

## Steps to Tame Feral Kittens



### Definition of a Feral Cat/Kitten:

A feral cat is an unsocialized cat who has either never had any physical contact with humans, or human contact has diminished over enough time that they are no longer accustomed to it. While they are socialized to their feline family members and bonded to each other, they do not have that same relationship with people.

A lot of feral cats are fearful of people and are not likely to become a lap cat or enjoy living indoors with people, however kittens (especially under 4 months) can become very socialized with time and patience to help them get over their fear.

### Step 1: Seclusion and Confinement

- Select a quiet room and set up a large pet carrier with a litter box, food and water bowls and comfortable bedding in which to confine the kittens. Arrange the litter box and bowls so they are within easy reach for cleaning and refilling.
- Allow the kittens strict “chill out” time to acclimate to their new surroundings without intrusion or disturbance. Check to be sure they are eating and using their litter box, but otherwise do not disturb them for 1-2 days.

### Step 2: Handling and Hand Feeding

- On the second or third day of confinement, begin handling sessions 3-4 times daily, or more often if possible. Wear protective gloves and use a towel to pick up each kitten. Start with the one that seems the least reactive and the most likely to accept handling. When one kitten exhibits a stressful response, their behavior can negatively impact the responses of the others. Likewise, some kittens may become less reactive as they observe calm and soothing handling of their littermates.

- Be sure to approach the kittens slowly—they will be less likely to react when movements are slow and deliberate. Securely wrap and fold the towel around the kitten’s body and limbs, leaving only the head exposed. Holding the kitten so that her head is facing away from the handler will enable her to feel less threatened, making her less likely to struggle or fight to escape. Approaching from the back, carefully attempt to gently touch and rub the top of the kitten’s head. Talk in a soothing tone. Put baby food on a small spatula and hand feed it to the kitten.
- In general, the more often the kittens are handled, the more quickly they will be tamed. Eventually, progress to stroking the kitten’s body during handling sessions.

### **Step 3: Ensuring and Continuing Progress**

- Expect to see progress over the next several days. Kittens should begin to relax upon handling and may even begin to greet the caregiver at the front of the carrier. When the kittens are readily accepting handling and greeting caregivers, they can be released in a small room, such as a bathroom. Prior to their release, the room should be “kitten proofed”. This should include putting away anything that could be broken or damaged or otherwise be harmful to the kittens, securely blocking off any places into which the kittens could crawl and, in the case of a bathroom, closing the toilet lid. Regular handling and feeding sessions should continue, and the kittens should be encouraged to interact with the handler via toys such as feathers or wands. Play is a very important part of ensuring social bonding.
- It is not uncommon for one or more kittens in a litter to progress more slowly than the others. They may resist handling and remain frightened, reactive or aggressive. In this case, solitary confinement can be extremely helpful. Without littermates for social companionship, the kitten will be more willing to interact with a human caregiver. This will greatly facilitate the taming process and can produce dramatic results.

### **Step 4: Continuing Socialization**

- Ensure that the kitten’s world does not “get too big, too fast”. This is crucial to prevent the development of fear, which could hamper the taming process. If allowed too much room in which to explore too quickly, kittens may become stressed and overwhelmed, ultimately seeking a hiding place. They may be difficult to find and even more difficult to catch or retrieve, which in turn further induces stress and can compromise the progress they have made.
- As kittens progress, it is important to introduce different handlers—they need a healthy daily dose of positive attention from different human caregivers and reasonable amounts of exposure to the sights and sounds of household activities in order to become properly socialized pets.
- If adopted to a new home, new owners must take special care to introduce their new kitten very slowly into the new household. Confinement should be used to ensure the kitten continues to feel secure. Once the kitten is actively seeking to be let out of their carrier or small room, they are usually ready to venture forth.

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