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indyhumane: caring for kittens handbook
bottle babies

It is critical to get unweaned orphaned puppies and kittens into foster care as soon as possible. They can typically be weaned around 3-4 weeks old. Until then they are considered bottle babies and require extensive around the clock care.

supplies

Below are the supplies recommended for caring for bottle babies. If registered for the foster to surrender program, you will be provided with any supplies needed.

basic supply list for neonates

- Bottles & Nipples
- Syringes
- Formula
- Pedialyte
- Karo Syrup
- Dawn Dish Soap
- Scale
- Thermometer & Lubricant
- Baby Wipes
- Rubbing Alcohol
- Flea Comb
- Wash Cloths
- Gloves
- Canned Food
- Food Trays
- Tracking Sheet
- Handouts

All of these supplies will be provided in the “Baby Bag” that goes home with every neonatal foster. Please return bag and all supplies once weaned.

tips & tricks

- Never lay animal on their back to be bottle fed, always keep upright
- Only give formula specific for species
- Call Foster Care Manager immediately if any issues arise including weight loss, lack of appetite, or extreme lethargy
- Normal temperature for neonate is 100-102.5 F
- If kitten is not latching at first try brushing them with a tooth brush or petting them to stimulate their appetite, this mimics mom licking them!
Proper care and treatment is critical to the wellbeing of neonates. It is important to follow proper technique and guidelines to provide them with the best care possible.

Heating pads and lots of blankets are necessary. Puppies and kittens are unable to regulate their own body temperature at this age so they need a source of heat. When using a heating pad, keep it on low and place a blanket or towel over it so it is not directly touching the skin. Also, make sure there is room for them to get off of the heating pad in case they get too warm to avoid overheating them.

Bottle feeding needs to be done every 2-4 hours depending on the age of the puppy or kitten (see chart below). The amount also depends on their size. General rule of thumb is to feed 5g food per 100g body weight. A chart is provided showing the average weight and feeding amounts for kittens. It is difficult to determine this for puppies due to breed differences.

It is super important to weigh your bottle babies frequently. The best method for making sure they are eating enough is to weigh-feed-weigh. With this you weigh (in grams) them first and then continually weigh (in grams) while feeding to ensure they are gaining 5% of their body weight at each feeding.

Only use products specially made for bottle kittens/puppies (the shelter will provide). Be sure to follow directions for mixing and make sure the liquid is warm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age in Weeks</th>
<th>How Often to Feed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1</td>
<td>Every 2-3 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Every 3-4 hours</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Every 5-6 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Begin weaning- may need to supplement with bottle feeding every 8-12 hours if not completely weaned</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
but not too hot. Be careful heating in the microwave because it can heat unevenly. It is best to reheat by placing the bottle in a bowl of warm water.

When feeding, allow the puppy/kitten to be positioned upright, not on its back like a baby. You’ll know it has latched on if you see the ears moving up and down and they begin suckling. Feel their belly after they eat to make sure it full, but not distended (it should be big but not hard). Don’t forget to weigh-feed-weigh!

**syringe feeding**

If they are struggling to use the bottle, syringe feeding may be necessary.

The key to syringe feeding is to go slow and to keep the animal upright (never laying on its back or side). Go slow enough for the animal to swallow properly. If the animal is not swallowing or fighting it, stop and take a break. Incorrect syringe feeding leads to risk of aspiration pneumonia (the fluid goes into their lungs) which is fatal.

**stimulating to eliminate**

At this age the kittens/puppies are unable to eliminate by themselves. Usually the mom takes care of this but since our bottle babies are orphaned it is now our job. To do this use a wash cloth and get it wet with warm water. Then rub the kitten/puppies’ bum with it until they urinate and/or defecate (do this over the sink or trash can). Urination should occur after every feeding. Defecation should occur at least every other day, if not daily.

**lots of love**

Give them lots of love and snuggles! They are missing the love from mom so try to simulate that with snuggly blankets or a stuffed animal for them to cuddle with.
gruel babies

Kittens/puppies at 3.5-4 weeks of age can be switched to gruel (canned food mixed with warm water). These kittens are in the stage between being bottle fed and being weaned.

Kittens/Puppies at this age should always have kibble, fresh water, and fresh gruel available to them.

These little ones may need help at this stage as they don’t always get the hang of eating on their own right away! Even if you notice them eating some on their own, it is still important to weigh often to be sure they are eating enough. If they do not gain their 5% at each feeding you will need to syringe feed gruel.

*You will use the same chart for feeding amounts for kittens as you would for bottle babies just be sure to adjust for difference in amount of time between feedings if needed.*

making gruel

Gruel should be made by mixing 2 parts canned food with 1 part water. Gruel should be the consistency of applesauce. Once mixed up the gruel is good for 48 hours if refrigerated. Be sure to warm gruel up before feeding.

Syringe gruel is made with the same ratio but is mixed with a blender. This helps get rid of any lumps making it easier to syringe feed. Syringe gruel will be necessary anytime a kitten this age needs to be syringe fed.

weaning

Around 3-4 weeks of age the kittens/puppies should be ready to be weaned. Some take longer than others so if they are not weaned by then it is not a concern. The key to weaning is to do it slowly. Start by mixing their milk replacer with canned puppy/kitten food in a shallow bowl. Allow them to explore. Some will get the hang of it right away while others take a little longer and require more convincing. It
may be necessary to supplement with occasional bottle feedings until they are fully weaned.
### Minimum Feeding Requirements Based on Weight

5g food per 100g weight/1g per 20g body weight every 3-5 hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weight Before Feeding (grams)</th>
<th>Weight After Feeding (grams)</th>
<th>Amount of Food Consumed every 3-4 hours (grams)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>63</td>
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<td>700</td>
<td>735</td>
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**Tips & Tricks**

- Feed bottle babies as much as they will take on their own from the bottle; syringe feed when they do not eat enough on their own.
- If gruel babies lose weight from previous feedings but have been eating on their own, syringe feed the required amount.
- Don’t forget to weigh gruel babies as well! If they continue to gain enough weight on their own there’s no need to syringe feed, but continue to monitor weight!
weaned kittens

Orphaned kittens make up the largest single group of animals euthanized at most shelters. At IndyHumane we strive to put an end to this by providing optimal care to each animal that comes into our facility by placing them into foster homes. Orphaned kittens in particular require extra specialized care due to having weakened immune systems and the need for constant care and attention.

This chapter will cover kittens that are already weaned. The chapter titled Bottle Babies will discuss kittens prior to weaning.

supplies

below are the supplies recommended for caring for bottle babies. If registered for the foster to surrender program, you will be provided with any supplies needed.

supply list for weaned kittens

- Food (dry and canned food)
- Treats
- Food and Water Bowls
- Toys
- Bedding
- Dog crate
- Heating Pad
- Scale
- Litter and litterbox
- Scratching posts

This is not a complete list. Every animal is different and may require more supplies. When picking up your foster animal any supplies specific to them will also be provided.

care

Kittens require extra care both medically and behaviorally. Being in a foster home gives them the best opportunity to get the best care possible.
**feeding**

Kittens should be fed a food specifically designed for kittens. Younger kittens that have recently been weaned should start with canned food and graduate to dry food. They should always have a bowl of dry food and a bowl of water available to them. Fresh canned food can be fed 2-3 times a day. Warm water can be added to canned food to increase water intake and soften the canned food if needed. Feeding amounts are provided on packaging based on current weight and age of the kitten.

*If your kitten is not eating on its own, please refer to the gruel babies section under neonates.*

**litter box**

Kittens should have access to a clean litter box at all times. Using the litter box is an instinct for kittens and not something that needs to be trained. It is important to keep the litter box clean and scoop waste daily.

**socialization**

This time in a kitten’s life is a key socialization and development period. It is important to expose them to numerous positive experiences to enhance their socialization. Exposing young animals to activities such as baths and nail trimming in a foster home early on can prevent them from becoming fearful of these activities as they get older. Kittens do best at this age when they have at least one littermate in the foster home with them. It is important to understand the normal developmental progression in order to be prepared for the care the animal will need during that time. It is also helpful to know what is normal in order to be able to recognize when something is wrong.

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*indyhumane: caring for kittens handbook*
NORMAL DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRESSION OF KITTENS IN THE FIRST 8 WEEKS

**Bottle Babies**

**Week 1**
- Eyes are closed and ears flat to head
- Unable to regulate body temperature
- Frequent bottle feedings and stimulate to eliminate

**Week 2**
- Eyes open at 7-10 days and can see blurry images
- More active
- Frequent bottle feedings and stimulate to eliminate

**Week 3**
- Vision improves and kittens become more active and curious
- Teeth start to erupt
- Less frequent bottle feedings

**Big Kids**

**Week 4-5**
- Regulate body temperature on their own
- Able to be weaned
- Using the litter box
- Socialization is very important

**Week 6-7**
- Vision, hearing, and movement all well developed
- Playful and practice “hunting” skills
- Eating solid food by 6 weeks

**Week 8**
- A healthy 8 week old kitten should be 2 pounds and ready for surgery!

*While the developmental progression and necessary care for kittens is pretty basic, every kitten is unique and may require special care. It is important to monitor the kitten’s health so they can be treated immediately if any health concerns arise. Always be aware of any diarrhea, lethargy, or signs of upper respiratory infection (ocular and nasal discharge, sneezing, etc.) and report them right away.*

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**routine medical care**

Kittens receive their first vaccinations at 4 weeks of age and receive booster vaccinations and dewormers every 2-3 weeks until they are 16 weeks old. Appointments for boosters will be made through the Foster Care Manager for boosters.

*Care for animals with medical conditions will be discussed in a later chapter.*

**surgery**

Once a healthy kitten reaches 1.5 pounds they are ready to return to the shelter for their spay/neuter surgery. After surgery they will be able to go to the adoption floor and be available for adoption!

**taming feral kittens**

Feral kittens have become a growing problem in the community. Unspayed feral cats continuously get pregnant and can have several large litters a year. When feral kittens come into the shelter we work to socialize them in hopes that they can become happy, indoor cats. If a kitten is socialized young enough (within the first 6 weeks is preferred but some can be older) they can become tame.

These kittens require an experienced foster home to help socialize them. It is very important to go slow with these kittens but also not neglect to handle them as much as possible. They take more time than most kittens, but are very rewarding! The amount of time the process takes varies depending on the kittens age and attitude.

**containment**

When you first take your feral kittens home, do not set them loose around the house. Feral kittens will find hiding spots. We recommend

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**tips & tricks**

- It is normal for feral kittens to hiss, spit, growl, and swat. If they do this go back a step and slow down. Let them come to you and learn you are not a threat.

- When starting, keep socialization sessions short. All this work is exhausting for kittens and they can get overwhelmed quickly. Giving them plenty of breaks is important.
using a large dog crate which can be provided by the shelter. The crate should contain their food, water, bedding, and litter box.

**Handling**

Start slow with handling. Never force them to do anything that makes them uncomfortable, and never risk getting bit. Start by sitting near them (never standing over them as that be threatening) with irresistible treats. Start by putting the treat in front of them and slowly begin creating a trail to you. If the kitten stops at a point and becomes uncomfortable, go back a step and start over. The goal is to eventually have the kitten taking the treat out of your hand.

All handling and associations with people need to be positive. If you need to administer medications always start and follow with something positive. You don’t want them to associate you with only being the person that medicates them.

Playing with kittens is very important! Use an interactive toy with them to strengthen their bond with you. Have a special toy that is only played with when you are present.

Be sure to keep track of their progress with socialization. The chart on the next page has scoring that can be used to measure progress.

**Containment Part 2**

Once the kittens have warmed up to you and are less likely to hide, you can begin increasing the space they can stay in. If you typically use a small bedroom or bathroom for your fosters this is the time they can move into it. Always be sure to kitten proof the room and make sure there are no hiding spots they can get into. If you don’t have a specific room they can permanently stay in, you can try allowing them to come out of the crate for play time and eating and then back in for bed time. Never make the crate a punishment. They should see it as a safe place.

**Exposure**

Once the kittens are comfortable with your family, start introducing them to new people and smells. Encourage friends to come over and handle them. Always have these experiences positive and reward the kittens.

indyhumane: caring for kittens handbook
adoption
Once the kittens are socialized they can be ready for adoption! Every kitten is different as far as how long it takes and what type of progress they can make. Some kittens will always be a little more timid and selective of people, and that is fine.
moms with litter

Being with mom is always preferred for neonate puppies and kittens. If they are found with mom they will all need to go to a foster home together until the babies are weaned. Although mom does all the work caring for the babies, she could stop lactating or reject her babies requiring you to intervene with their care. It is important to always be prepared to care for the kittens on your own if needed.

supplies

below are the supplies recommended for caring for bottle babies. If registered for the foster to surrender program, you will be provided with any supplies needed.

*All supplies given for bottle babies will also be provided when taking a mom with babies. Occasionally a mom will stop lactating or reject her babies requiring you to intervene with their care.

basic supply list for moms with litter

- Bottles & Nipples
- Syringes
- Formula
- Pedialyte
- Karo Syrup
- Dawn Dish Soap
- Scale
- Thermometer & Lubricant
- Baby Wipes
- Rubbing Alcohol
- Flea Comb
- Wash Cloths
- Gloves
- Canned Food
- Food Trays
- Tracking Sheet
- Handouts
- Food for Mom
- Litter box
- Litter

All of these supplies will be provided in the “Baby Bag” that goes home with every neonatal foster. Please return bag and all supplies once weaned.

care

Mom will do everything necessary to care for the kittens (feeding, cleaning, stimulating to eliminate, etc.). Mom should be fed high quality kitten/puppy food to ensure she is getting enough nutrients for

indyhumane: caring for kittens handbook
**tips & tricks**

✓ Always use caution when approaching mom and babies.

✓ Check regularly that mom is lactating and all kittens are nursing.

✓ Keep mom separate from other animals in the home, she needs a quiet place to raise her babies.

✓ Keep mom and babies in a small area. This will reduce the chances of her neglecting them or hiding them from you.

herself and for feeding the babies. Caloric needs are higher for nursing moms so be sure you are feeding her enough.

Kittens/puppies should be handled as little as possible in the first 2 weeks. They are very fragile and mom will do all the work that is needed to care for them. Only intervene if necessary.

Check daily that all kittens/puppies are nursing and mom is still lactating. Just because kittens/puppies are suckling does not necessarily mean she is still producing milk. Puppies/kittens should also be weight twice a day to ensure they are gaining.

Mom and babies should be kept in a small area (but big enough for them to all move around comfortably). Moms will often try to hide their babies from people so reduce hiding spots and make sure any small areas such as vents are covered.

**socialization for mom**

As with any adult cat or dog, socialization is important for the mom. Always go slow and be cautious as moms can become protective of their babies. A mother dog or cat can behave differently than normal due to their hormones. The mother should be allowed time away from the babies to go to the bathroom and play.

**socialization for babies**

As the kittens/puppies grow socialization and handling will be crucial just as it is with orphans. Mom will teach them some things, but socialization and handling from humans is very important. Please refer to the chapter on Weaned Kittens and/or Weaned Puppies for further information.

**possible issues with mom dogs/cats**

There are issues that can arise with mom dogs/cats that the foster family needs to be aware of. There are instances in which intervention may be necessary.
**no longer lactating**

It is important to frequently check that the mother is still producing milk. It is possible that she may stop prior to the kittens/puppies being weaned. In this case, the puppies/kittens will need to be bottle fed. Occasionally the mother may only stop producing in a few teats or just slow down production. In these cases, the kittens/puppies may still nurse but may also require supplemental bottle feeding to make up for the lack of mom’s milk. If you suspect the mother has stopped lactating or has slowed down, please alert the Foster Care Manager.

**maternal neglect**

In some cases, kittens/puppies suffer from poor maternal care. This can be due to lack of maternal instincts, often seen in first time moms or very young moms, environmental stress, or mother’s intuition, meaning the kitten/puppy was sick or weak and she knows he/she will be unable to thrive.

It is important to decrease the possibility of environmental stress. The foster home should be a calm, quiet environment for the mom and litter.

It is not neglect simply if the mom is not with the babies 24/7. Once fed and cleaned, it is normal for mom to step away from them and have some time to herself. However, if she is not feeding/cleaning them or ignores crying that is a sign of neglect.

**If you suspect a puppy/kitten is being neglected by the mother, contact the Foster Care Manager immediately as this is an emergency.**

**maternal aggression**

It is common for a mother to be protective of her babies. Foster parents should always take caution approaching the mother or handling the babies around her. The mother should not be introduced to any other animals in the home as that can increase chances of maternal aggression. If maternal aggression becomes severe or threatening, please contact the Foster Care Manager.
Thank you for helping us save lives!

Contact Information:
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