

TAMING SHY OR FERAL KITTENS

THE TAMING PROCESS

Taming shy or feral kittens can take anywhere between two and six weeks or longer, depending on their age and state of wildness. Kittens are individuals whose temperaments vary greatly, even within the same litter. **Taming a shy or feral kitten requires patience, commitment, and lots of love, but the process can be tremendously rewarding.**

The steps involved in the taming process are listed below:

Containment in a cage or large pet carrier.

Transfer your kitten to a cage or a pet carrier large enough for a small litter box and bedding. Place the kittens' new home in a small room away from pets and children. **DO NOT** attempt to handle the kitten for the first two days as he/she learns to feel safe. Visit him/her frequently and talk quietly, but resist touching him/her. Always move slowly around him/her.

Food and water should be placed in the cage or carrier, along with a small litter box or pan. Many cages have food and water bowls attached to the doors, so that you can feed and water the kitten without placing your hands inside the carrier.

Another method is to place the kitten in a small room, such as a bathroom, in the carrier. Put the litter box in the room and leave the carrier door open so that the kitten has access to the box. Remove toxic cleaners, put the toilet seat down, and otherwise kitten proof the room as needed.

Remember to give the kitten a place they can hide. An overturned box with a small entrance can provide a safe retreat.

HELPFUL HINTS: Don't leave a shy or feral kitten in quiet isolation for long periods of time. Let them hear human voices, televisions, and the normal clatter of your household. Walk by your kitten's carrier or room often, and talk to him/her whenever you get the chance during the taming process. You can continue to help your feral kitten adjust to domesticity while you are gone for a few hours- just leave a radio or stereo on and treat your kitten to soothing classical or soft pop music.

Use some of your worn clothing as bedding for kittens. This will help them get used to your scent.

Periodic and brief handling with a protective towel.

After two days, place a towel over the kitten, and pick him/her up in the towel. If the kitten stays calm, pet her gently on the head from behind. Don't approach him/her from the front; a hand coming directly toward the kitten will frighten it.

If the kitten remains calm, grip him/her by the nape of the neck, put the towel on your lap, and set the kitten on the towel. Talk gently and stroke his/her body briefly, then release him/her.

After handling, reward the kitten with a treat she can lick off a spoon, such as a tiny

amount of canned kitten food. Repeat this process often—hand-feeding food is an excellent way to bond with your kitten and speed up taming.

Begin to brush your kitten with a soft pet brush to mimic a mother cat's grooming, and work your way up to using a flea comb. Talk to her often. The attention will give your kitten a feeling of well being, and she will begin to transfer her need for maternal love to you.

Do not stare at your kitten for any length of time. Cats consider this to be a form of aggressive body language. Instead, avert your eyes and lower your head often to signal submissive, friendly behavior.

You can begin to play with your kitten now. Choose "kitten tease" toys or other lightweight cat toys, but be sure not to give string toys with a shy or feral kitten, or any kitten, as they may try to eat the string while you are gone.

Containment in a small room.

If your kitten has made considerable progress within a week, she should be allowed access to a small room and should be placed in the cage only if needed.

A large room may overwhelm a timid kitten and increase his/her fear level. For example, bedrooms may not be a good choice if the kitten hides under the bed and you have difficulty reaching her.

In fact, the tiny places and spaces a kitten can wedge into in any room will amaze you. Think like a kitten by getting down on its level; then kitten-proof his/her quarters as much as possible. Resist the impulse to chase him/her if it begins to head somewhere you don't want it to go. Chasing will reinforce the kittens already ingrained urge to run from you. Even very tame kittens can develop the habit of fleeing from the people they love if they are chased during the training period.

Exposure to other people.

When the kitten no longer responds by scratching or biting, you can encourage friends to handle them frequently. Shy or feral cats tend to bond with one person, so it is a good idea to socialize them with other people and children who are willing to handle the kitten quietly.

Placement in suitable adoptive homes.

The most suitable home is a calm environment in which the kitten will feel safe and secure. A perfect home for shy kittens is two shy kittens kept indoors.

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