



Cats are not small fluffy dogs that miaow! They are a totally different species with their own particular instincts and needs. Cats are natural hunters and tend to be very much more independent compared to dogs. They can enjoy human companionship, but generally on their own terms. However they still need their owners to spend as much time as possible with them, especially in the important first few weeks of life, as well-socialised kittens are much more likely to grow into happy, confident cats.

Socialisation

Socialisation can be fun, as the hunting instinct is strong and can be utilised in play.

Ideally a new kitten should already be friendly and outgoing, but the owner should continue to get the kitten used to a variety of situations and individuals on a daily basis, ensuring, of course, that each encounter is a pleasant one!

New encounters should be supervised, and, if the kitten becomes anxious, it should be given a place where it can hide, or a space to where it can retreat. Kittens are curious and will soon investigate again.

Ideally kittens should meet adults and children of all ages. It is important to wait for the kitten to approach before gently stroking it. If it is too nervous to approach, eye contact should be avoided, as cats interpret direct eye contact as confrontational.

Cats have an amazingly strong sense of smell, and we can utilise this by introducing a kitten to cloths that have been hung in various places, or have been held in contact with another individual.

Learning that other animals, such as dogs, are a normal part of life, is also important, although any dogs introduced to the kitten must obviously be very good with cats!

Cat Behaviour & Training

Handling your cat

Once your kitten is happy to be handled, get it used to being groomed and examined. Try to make examination of ears, eyes, mouth, and tail part of a game. If tooth brushing is practiced from a young age, this too becomes easier when it is important later on.

Getting your kitten used to a carrier when very young is helpful, and short car rides can be a good idea.

Scratching

Kittens can be easily amused with boxes and toys. If occupied in this way they are less likely to scratch at the furniture. However they will need to scratch something at times. Commercially produced scratching posts or large tree branches can be used. Branches from apple trees are good as they are not poisonous, but be sure no insecticide has been used.

House Training

House training is not usually difficult with kittens. They are generally happy to use a litter tray from the start, and if required to use the garden, this can be encouraged later by the use of earth in the tray, and by moving the tray nearer to the back door.

Training

Cats can be trained very successfully, although they may not always seem as eager to please as dogs! Clicker training can work very well, as can an immediate stroke or encouraging voice.

Scolding has little effect on cats, while the classic dog discouragement of ignoring offenders is unlikely to be noticed, let alone have any influence on their actions. A water pistol is usually far more effective if inappropriate behaviour needs to be addressed, as the cat will be deterred without being frightened.

As with any species, the response of the owner should be immediate and consistent if the animal is expected to learn.

KEY POINTS

- Well socialised kittens become well adjusted cats
- Frequently handle and groom your kitten
- Don't try to dominate cats, it just makes them nervous