally, foreign materials require surgical removal.

Feeding

In the beginning, most kittens can be fed a high-quality kitten food. The food should be left out, free choice, with ample amounts of clean, fresh water. If the kitten is a glutton (eats any and all amounts of food in front of it), then it should be provided with water at all times and food twice daily. It is currently believed that wet (canned food) should be the mainstay of a cat's diet. We recommend one-hundred percent meat canned cat food.

Kittens should eat kitten food for 9-12 months, then gradually switch to an adult cat food. If the kitten is overweight, your veterinarian may recommend switching to an adult food earlier. Kittens do not need any additional supplements, however occasional treats are acceptable. Try to avoid table scraps and milk, as these can cause diarrhea in your kitten.

Declawing

The procedure of declawing a cat is a heavily debated topic. It is a decision that must be made by the owner after careful consideration of the benefits and the risks. The procedure is a sterile, surgical one, performed under general anesthesia. The surgery involves removing the last segment of each digit at the joint. The claw is completely removed this way and ensures that it will not regrow. Pain medication is administered to reduce discomfort. Kittens are usually declawed at the same time they are anesthetized for a spay or neuter procedure. Cats will stay in the hospital an additional day with special bandages on their paws to protect the surgical sites. After the recovery period, cats are sent home with the caregiver with specific follow-up instructions. There are alternatives to declawing, including routine nail trimmings, claw covers, and scratching posts. Feel free to ask for more information to help you in the decision-making process.

Indoor vs Outdoor Cats

This is another controversial topic due to the cat's predatory nature. Many songbird populations have been dramatically decreased due to cat attacks. If at all possible, we highly recommend you keep your cat indoors. Keeping cats indoors significantly decreases the risk of contagious infections, traumatic injury by cars or other animals and the loss of your pet's life. If your cat must go outside, we strongly recommend some form of identification be placed on your pet, preferably in the form of a microchip. The microchip is placed under the skin and can be scanned at most animal hospitals and shelters if your cat is lost or injured. We carry the Home Again microchip for this purpose.

Benefits of Spaying or Neutering Your Kitten

All cats, unless specifically designated as a breeding animal, should be spayed or neutered. There is no ethical or medical reason to "just have one litter" these days. Cat overpopulation is already reaching epidemic proportions. Spaying or neutering your cat not only helps control the pet population, but also provides significant medical benefits for your cat.

Female Cat Spay

Spaying or performing an ovariohysterectomy is the procedure for female cats. This is a surgical procedure done in a sterile environment, at about 6 months of age and prior to the first heat. The procedure involves general anesthesia and the removal of both ovaries and the uterus. Pre-anesthetic blood tests are highly recommended to evaluate the kitten's internal organ function prior to surgery to decrease surgical risks. Kittens usually spend one night in the hospital recovering after the procedure and are released from the hospital with follow-up instructions for the caregiver.

It is very important that the pet owner know that an unsplayed cat runs the risks of pregnancy, uterine infections, uterine cancer and mammary gland cancer.

Male Cat Neuter

Neutering or performing a surgical castration is the procedure for male cats. This is a surgical procedure, done in a sterile environment, at about 6 months of age before the male cat starts to spray or mark his territory with urine. The surgical procedure involves a short-acting anesthetic to facilitate the removal of the testes. Pre-anesthetic blood tests are highly recommended to evaluate the kitten's internal organ function prior to surgery to decrease surgical risks. Male cats usually do not need to spend the night in the hospital and typically go home later that same day with follow-up instructions for the caregiver.

It is important the pet owner must know that an unneutered cat runs the risk of spraying or marking territory with urine, excessive inter-cat aggression (cat fights), intense urine odor, and unwanted breeding and roaming of outdoor cats.



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Twice a Year for Life!

What is pet wellness?

The goal of a pet wellness program is to prevent or minimize disease or injury, improve your pet's quality of life, and help your pet enjoy a healthy life for as long as possible.

Your veterinarian will accomplish this in several ways:

- Routine health screenings
- Ongoing communication between you and your veterinarian
- Preserving the veterinarian-client-patient relationship

How often does your pet need a wellness exam?

- Like people, pets can benefit from routine wellness exams too. But with one important difference – pets age faster than people.
- Because dogs and cats age 7 times faster, on average, than people, significant health changes can occur in a short amount of time. And, the risks of cancer, diabetes, obesity, arthritis, heart disease, metabolic problems and other serious conditions all increase with age.
- Many pet owners are not aware that taking a dog or cat to the veterinarian once a year is the same as a person seeing their doctor or dentist every 7 years. We recommend that **ALL** pets have wellness exams every 6 months to detect, treat or, ideally, prevent problems before they become life threatening.

What is included in a wellness exam?

Here is a list of some of the most important health screenings for cats and dogs. We may recommend additional tests depending on your pet's health history and other factors.

- In adult dogs (1-6 years of age)
 - Immunizations
 - Parasite check
 - Heartworm check
 - Dental health
 - Blood panel (CBC)
 - Chemistry panel
 - Urinalysis

- Additional exams for senior dogs (7+ years)
Osteoarthritis check
Chest radiograph
Thyroid check
- We recommend **wellness exams** (evaluation of all body systems i.e. general appearance, musculoskeletal, respiratory, digestive, ears, eyes, circulatory) and **fecal exams** (to check for intestinal parasites) every six months.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT FEEDING YOUR NEW PUPPY OR KITTEN

What should I feed my new puppy and kitten?

General guidelines to consider:

1. Select a food appropriate for the breed and life stage of your animal. For example, small breed puppy food (as opposed to large breed adult dog food) or kitten food (as opposed to adult cat food).
2. Select a food with quality control. AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials) oversees the pet food industry. Make sure the food you select has a stamp of approval on the back of the bag. Check out www.aafco.org and acvn.org for more information.
3. Select a food that the puppy or kitten eats well and that does not cause digestive problems, such as vomiting or diarrhea.
4. Read the labels! Look for quality ingredients. Reading pet food labels is similar to reading human food labels. Look for meat as the primary ingredient without wheat, soy, or corn. For more information on interpreting pet food labels visit www.dogfoodproject.com or www.consumersearch.com/cat-food/review.
5. Look for a food with minimal processing, no dyes, preservatives, or chemicals.

Suggested Brands: EVO, BLUE BUFFALO, ORIGIN, WELLNESS, INNOVA, CALIFORNIA NATURAL, NEWMAN'S OWN

How much and how often should I feed my new puppy and kitten?

Puppies and kittens gain weight quickly on a weekly to biweekly basis due to growth spurts. As they grow, their caloric needs change. Every pet food contains a different caloric density. You, as the owner, need to adjust the amount of food eaten on a weekly to biweekly basis as your pet grows in order to meet your pet's changing needs. Please discuss optimal caloric requirements for your puppy or kitten with your veterinarian.

Since there is so much variation between each individual, even within the same species, learn to evaluate your pet's body condition. A body condition chart is enclosed to help guide you in the process (see below). While it is important to provide enough food for your young pet's caloric needs, be careful not to over feed puppies and kittens. Studies show pets that are overweight while young are typically overweight as adults.

We recommend feeding your puppy or kitten three times daily for the first few weeks. Make sure the puppy or kitten is eating and growing well and adjusting to the new household. Once the puppy or kitten is doing well, you may transition to a twice a day feeding schedule. Make food available for 15 to 30 minutes at meal times. After 30 minutes, remove the food until the next feeding time.

When do I need to change food choices for my new pet?

If you find a food that your pet eats well and does not cause gastrointestinal upset, do not change foods. Changing food can often result in gastrointestinal imbalances, such as vomiting and diarrhea, and encourage your pet to become picky with his/her food.

When you do need to change food, please transition gradually (over the course of a week) whenever possible.

We recommend transitioning your puppy or kitten to an appropriate adult formula when they have reached at least 90% of their adult size and weight. Since there is so much variation between each individual within the same species, the transition will vary. Provided below is a general guide on when puppies and kittens reach this point:

Kitten: 8-12 months of age

Small breed puppy: 8-12 months of age

Large breed puppy: 4-6 months of age

Giant breed puppy: 4-6 months of age

Useful Websites:

www.petobesityprevention.com

www.aafco.org

www.acvn.org

www.dogfoodproject.com

www.consumersearch.com/cat-food/review



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FELINE DISEASES

<p>Rabies: A fatal viral disease spread by the saliva of infected animals. This vaccine is required by CT state law. It can lead to: Temperament changes, inability to swallow and convulsions. Ultimately can be fatal. Can be transmitted to humans as well as animals.</p>	<p>Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis: A highly infectious upper respiratory disease. It can lead to: Fever, conjunctivitis, corneal ulcers, and sneezing.</p>
<p>Calicivirus: Upper respiratory virus which can also affect the eyes, musculoskeletal system and gastrointestinal tract. It can lead to: Lameness, fever, mild loss of appetite, pneumonia, and eye/nasal discharge.</p>	<p>Panleukopenia: “Feline Distemper”. Highly contagious viral disease of cats caused by the feline parvovirus. It can lead to: Depression, loss of appetite, high fever, lethargy, vomiting, severe diarrhea, dehydration or hanging over the water dish. Often fatal.</p>
<p>Feline Leukemia: Fatal disease that affects the immune system. It can lead to: Loss of appetite, fever, weight loss, chronic illness, enlarged lymph nodes, inflammation of gums, infections of skin, urinary bladder and upper respiratory tract.</p>	<p>Feline Immunodeficiency Virus: An infectious virus passed from infected cats through saliva and blood. It can lead to: inability of the immune system to fight infections and diseases; fever, enlarged lymph nodes, anorexia; weight loss; depression; stomatitis, or ulcers in the mouth; dermatitis, or skin disorders; conjunctivitis.</p>

About the Vaccines

Benefits of the vaccines: Vaccinations are the best way to protect against the diseases mentioned above. By vaccinating our pets, we are protecting our environment as well as our communities and also helping to reduce disease outbreaks and their effects in the broader animal population.

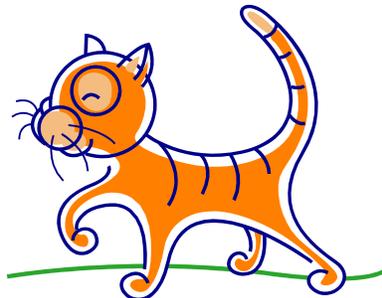
When should you start vaccinating your pet? Your kitten should get his first vaccination at about 8 weeks of age. Booster vaccines are given every 3 – 4 weeks until the kitten is at least 16 weeks of age. Your veterinarian will go over your kitten's tailored vaccination schedule with you.

Are there risks associated with vaccinations? Like any other medicine, vaccines carry a small degree of risk, but this must be weight against the risk of the disease.

- **Mild Problems:** Some animals have a systemic reaction, including a low-grade fever or muscle aches and pain. This reaction may cause them to eat less and sleep more for 24 – 48 hours.
- **Severe Problems:** Rarely, cats will have a more severe anaphylactic reaction characterized by hives, swelling of the face, vomiting or diarrhea. In extremely rare occasions, it may also lead to death.

What to do if there is a serious reaction:

- ❖ Call the office right away or bring your pet in immediately.
- ❖ Write down what happened and the time that it happened.
- ❖ If SWVG is not open contact Veterinary Referral Emergency Center in Norwalk – 203-854-9960 or Cornell University Veterinary Specialists in Stamford – 203 595-2778



Why Spay or Neuter Your Pet?

What do "spay" and "neuter" really mean?

Female dogs and cats are spayed by removing their reproductive organs, and male dogs and cats are neutered by removing their testicles. In both cases the operation is performed while the pet is under anesthesia. Depending on your pet's age, size, and health, he or she will stay at your veterinarian's office for a few hours or a few days. Depending upon the procedure, your pet may need stitches removed after a few days. Your veterinarian can fully explain spay and neuter procedures to you and discuss with you the best age at which to sterilize your pet.

Spaying or Neutering Is Good for Your Pet

- Spaying and neutering helps dogs and cats live longer, healthier lives.
- Spaying and neutering can eliminate or reduce the incidence of a number of health problems that can be very difficult or expensive to treat.
- Spaying eliminates the possibility of uterine or ovarian cancer and greatly reduces the incidence of breast cancer, particularly when your pet is spayed before her first estrous cycle.
- Neutering eliminates testicular cancer and decreases the incidence of prostate disease.

Spaying or Neutering Is Good for You

- Spaying and neutering makes pets better, more affectionate companions.
- Neutering cats makes them less likely to spray and mark territory.
- Spaying a dog or cat eliminates her heat cycle. Estrus lasts an average of six to 12 days, often twice a year, in dogs and an average of six to seven days, three or more times a year, in cats. Females in heat can cry incessantly, show nervous behavior, and attract unwanted male animals.
- Unsterilized animals often exhibit more behavior and temperament problems than do those who have been spayed or neutered.
- Spaying and neutering can make pets less likely to bite.
- Neutering makes pets less likely to roam the neighborhood, run away, or get into fights.

Spaying and Neutering Are Good for the Community

- Communities spend millions of dollars to control unwanted animals.
- Irresponsible breeding contributes to the problem of dog bites and attacks.
- Animal shelters are overburdened with surplus animals.
- Stray pets and homeless animals get into trash containers, defecate in public areas or on private lawns, and frighten or anger people who have no understanding of their misery or needs.
- Some stray animals also scare away or kill birds and wildlife.

Fix That Bunny!

When being conscientious about the pet overpopulation, don't forget to spay or neuter your pet rabbit. Altering rabbits can reduce hormone-driven behavior such as lunging, mounting, spraying, and boxing. Spaying females can prevent ovarian, mammary, and uterine cancers, which can be prevalent in mature does. Also, rabbits reproduce faster than dogs or cats and are the third-most surrendered animal to shelters.

Spay or neuter surgery carries a one-time cost that is relatively small when one considers its benefits. It's a small price to pay for the health of your pet and the prevention of more unwanted animals.

Consistency in the Family

Information provided by First Steps with Puppies and Kittens: A Practice-Team Approach to Behavior by Linda White, Edited by Evelyn Crawford, Veterinary Assistant and Reviewed by Dr. Diana Chang, VMD, South Wilton Veterinary Group

It is important for your entire family to work as a team to successfully train your new pet. Your puppy/kitten will need to learn the meaning of your words, the rules in your home, and your expectations of him or her. You will confuse your puppy/kitten if words, rules, and expectations are inconsistent from one family member to another.

Children can be great little trainers. It is recommended they be at least three years of age to help with training. Children should be supervised during training sessions. Pets and children should never be left alone unsupervised.

Since puppies do like to chew and kittens like to sharpen their claws, discuss these natural behaviors of puppies/kittens with your children before their favorite toys are chewed, clothing is ruined, and various other problems occur. Let your children know that cruelty (actions such as shocking, hitting, shaking, pulling ears, pulling tails, grabbing, or rubbing the pet's nose in feces) will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Many times children don't even realize that what they are doing is cruel to the animal. In addition to children, babies and toddlers should never be left alone with your pet or even with your most trusted adult dog, unsupervised.

Puppies and kittens have some basic needs—physically, mentally, and emotionally. They need to eat on a regular schedule (consult your veterinarian) and require access to clean, fresh water. Puppies need to relieve themselves frequently as well as nap many times throughout the day. Playtime, rest, and exercise are all important to young dogs or cats.

Puppies and kittens should have a safe, comfortable place to go when they are not being supervised. Ideally, puppies/kittens should be socialized a few minutes each day, and they should be trained for 5 to 10 minutes at a time. This time can be gradually increased as the pet gets older. Each training session should remain short to make it easy for the puppy/kitten to pay attention, but more sessions can be added throughout the day.

To care for your pet and to maintain consistency while training, develop an action plan for your family. Adults should be actively involved in supervising the following activities. Consider these questions when developing your plan:

- Who will feed the puppy/kitten and when?
- Who will keep the water bowl clean and filled with fresh water?
- Who will be in charge of the puppy's/kitten's bedding to make sure it is clean?
- What training techniques will you use for housetraining? Crate training? Litter training?
- Who will be in charge of training the puppy/kitten in these areas?
- Who will socialize the puppy/kitten to different people, places, and things? How often and when?
- Who will play with the puppy/kitten? How often and when?
- Who will take the puppy for a walk? How often and when?
- Who will brush the puppy/kitten? How often and when?
- Who will trim the puppy's/kitten's nails?
- Who will brush the puppy's/kitten's teeth? How often and when?
- Who will supervise the puppy when not in his/her crate? How long and when?

Develop a chart outlining everyone's duties. Have each family member check off their chores as they are accomplished daily and continue this for a three-month period.

Give your puppy or kitten room to make mistakes. Being overly demanding and short tempered can have long term negative consequences on the behavior and enjoyment of your pet over its lifetime.

Always be consistent. If your pet is not allowed to do something today by one person and then allowed to do the same thing tomorrow with someone else, the pet will become confused with the mixed signals. This can even happen with the same person from one day to the next! Mixed signals can confuse your pet and lengthen the time it takes for puppies and kittens to learn what is right, wrong, acceptable, and not acceptable.

Puppies and kittens can express their confusion by being overly excited, fearful, shy, timid, or aggressive. In many cases, you may see a combination of behavior problems occurring.

This does not have to happen. Your pet is constantly learning, and every waking hour to them is a learning experience. With time, patience, and training consistency, your pet will become a successful member of your family. End all training sessions on a positive note. If the puppy/kitten is having difficulty learning a new cue, stop before you both get bored or frustrated and ask the pet to do something he/she is very good at, such as asking him to sit. Mark and reward this behavior and end the training session.

Families that work together as a team can be great trainers. Keep the same message every time (be consistent). If more than one family member is training, all family members should train the exact same way. Introduce variations into your training (different locations, different people, and distractions) gradually.

It does not matter what you are trying to teach your pet, just be consistent. If you are training a puppy to do his business outside, then take the puppy out the same door every time. If you want your puppy to be quiet while in his/her crate, don't open the door to the crate when the puppy is barking to be let out. If you do not want your kitten scratching or biting at your hands, never use your hands to play with your kitten. Use an appropriate cat toy instead. Reward the behaviors you want in a consistent manner.

Some people get upset with an animal because they think the puppy/kitten knows what they want. They call their pet hardheaded, or stubborn, or they say their pet has selective hearing. This can happen when you think the pet knows what the word "sit" means. You taught *sit* in the kitchen to receive meals, and now you are outside and the puppy/kitten just will not listen to you. It is not because the puppy/kitten did not hear you, nor does the pet have selective hearing. It is because your puppy/kitten really does not know what "sit" means outside.

Dogs and cats do not generalize very well—they learn in context. That means the puppy/kitten has to be taught *sit* in many different places for the first few times, and if possible with different family members. Once he/she understands *sit* in various places with different people, the puppy/kitten now understands that "sit" means put its rear end on the floor whenever it hears that word.



Training Principles

Information provided by First Steps with Puppies and Kittens: A Practice-Team Approach to Behavior by Linda White, Edited by Evelyn Crawford, Veterinary Assistant and Reviewed by Dr. Diana Chang, VMD, South Wilton Veterinary Group

What you allow today, your puppy/kitten will try again tomorrow. In many cases, this will be a good thing.

To the same effect, what you ignore today, your pet will learn to stop doing in the future. Your pet will try the same behavior many times until he/she realizes that the behavior is not going to be rewarded. When the animal makes that connection, the behavior will stop. Puppies, kittens, and children are always testing their boundaries.

Here are two simple rules to follow as your pet is learning the do's and do not's about his/her new home:

- Behaviors that are rewarded will increase in frequency, intensity, and duration.
- Behaviors that are ignored (not rewarded) will diminish in time, frequency, and duration.

If you like a behavior your puppy or kitten is exhibiting, give it a name and then mark and reward it. If you do not like the behavior the pet is displaying, walk away, look away, isolate him, or ignore him; do not scold, reason, or talk to him. Just ignore him when possible and walk away. This will ensure he is not rewarded for poor behavior, positively or negatively. However, do not ignore him or walk away if he is doing something that could hurt him or someone else.

The most important thing your puppy wants is your attention. Kittens are a bit more aloof, but they still enjoy getting attention. As far as your pet is concerned, whether you are scolding, pushing, pulling, or yelling, it is still attention. When you pay attention to your pet with words, pets, toys, or treats, he/she will want to perform more of those behaviors because he/she gets your attention. Making a short, sharp sound with a can or plastic bottle with coins in it, clapping your hands together, or a loud word such as "off" will interrupt the pet's behavior. When the puppy/kitten stops the inappropriate behavior, remember to mark and reward him.

You will want to make some decisions in regard to the training methods everyone in your household will use. Harsh corrections are no longer considered productive when training animals. Besides, your new family member deserves more respect than that.

For any type of training to be successful, everyone must use the same training methods. When different family members use their own style while training, the pet will only get confused and you will be setting your pet up for failure.

Although done differently, every puppy and kitten needs and deserves appropriate playtime and an opportunity to burn off excess energy every day. People who give their animals the exercise and playtime they so desperately need while young will find training will go much faster and easier than for animals who do not receive these opportunities.

Puppies and kittens who receive consistent guidelines and daily opportunities for exercise and play will become wonderful family members. Training, patience, consistency, and love are the keys. Consider your baby pet your newest savings account. What you put in today, you will get back in the future with interest (a well-behaved and trained pet for perhaps the next 10, 15, or 20 years).

Marking the Correct Behavior

Like most animals, one of the ways your dog learns is by associating things that happen at the same time. For reward-based training to work, the reward must be given as soon as the desired behavior is offered. This should happen within a half second from when the puppy offers the desired behavior. This is not always possible, however, unless your puppy is right by your side. To get around this problem, you can create a temporary substitute for the reward that becomes associated with the concept that a reward will come shortly. This learning process is called associative or classical conditioning. The temporary reward substitutes are called a mark (or a bridge).

A mark can be any word or other type of signal, just as long as it is used consistently. For example, you could use the word "yes" or a click from a clicker as a mark. You may choose to use another

word, but it must always be the same word. In time, your puppy/kitten will begin to associate that something good is going to happen when he/she hears the word “yes,” the click from the clicker, or whatever other word you have decided to constantly use.

Timing and consistency in all training are very important. The mark should happen the moment the desired behavior happens. It is important to follow up the mark quickly with the reinforcement reward (treat, pet, or play).

Turning Lures into Rewards

A lure is something you use to guide your pet into a behavior. A reward is something your pet receives after he/she offers a behavior. The most commonly used lures and rewards are food treats, although toys can be effective.

The lure is used to coax an animal into a behavior you want him/her to do. It physically guides the animal into the desired position, such as a *sit* or a *down*. You can use a lure to entice your pet to *come* when he/she is called by showing him/her the treat.

A reward just seems to “magically” appear when the pet offers a desired behavior. This differs from a lure in that your animal may anticipate a reward, but does not know for sure if there is one or when it will appear. If you have a visible reward in your hand, he will learn to offer the desired behavior only when you have the reward in your hand. In some situations, rewards may be visible, but they are not used as lures. A perfect example would be playing fetch with a dog. The dog sits, and then you throw the ball.

At first the reward may be food treats, as most puppies and kittens are motivated by food; however, the reward can be play, a favorite toy, or an ear scratch. Whatever motivates your animal most will work as a reward. Rewards work only if the reward being used is important to the animal. You will want to take some time to learn what motivates your pet.

When training your animal, you must determine what he/she loves and likes. Training treats are not meant to be meals. Always use tiny pieces of food so that your puppy/kitten does not fill up on them. Training treats should be low-fat and may include small, healthy commercial treats or tiny pieces of cheese, liver, chicken, fish, chicken hot dogs, or beef. Training toys for puppies to be used as rewards can be squeaky toys, tennis balls, a Frisbee, or any toy your puppy really enjoys. Training toys for kittens can be dancing feathers or tassels, catnip, a soft mouse, or other animated objects.

Offering your pet his/her normal mealtime kibble is okay if you are asking for an easy behavior without distractions. In many cases, though, kibble will not be enough to motivate your pet if there are distractions present.

Once your animal understands the cue you are requesting, treats should be used intermittently and unpredictably. One time you may reward with one tiny treat, another time two, then you may give an ear scratch or you may choose to use a favorite toy as the reward. The most important thing you can do is to keep your animal guessing.

When your pet goes from the lure to the reward for the first time or two, it is time to introduce him/her to a jackpot. A jackpot is a super-reward for doing something outstanding, such as many treats given for one behavior. For example, when your animal figures out that the cue *sit* means “butt on floor” without being lured into the position with a treat, that is a big accomplishment, and your pet deserves a big reward. Instead of one or two little treats, give him/her a handful of treats, such as five or six treats, one after the other, until your pet has received all of them.

Sometimes people get confused when training with food rewards. Their concern is that if the animal does not see the reward, they will not give the desired behavior. This is true only when you forget to turn the lure into a reward. See the following two examples.

Example: Using a Lure

Say you want to train your animal to *sit* on cue. Show your pet the lure/treat in your hand while he/she is standing.

Place your hand with the treat in it right above his nose and slowly move your hand with the treat in it over his head to a position just a hair above his nose. As you slowly move over the nose toward his head, his head will tilt upward to follow the treat until the only way he can keep an eye on that tasty treat is to put his butt on the floor. You have just lured him/her into a *sit*. Once the pet sits, mark (a word like “yes” or a click from your clicker) and reward him/her for giving you the behavior you requested.

Example: Combining Lures and Rewards to Train a Common Behavior

As in the example above, use a lure to begin training the *sit* command. You will want to begin associating a mark with the reinforcement (treat). When the animal's butt hits the floor, mark the behavior (sitting) with a word such as "yes" or use a clicker, if you prefer. Once you have marked the desired behavior, quickly give the animal the treat. Repeat this exercise 15 to 20 times over three or four days.

Once the animal is performing the intended behavior consistently, it is time to add the word "sit." The reason you wait to introduce the verbal cue is because he/she knows what is expected (sitting). Now is the time to associate a cue with the behavior. When you lure the pet into the behavior, say the word "sit" the second the animal's butt touches the floor. As soon as the behavior is completed, mark and reward your pet. Repeat this exercise seven or eight times a day (for 10-15 seconds) over the next couple of days, or until you are sure your pet is getting the idea; then it is time to replace the lure with a reward.

Keep the treat you are using as a reward out of the animal's sight this time, but have it available quickly when you get the correct behavior. Using your hand the same way (but without a treat), give your pet the verbal cue "sit" and wait for him/her to think through your request. Do not repeat the cue. Give your pet a few seconds to figure out your request. The second his/her butt hits the ground, mark the behavior with a "yes" or click and quickly give the pet a jackpot (many tiny rewards) to reward a great job.

Now that your pet understands the *sit* cue, you no longer need to use the food as a lure to coax him/her into sitting from standing. Instead, you give the verbal cue "sit," butt hits floor, and you immediately mark that *sit* with "yes" or a click from your clicker to let the animal know he/she has done exactly what you wanted, and then you reinforce the correct behavior with a treat as a reward. The reward reinforces the desired behavior.

Rewards Schedule

When you begin training your puppy/kitten, one very important piece of the training is a reward schedule. A reward schedule refers to how many and how often your pet will receive treats from you. The concept of a reward schedule is to keep your animal interested and guessing about what he/she may or may not receive when offering the requested behavior.

This schedule will start off very basic and then vary as the requested tasks become more difficult, other family members begin to train him, and distractions are added to the training schedule.

Good trainers are quick, both in marking the correct behavior and rewarding it. They are generous, yet unpredictable, with their rewards. They are unpredictable by changing the number, type, and even how often they use different rewards. This scheme will keep your animal guessing, make it fun, and keep your pet's attention focused on you.



Training Methods

Information provided by *First Steps with Puppies and Kittens: A Practice-Team Approach to Behavior* by Linda White, Edited by Evelyn Crawford, Veterinary Assistant and Reviewed by Dr. Diana Chang, VMD, South Wilton Veterinary Group

There are four basic training methods often used in training animals. Decide which method you want to use with your newest family member. Here is a little information about each method to help you decide.

Verbal Training

Verbal training consists of saying a word such as “yes” whenever your puppy/kitten does what is expected. Coupled with a reward, this reinforces the behavior that you want. Perfect timing is not necessary since the animal can also pick up on the emotional content of the mark (“yes” in a happy voice). For example, if you give the cue “sit,” when the puppy’s rear hits the floor, you mark it with “yes” (happy voice) and give the puppy a reward.

Target Training

Target training involves an object that your pet learns to touch with his/her nose. Once the pet touches the target from a short distance, he/she can learn to touch the target from a greater distance.

This method of training is great for getting a puppy or kitten from point A to point B without pulling or having to drag the pet into a position. Targeting can also be helpful in training a pet to do tricks.

To begin target training for larger breeds of dogs, use the palm of your hand as a target. Place the palm of your hand in front of the puppy’s nose. Say the word “target,” and wait for your puppy to lean forward and touch your hand. The second your puppy leans forward and touches the palm of your open hand with his/her nose, mark the behavior (the puppy touched your hand) and give him/her a treat to reinforce the behavior the puppy just gave you.

With smaller-breed puppies and kittens, you can use a targeting stick or an old wooden spoon. Take a piece of colored tape or use a marker and draw a line around the spot on the stick or spoon you want the pet to touch. Place the stick or spoon an inch in front of the animal’s nose. The second the puppy/kitten touches the targeting stick or spoon, mark and reward your pet.

If your pet does not reach out to touch the object, try rubbing a little cheese, chicken, or fish on your hand or on the targeting stick. This will usually get the animal’s attention. Repeat the above exercise with the new smell on the object.

Once your animal consistently touches the object when you say the word “target,” extend the distance between the animal and the target or your hand. Remember, every time you ask the pet to *target*, it is your job to mark and reward when he/she demonstrates the desired behavior.

Continue to gradually extend the distance until the puppy/kitten will walk around in a circle or across the room to *target* the targeting stick or your hand when asked to do so.

Clicker Training

Clicker training is similar to using verbal training, but instead of using your voice, you use your clicker. A small click from the clicker can be used to mark a requested behavior or to form more complicated behaviors. Timing in this method is extremely important. It requires the trainer (you) to click the moment the animal performs the desired behavior; for example, the second your puppy’s rear hits the floor when training the *sit* cue.

Before training your animal, train yourself to properly administer the timing of the clicker. Hold a tennis ball in one hand and the clicker in the other. Bounce the tennis ball, and the moment the ball hits the floor, click. Your click should be made at the exact moment the ball hits the floor. You may need to practice a few times to get your timing correct.

If you think you and your pet would enjoy clicker training, then by all means, give it a try. Clickers are available at most pet stores.

Hand Signals

Hand signals can be used as a replacement for verbal training. It is most commonly used when training a deaf animal, when training from a distance, in competitions, or just for fun. There are many different hand signals you can use in training. What they look like can be left up to you unless you are planning to compete in an obedience ring with your pet.



Training Sessions

Information provided by First Steps with Puppies and Kittens: A Practice-Team Approach to Behavior by Linda White, Edited by Evelyn Crawford, Veterinary Assistant and Reviewed by Dr. Diana Chang, VMD, South Wilton Veterinary Group

Training sessions should be short, lasting only five to ten minutes. By keeping the lessons short, you will be able to work with your young puppy's/kitten's attention span and fit the training into your hectic schedule. Later, as your puppy/kitten gets older and the animal's attention span increases, you can increase the length of the training sessions.

That does not mean, however, that a one-hour puppy or kitten class is not a great idea. In fact, these classes are a wonderful learning experience for both you and your pet. When you start a training session, it is important to be relaxed and pay attention to your animal. Begin training in a quiet place where there are no distractions. As the animal becomes successful in learning a new behavior and all family members can get the pet to perform the desired behaviors on cue, then you can begin adding distractions.

Distractions

As distractions are added to the training sessions, reward levels should be increased based on the level of distraction. For example, suppose you ask your puppy to *stay* and introduce a ball on the floor. At first, just ask your puppy to *stay* for a few seconds, then reward and release him/her from the cue. Instead of a regular treat, this time your pet might get a tiny piece of chicken! Wow, that really makes staying still worthwhile because he/she just got a great reward!

When training *stay*, gradually increase the length of time you ask the pet to *stay*. Once he/she has learned to *stay* for 60 seconds, you can introduce a distraction. This could be a ball rolling on the floor in front of the pet or an animated toy on the floor nearby. If the pet holds the *stay*, give him/her two, three, or four tiny pieces of meat or fish and then release him/her from the *stay*. This way, as cues become more difficult, the animal is willing to do its best in hopes of receiving that great reward for its efforts.

Treats

In the beginning, every time your puppy/kitten performs a desired behavior, reward him/her with a food treat. In order to give the animal a food treat that he/she will consider a reward, you need to understand what foods your pet likes and is willing to work for. Different treats will obviously have different values for your animal. Cooked chicken, chicken hot dogs, freeze-dried shrimp, or liver would be a better motivator than normal kibble. Learn what motivates your pet. As a general rule, you would use "normal" rewards for normal performance and save the "high-value" rewards for higher levels of performance. Mix them up a little from time to time so that your puppy/kitten never quite knows what reward he/she may get.

You can try offering a piece of kibble as a reward if the pet is hungry, there are no distractions, and you are asking for an easy cue such as *sit*. If kibble does not interest your pet, you may want to find another treat he/she is willing to work for. It may also be helpful to schedule your training sessions before mealtime, so you will know the pet is hungry.

Today, there are many healthy treats on the market to choose from. Look for treats that can be broken into many small pieces and that do not crumble on the floor when you break them up. When you drop tiny crumbs on the floor while breaking up the treats, your pet especially will be more interested in hovering (playing vacuum) than paying attention to you. Test a variety of treats until you find the ones that motivate your animal. Only use healthy, low-fat treats and never use candy as a reward for your puppy/kitten because many kinds of candy are poisonous to pets.

Once your puppy/kitten is capable of performing a particular behavior on cue, you can start varying the rewards. You may offer one treat when your pet gives you the desired behavior, and the next time offer two. Or, you may give your pet one treat the first time he/she gives you a requested behavior and

then an ear scratch the second time. Remember to keep the treats out of sight once you are past the luring stage in training a desired behavior.

Involving the Family

In order for your puppy/kitten to respond to all family members, everyone should take turns in training. This is a great time to introduce different levels of rewards, meaning treats that your animal places a higher value on. For example, an adult who spends a good amount of time with the pet might get by with just pieces of kibble as rewards. A three-year-old might need more interesting treats such as a small piece of chicken or shrimp to help the animal pay attention, so the child can see positive results from his/her training sessions. At the same time, you want the puppy/kitten to stay focused on the child.

Children should train the puppy/kitten the same way adults do, with short lessons, varying the rewards, and always ending a session on a positive note. Children should never be left unsupervised with a puppy/kitten or even an adult animal. This is when so many accidents happen. Constant supervision will ensure the safety of both the child and the animal.

Evolving

As your puppy/kitten's training request becomes more challenging, more interesting rewards should be offered. As time goes on and the animal becomes more proficient at accomplishing his/her tasks, rewards should become more varied and valuable. You can increase or decrease those rewards, depending on the puppy's/kitten's consistency and response time.

Remember to always end a training session on a positive note. If you are asking for a new behavior from your puppy/kitten and he/she is having a difficult time with it, go back to something your pet understands so you both can be successful before you end your session. Make your training sessions *fun* for both you and your animal. Your pet will learn to look forward to each session, and you can both continue to learn and have great fun in the process.



Introducing Your Kitten to Your Home

Information provided by First Steps with Puppies and Kittens: A Practice-Team Approach to Behavior by Linda White, Edited by Evelyn Crawford, Veterinary Assistant and Reviewed by Dr. Diana Chang, VMD, South Wilton Veterinary Group

When you first bring your kitten home, you need to take steps to make the adjustment easier on both you and your kitten. A new place is scary for your kitten, so remember to take each step slowly and work at your kitten's pace. Whether your home houses other animals or not, you should introduce your kitten to one room at first, then add another, and so on. The same holds true for new people and objects. Introducing a kitten to new environments and people is a process that should be done gradually.

When bringing your kitten into your home for the first time, she should be in a carrying case. Before you bring her into her room, you should kitten-proof it; do not leave small objects lying around. Cats are very curious animals, and if there are small objects around for the kitten to play with or chew on, in many cases she will. Anything that is in the room that dangles or hangs should also be adjusted so the kitten cannot reach it. In addition, set the room up with a litter box, food, water, and one or two toys to investigate. Bring her into the room while still in her carrier. For now, the door to the carrier should remain closed for about a half hour. At this point, you simply leave your kitten alone. Any family member who wants to stay with her can, but they must speak softly to the kitten and sit still.

In about a half hour, you should check on your kitten. If she is meowing or near the front of her carrier asking to be let out, you can do so in this one room. Make sure someone sits with her quietly and gives her the time and space she needs to be comfortable with her new surroundings. Open the door to the carrier and let her come out on her own. Keep an eye on her but do not interact with her unless she initiates it by coming over to you. Make sure you keep the door to the room shut; once she decides to come out of the carrier, she may enjoy exploring her new environment or try to hide somewhere you cannot reach her.

Over the next few days, leave the kitten in her new room and make frequent visits to play and pet her if she will allow it. Give her time to investigate you and come to you on her own. Make sure the room you leave her in has been kitten-proofed so she cannot get hurt or in trouble.

When your kitten begins to cry when you leave her alone, it is time to open the door of the room to which she has been confined. Make sure other doors throughout your home are closed. You will want to give her time to get used to different areas in your home slowly. Let her come out of the room on her own.



Introducing Your Kitten to Other Pets

Information provided by First Steps with Puppies and Kittens: A Practice-Team Approach to Behavior by Linda White, Edited by Evelyn Crawford, Veterinary Assistant and Reviewed by Dr. Diana Chang, VMD, South Wilton Veterinary Group

Around the third or fourth day after you bring your kitten home and she is comfortable with the first room you gave her, put the kitten into her carrier and bring her into the family room or other room where your family spends time together. If you have more than one pet, introduce the other pets to the kitten while she is still in her carrier, one at a time. Let one pet out to sniff and look at the new family member. Stay with your pets and supervise their behavior. At first, most kittens will exhibit anxious behavior with the new animal. Give both animals time to look at and watch each other. If after a half hour or so the kitten is still in the back of her carrier, take her back into the original room, where she is already comfortable. If the other pet is a dog and making noises (for example, barking) toward the kitten, ask him to settle down and be quiet. When he does, mark and reward his quiet behavior.

Kittens can be somewhat skittish, especially when they have not had socialization opportunities. Loud noises, such as hearing a dog bark for the first time, can be frightening to your kitten. Dogs do bark at strangers, especially if they have not had socialization opportunities with cats prior to the new kitten. Your dog may get excited when meeting this new friend, and he could scare the kitten unintentionally. Do not scold your dog for barking; ask for quiet instead. If you would like information on how to train your dog to be quiet on cue, please let us know.

If your dog can settle down, then let the two animals look at and smell each other while the kitten is in her carrier until your dog gets bored with the new kitten and lies down or walks away.

If your kitten is being introduced to an older cat in your home, do the same thing. Let the resident cat check out the kitten, if she will, and make sure to give the older cat lots of attention. In many cases, the resident cat will snub the new kitten or hiss at her. This is because another feline has infiltrated her territory. Within a few weeks, this snubbing and hissing behavior generally dwindles and eventually ceases. In some cases, however, this behavior lessens but still continues. It may help to hold your older cat and give her lots of additional attention. This should help to stop the jealousy issues some cats have when a new kitten is brought into the home. Sometimes your older cat will never accept the new kitten. Your older cat will, however, learn to tolerate the new kitten, even if she does not like her. Give your resident cat lots of attention to reassure her she is still top cat in the house.

For the first encounter with the other pet(s), five to ten minutes is enough time together for introductions. Depending on how the animals react to one another, only one minute may be enough time. Watch the interaction, and if either pet becomes too aroused or concerned, put the kitten back in her room and close the door. You can try the introductions again later that day or the next. If the first introduction went well, repeat the exercise a few more times the first day.

The next step is to bring your kitten into the room with the other animal present and open the door to her carrier. Make sure there are places for your kitten to hide if she feels threatened. Again, allow only one resident pet to meet her at any given time. Supervise both of them closely. The kitten should be allowed to come out of hiding in her own time. This may take a while, so you will need some patience. Remember to not scold or reprimand your dog for barking. Being escorted out of the room and not being able to stay with you is reprimand enough.

Repeat this introduction exercise with all family pets, one at a time, until they begin to get comfortable with one another. In time, many will become great friends and even share mealtimes together. Once all the pets have had many opportunities to check out their new family member, it is time to allow more than one resident pet at a time with the kitten in the room.

At first, with two resident pets checking her out, the kitten will most likely be afraid and hide. If the other two pets are dogs, ask them to be quiet and settle down. If the dogs do not quiet down, take them out of the room. Repeat this exercise later in the day until the dogs can be quiet when they are with the kitten. When introducing your kitten to other resident cats, the same supervision is needed. Again, cats can be very territorial animals. Keep this in mind because your other cats may snub and/or terrorize your new

kitten. If you can let them work this out on their own, it will be easier for both of them. However, if you feel one animal is in danger, your intervention may be necessary.

Depending on the animals' reactions to each other, the introductions can take a few hours or as long as a few weeks. This is the most important time for all the animals. They will all need time to adjust to each other, and that time should be given.

When introducing any other animal, follow the same set of guidelines. When raised together, many animals can learn to be friendly with one another. However, it is important to note that some animals may not get along. For example, if you have a pet bird, you should not leave your bird and your kitten together unsupervised. Cats are predatory animals and instinctively they will most likely try to eat your bird. However, sometimes even the most unusual relationships can be formed for a lifelong friendship.



Counter and Table Surfing

Information provided by First Steps with Puppies and Kittens: A Practice-Team Approach to Behavior by Linda White, Edited by Evelyn Crawford, Veterinary Assistant and Reviewed by Dr. Diana Chang, VMD, South Wilton Veterinary Group

Kittens are very curious animals. When something on a table looks interesting to them, they will want to go see what it is. These objects can include photo frames, candles, coasters, vases, or anything new to the kitten. For a kitten, all of these objects are possible play toys. Kittens like to jump up onto surfaces; this is part of their play drive, and an inherent instinct in kittens.

Most kittens enjoy keeping an eye on their territory from a high point in a room. One of the easiest ways to address this behavior is to use a cat tree or climber that allows your kitten to find a vantage point higher than the countertop so she can be above her territory. Putting a little catnip on the tree will entice her to climb the tree to the highest vantage point. If higher than your countertops, she will develop a preference for the tree. Place the cat tree in a location where she can see inside and outside if possible.

Some ways you can interrupt the counter and table surfing behavior are listed here:

- Make a loud noise, such as a clap or a snap.
- Use a spray water bottle. Spray the kitten when she jumps up. Make sure the kitten associates the spray with the act of jumping up and does not associate it with you. (Spray and then hide the bottle.)
- Remove any items your kitten is intrigued with from countertops or tables.
- Use heavier items that are not easily knocked over to decorate countertops.
- Consider using something to put under the item so it sticks to the countertop.
- Use a training device such as a Scraminal.®



Knocking Things Over

Information provided by First Steps with Puppies and Kittens: A Practice-Team Approach to Behavior by Linda White, Edited by Evelyn Crawford, Veterinary Assistant and Reviewed by Dr. Diana Chang, VMD, South Wilton Veterinary Group

A kitten will sooner or later knock over and break something of value. In most cases, this is not an accident. Some kittens will actually stretch out their front paws to knock things over. It may seem like a strange thing to do; however, this is due to the kitten's curiosity and play drive. Kittens when left alone for extended periods of time will look for something to entertain themselves. One of the things they may do is knock things over. This is not done out of spite; it is the result of the kitten being bored. Kittens do enjoy company, and when left alone for extended periods of time, they simply get bored.

Here are some suggestions for addressing this behavior:

- Kitten-proof your home. Put items away so the kitten does not have anything to knock over.
- Offer the kitten a cat tree and place it by a window. Put the cat tree in a location that gives her an excellent high view of her territory. Rubbing a little catnip on the tree will pique her curiosity and she will investigate it. Soon she will begin marking it to make the tree her very own by rubbing on it, scratching it, and laying on it.
- Keep fragile items in a place the kitten cannot reach.
- If the kitten knocks items over only when left alone, take short trips out of the house. When you return, if she has not knocked items over, give her lots of attention and tell her what a good kitty she is. Gradually extend the length of time you leave her alone, ignoring her when she has knocked items over and giving her lots of attention and praise when she does not.
- Offer the kitten a different toy to play with and to entertain herself with when you are leaving the house. Toys filled with treats are great fun and stimulate kittens. Figuring out how to get the treats out of the toy is both entertaining and stimulating. When your kitten has toys that stimulate and entertain her, she has less reason to look for items in your home to knock over.
- When the kitten knocks items over when you are home, you can use a spray bottle and spray her, but only if you can catch her in the act of knocking items over. Or you can snub her and walk away. Do not give her any attention for at least 10 minutes. When using a spray bottle, it is important that the kitten is conditioned to the spray being bad and does not associate it with you, so hide the bottle the second after you spray her.
- If you have decorative items you want to leave out, consider getting some glue dots to stick under your decorative items to keep them in place even if she does try to knock them over.
- It is a good idea to consider heavier items for decoration purposes. The heavier the items are, the more difficult it will be for her to knock them over.
- Spend time interacting with your kitten. She needs and enjoys your attention.
- Provide play periods with family members; the kitten needs her locomotive and predatory play drive needs met.

Litter Box Troubleshooting

Information provided by First Steps with Puppies and Kittens: A Practice-Team Approach to Behavior by Linda White, Edited by Evelyn Crawford, Veterinary Assistant and Reviewed by Dr. Diana Chang, VMD, South Wilton Veterinary Group

Kittens do not usually have to be trained to use a litter box once they know where it is and, of course, if it is in a convenient yet somewhat private location. However, there are some cases in which a kitten will not use the litter box. If the kitten is eliminating inappropriately, there is probably a preference problem. In these cases, some of the tips given below may help to determine the kitten's preferences. Wait a week or two between each change to allow the kitten to make a choice and show her preference.

You can try using a different litter. Some kittens prefer litters that clump because they are softer. When trying out a new litter, it is important that you get another litter box identical to the one you already have. Put the same amount of the current litter in one box and the new litter in the other box. Let the kitten make her own decision. Try this for two weeks before making a final decision on which litter your kitten prefers.

Try changing the amount of litter you put in the box. Some kittens prefer a lot of litter (four to six inches), and others prefer little to none. Try adjusting the level of litter over a week or two. Start off with just an inch or so of litter in one box and no litter in another. Over the next week, gradually increase the amount of litter you put in her box.

If you have more than one cat, get separate litter boxes for each plus one extra. Cats often do not like sharing their litter boxes.

You can also try to slowly change the box's location, little by little. It should be placed somewhere that is easily accessible for your kitten, offers escape routes, and is quiet and private because cats do enjoy their privacy.

Make sure to clean the litter box on a regular basis. Kittens do not like dirty litter boxes or dirty litter. Scoop the box out a few times a day and wash the litter box at least once a month. If urine or feces gets stuck to the box, the box should be washed immediately.

Check whether the litter box is large enough for your cat. Many commercial litter boxes are not big enough for many cats. If you think this could be a concern, consider a larger plastic container for the cat to eliminate in. A good general rule for litter box size is three times the length of your cat from nose to tail. Plastic storage boxes that are designed to go under a bed make excellent litter boxes. They are usually long enough for most cats and low enough for easy entry and exit.

Be sure the litter box offers an easy entrance and exit for your cat. If it does not, you may want to open up the side further or consider a new box.

When you first bring your kitten home, you should keep her in one room. This room should contain her litter box. As you gradually introduce your kitten to more areas of your house, the litter box can be moved with her. When she has access to the full house, you can move the litter box slowly, a foot or so every day until it has reached its new location.

If you have a large home, consider getting multiple litter boxes. Again, place these in areas where they are easily accessible and provide privacy and escape routes.

You can also begin to reward your kitten's good behavior! Pay close attention to your kitten. When she uses her litter box, give her a treat! This may help her want to use her box more frequently and stop the inappropriate elimination.

Any recent changes in lifestyle or home surroundings may cause your cat to suddenly stop using her litter box as well. Cats are very sensitive to any sort of change, and this may be the root of the problem. Sometimes simply moving furniture around is enough of a disturbance for a kitten to stop using her litter box. If you have moved furniture around, make sure your kitten knows where her litter box is and give her lots of assurance that everything is okay. This is, in fact, a great time to introduce a new litter box and reward her when she does use her new litter box.



Playing Safely with Your Kitten

Information provided by First Steps with Puppies and Kittens: A Practice-Team Approach to Behavior by Linda White, Edited by Evelyn Crawford, Veterinary Assistant and Reviewed by Dr. Diana Chang, VMD, South Wilton Veterinary Group

Learning to play safely with your kitten entails paying close attention to what you are doing as a kitten parent. Cats have a tendency to be full of energy one minute and napping the next. Think of the term “catnap.” We use this to describe a short and quick nap. The reason it is called catnap is because cats do this repeatedly throughout the day.

When your new kitten has overcome her initial fear of being in her new home, it is important for you to understand that she will start displaying her curiosity through energetic exploring. To help her display this energy in a positive way, you need to play with her. It is your job to help her get her mental and physical exercise needs met.

Kittens basically have two modes of play: predatory and locomotive. Predatory play includes behaviors such as pouncing, grabbing, chasing, and throwing things in the air. Locomotive play includes behaviors such as running, climbing, leaping, and finding places the kitten can go into and come out of quickly, such as a paper bag or a box.

To play safely with your kitten, give her toys that stimulate both modes of play. For predatory play, balls, fake mice (especially those that make noise), and laser pointers are excellent suggestions. Keep in mind, however, that you do not want to get any objects small enough that your kitten can swallow them. Objects with feathers, although fun for your cat, will end up in pieces around your house. Kittens enjoy tinsel toys too, but they should be offered only during supervised playtime. For locomotive play, one suggestion is to get a cat climber. These come in many different sizes and types. They can be used not only as a place to climb and run through but also as a scratching post or a place to sleep. You can also have a cat tree for your kitten to climb on, scratch, and lay down on so she can oversee her territory.

Social play is great for your kitten, too. However, never use your feet or hands as play objects with a cat. Your kitten cannot tell the difference between your appendages and his toy mouse if both are being presented as toys!

Social play is interaction between your kitten and people or other animals within the household. This type of play is important not only for getting along with the family members, but also if you want your kitten to be comfortable around guests in your house.



Pouncing On Legs

Information provided by First Steps with Puppies and Kittens: A Practice-Team Approach to Behavior by Linda White, Edited by Evelyn Crawford, Veterinary Assistant and Reviewed by Dr. Diana Chang, VMD, South Wilton Veterinary Group

Some kittens like to pounce on legs or toes when people walk by them. This is part of kittens' normal predatory play drive, but can still be very annoying. Some kittens will do this to let you know they want to be played with. Either way, you do not want to reward this behavior with your attention. Yelling at her or caressing her is still attention and, to a large extent, both are exactly what she wants—your attention. This is one way the kitten can tell you she needs some interactive playtime with you or with some toys. Kittens love to pounce on things; it is their predatory play drive in action. Toys such as a laser light she can chase around the room and then pounce on when it is hovering in one spot allows her to complete her predatory play drive. If she does not receive this kind of playtime, you are leaving it up to her to find something to pounce on, such as your legs. Contrary to popular belief, kittens do need interactive time with their families. They do not enjoy being left alone all the time. They need love, socialization, and playtime with all family members.

Here are some ways you can address the pouncing behavior:

- Make a loud noise to startle her (e.g., clap, snap, shake a plastic bottle with coins in it, or make a loud sound such as saying the word “Ouch” in a loud voice) and walk away from the kitten.
- Catch the kitten letting you walk by her and not pouncing on you, and mark and reward her gentle behavior with a nice long pet, treats, or your attention.
- When you can see that the kitten is getting ready to pounce on you, quickly get up and walk out of the room while completely ignoring her. Later, when she allows you to walk by without pouncing, give her lots of love and special attention. This is a perfect time to play with her, using a toy she can pounce on to get her predatory needs met while she is being a good girl.
- Use treats, circular touches, or simply your attention as the reward for good behavior.
- Enrich the kitten's environment by offering a more interesting variety of toys to stimulate her mentally. If she is bored, she might think your legs are the only toys available to her.
- Exchange the kitten's toys frequently. Offer one toy at a time for a few days and then put that toy away and offer her another toy. When you exchange her toys, they will stay interesting to her. If toys are all left out all the time, she will become bored with all of them. In many cases, when kittens offer inappropriate behaviors, it is because they are bored.



Scratching and Biting

Information provided by First Steps with Puppies and Kittens: A Practice-Team Approach to Behavior by Linda White, Edited by Evelyn Crawford, Veterinary Assistant and Reviewed by Dr. Diana Chang, VMD, South Wilton Veterinary Group

Scratching and biting are part of how a cat not only defends herself, but how she plays. In you use your hands to play with your kitten, she will scratch and bite them in time. She will not understand that scratching and biting you in an inappropriate behavior; after all, that is how she naturally plays with other kittens. If your kitten ever scratches or bites you, all attention and play must stop. The kitten will eventually learn that when she scratches or bites, she receives no attention and any playtime is over.

Kittens and adult cats know when their claws are out or in, so scratching you is never an accident. When the kitten scratches anyone, all attention stops and she must be ignored. Your kitten is also aware when she bites; this, too, is not an accident. Some cats bite as a way of showing affection; however, this is still not good behavior. Whether she bites hard or soft, all attention stops and you should walk away.

Among the ways you can address this behavior are the following suggestions:

- When you are playing with the kitten and she bites, the play stops immediately and you walk away from her. It is important to be consistent. Do not one time disallow the biting, and the next time allow it because she bit gently. Only you can make the decision on whether you want the biting to stop or continue. If you are grooming her and she bites you, you may have hurt her unintentionally and the bite was her way of saying stop. Place your thumb under her muzzle and place the rest of your fingers on her head with one hand. With the other hand just brush her once or twice gently and let go. If you stop grooming her the minute she bites you, you are sending her a clear message that you will stop whatever you are doing if she bites you. When you control her head for just five seconds and do one or two soft brushes and then stop and let her go, in time she will learn biting does not work. If you believe your kitten is being very aggressive with you, then share that with your veterinarian.
- When your kitten scratches you, all attention to her must stop. If you are playing with her and she scratches you, it was not an accident. Kittens and adult cats know when their claws are in or out. If you were scratched, it was on purpose. You may want to get a few different scratching posts for her. Kittens have preferences as to what they scratch on, and cats throughout their life will need to scratch. Have a few different scratching posts scattered throughout your home. When she does scratch you, it is important that you ignore her and walk away. Over time, she will stop scratching you and limit her scratching to her scratching pads or posts.
- When the kitten scratches you, you can make a loud sound, such as clapping your hand together or saying “ouch” in a loud voice, to interrupt her, then walk away. This will startle her, and cats do not like to be startled. Ignore her for a few minutes to let her know you do not like when she scratches you.
- Never use your hands or feet to play with your kitten. If you do, you are offering her your skin to bite and scratch, as a play toy. Only use safe cat toys to play with your kitten.

