

# Taming Feral Kittens for Adoption



**FERAL CAT  
INITIATIVE**



**BIDEAWEE'S FERAL CAT INITIATIVE**

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# Why Taming Feral Kittens Can Be a Good Idea

With thousands of kittens and cats already in shelters awaiting adoption, you might ask, "Why tame feral kittens and add to that number?" Increasing the number of cats needing adoption is clearly a concern to weigh against any rationale for taming feral kittens for adoption. That said, taming feral kittens for adoption can support the ultimate success of a Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) project, improving the quality of life for residents, caretakers, and cats alike.

Removing and taming kittens may, at first, seem to contradict the fundamental mission of TNR. With TNR, members of a cat colony are trapped, spayed or neutered, vaccinated for rabies, eartipped, returned to their homes on the street, and cared for there to live out their lives without reproducing and adding to the overall feral cat population. TNR is widely recognized as a global solution to community cat overpopulation, so it's a valid choice to neuter, instead of tame, feral kittens and return them to live with their mothers and their colonies. A safe outdoor life is enjoyed by many a feral cat who lives to a



ripe old age with daily care and an all-weather shelter provided in a safe locale, surrounded by tolerant, if not necessarily compassionate, neighbors. This, of course, is an ideal set of conditions and many colonies thrive even when their devoted caretakers face a far less ideal situation.



Once a TNR project is completed and all of the nuisance behaviors of un-neutered cats are diminished, even naysayers are usually convinced that TNR was the right approach. Nothing is as persuasive an argument for TNR as an end to the yowling at night, the foul-smelling marking of territory, and fighting males defending territory.



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Bideawee's Feral Cat Initiative recommends that rescuers strive to complete the TNR of an entire colony to stop reproduction. Unfortunately, some people who claim to be working on a TNR project are primarily pulling litter after of litter of young kittens out of a colony, while neglecting to neuter all of the adults. This takes dedication and work, but it is clearly not TNR, and when the population fails to stabilize, community members will view this as a failure of TNR.

However, removing and taming the youngest kittens for adoption when a TNR project is just getting underway, or is still incomplete, can be a good strategy to benefit all concerned.



In places where TNR has been neglected for too long, the large number of cats in the area is often a major source of complaints from residents. If the litters of young kittens can be removed from a colony, the immediate and noticeable reduction in the number of cats can help improve community relations.

Removing kittens also reduces the costs to feed and care for a colony and allows for a better quality of ongoing, lifelong care to be provided to remaining colony members. The true benefit of taming feral kittens for adoption lies in the long-term acceptance and welfare of the feral colonies they leave behind, not from the notion that a cat always has a better quality of life living indoors.



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# The Best Age for Taming Feral Kittens



Kittens grow up in a feral state when they have had no positive interaction with humans and are so frightened or aggressive that they cannot be handled at all, or at least not safely. If you want to easily tame feral or under-socialized kittens for adoption, there is a narrow window of opportunity when they are between 5 and 8 weeks of age.

Kittens under 2 months old usually can be socialized very quickly using food as an incentive to befriend humans because they have not yet developed the strong “fight or flight” instinct of older kittens. Often within a day or weekend of work they are comfortable being handled by

humans and will quickly adjust to the atmosphere in the cage setting of a busy store or adoption facility. After 2 months of age, the factors of age, sex, genetics, and life experience will determine whether a cat might be easily tamed for adoption or will need a prolonged period of work to be at all comfortable around humans. With all of these variables in play, it’s hard to predict how long it will take to tame an older kitten or an adult cat.

## Why is it so easy to tame kittens under 2 months of age?

The optimal time to quickly tame feral kittens is between 5 and 8 weeks, their natural weaning period. There are several biological reasons that make kittens emotionally predisposed to accepting humans so readily at this age. During this time, kittens begin the transition from complete dependence on their mother to complete independence. Some have likened the impact of this stage to the transformation of a caterpillar to a butterfly. Nature converges many factors to make the readiness to learn a completely new way of life from mom very strong at this point.

For one thing, at this age, a mother’s milk no longer provides enough nutrition to support her kittens’ rapid growth, so they are eager to accept a new source of food energy that can meet the demands of their growing bodies. Using food to tame kittens is very effective between 5 and 8 weeks, when they are both craving nutrition and mentally open to new things. It is during this weaning period that mother cats would normally start bringing prey to their kittens to introduce a new energy source and start to teach them to hunt for themselves.



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Nature encourages this process by making moms increasingly intolerant of nursing, thereby increasing hunger in the kittens and adding a strong incentive to learn to hunt. Nursing uses up a great deal of a mother cat's bodily resources. As the kittens grow, hormones signal the mother to phase out nursing and caring for the current litter to regain her body condition for the next breeding cycle. Along with these hormonal changes in mom, the her kittens' growing teeth and sharp claws kneading her belly further inspire her to teach them to hunt rather than to continue nursing. All these influences come together for a very efficient transition to independence.

To further impress the importance of this timing, science has shown that while kittens are very ready to learn and change habits between 5 and 8 weeks, they are also very reluctant to give up any impressions formed at this age. This period is when nature has biologically predisposed kittens to learn and absorb basic life lessons at warp speed. Whichever teacher gets there first has the strongest influence on their opinions for a lifetime. It is important to create a positive association with humans before they have learned otherwise. Once a fear of humans is ingrained, it is very hard to change their young minds.

It is at around 6 weeks that kittens start leaving the den and a new communication system with mom develops as part of the learning process. Mom growls when there is danger, and the litter scatters and hides until mom signals that the danger has passed. If humans are a perceived danger for mom, the kittens will learn that fear directly from her. They can relearn differently with the prompt introduction of a counterincentive of food and nurturing from humans, but they aren't easily convinced to change their minds after this second month of life has passed.

Start the taming early, be consistent, and get it done as young as possible! Otherwise, be prepared to be very patient and forget any timeline. It can be done, but there are no guarantees as to how long it might take to gain an older kitten or cat's trust. While cats are very adaptable and can change their opinions over time, nature has stacked the deck against any "Johnny-come-lately" lessons in the joys of a life with humans.



# Stray or Feral?

Alley Cat Allies offers guidelines for telling the difference between stray and feral cats both outdoors and indoors. This information can help you to decide which future living and care conditions would be best for each cat you encounter.

## How do I tell the difference when the cats are outdoors?

Observing cats on their own outdoors before trapping can help you determine each cat's level of socialization. It will help you hone your trapping plan if you can develop a sense of whether a cat seems suited to living outdoors in a managed colony or indoors as a pet. How do I tell the difference?



STRAY CAT OUTDOORS	FERAL CAT OUTDOORS
May approach people, houses, porches, or cars	Will not approach and will likely seek hiding places to avoid people
Will likely live alone, not be in a group	May belong to a colony
May be vocal, meow, or "answer" your voice	Unlikely to meow, beg, or purr
Might walk and move like a house cat, such as walking with tail up — a sign of friendliness	May crawl, crouch, stay low to the ground, and protect body with tail
Will probably look at you, blink, or make eye contact	Unlikely to make eye contact
Will be visible primarily during the daytime	More likely to be nocturnal; occasionally out during the day
Will probably be dirty or disheveled — displaced cats will often stop grooming due to stress	Will probably have a clean, well-kept coat (unless ill or injured)
Less likely to have an eartip	Will likely have an eartip if neutered as part of a Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) program



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## How do I tell the difference when the cats are in traps?

It can be difficult to determine each cat's level of socialization during a stressful event such as trapping. Socialized cats may behave like feral cats when they've been trapped, especially in the first day or two after trapping. But there are still some differences you can observe between stray and feral cats in traps.

STRAY CAT IN TRAP	FERALCAT IN TRAP
It may be possible to touch the cat eventually or she may tolerate a small amount of touching with an object	Cannot be touched, even by a caretaker
May come to the front of the cage; may eventually rub against the cage in a friendly way	Will likely stay in the back of the cage and retreat as far back as possible; if jolted or frightened, may shake, rattle, or climb the cage, and could become injured banging into the cage
May relax over time	Will remain tense and unsocial
May investigate toys or food placed near the cage; may respond to household sounds like cat food cans or bags being opened	Will likely ignore all people and toys, and possibly even food; will not show any familiarity or interest in household sounds
May hiss or growl to show anxiety	Will be aggressive and lash out if threatened or cornered (signs of aggression include ears back and eyes dilated)

## What do I do next?

Once you have evaluated a cat and feel like you have a sense of the cat's level of socialization, the next step is to get them spayed/neutered and vaccinated. From there, use your judgment to do what's in the cat's best interest, whether it is returning them to their original location with an eartip, seeking an adoptive home, or socializing for adoption.

For more information about identifying stray and feral cats, visit the [Alley Cat Allies](https://www.alleycatallies.org/) website.



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# Always Trap Feral Kittens, Never Chase or Grab Them!

Chasing down feral kittens and grabbing them is generally a bad idea, even when the kittens don't escape and you manage to get them indoors. The stress and anxiety it causes for them can take weeks to overcome. Their instinct may convince the kittens that the person chasing them is set upon eating them. When that same person tries to pet them, and hold them, and nurture them, the kittens may be even more traumatized.

Trapping removes human contact from the terrifying experience of being separated from their mother and the life they know. We humans can then actually take a positive role when we offer food and reunite them with their siblings. The less the kittens associate humans with their trauma, the faster we can gain their trust and tame them for adoption.

## Trapping Technique

Here's an ideal scenario for a successful trapping of mom and kittens:

Before starting any trapping, get the mom and kittens to eat for several days from a trap that is secured open with a cable-tie or other hard-to-undo fastener, or under a drop trap that's propped up by a heavy, hard-to-move object. The goal is to make sure that even the most cautious kittens and their mom are not afraid to go into the trap before you start trapping. Normally, moms trot out their litters to the feeding station at about 6 weeks old. If you observed when the mom got skinny (after delivering her litter), you can set up the trap about 6 weeks later and start "training" mom to go into it even before she brings the kittens along. Nursing moms are extremely hungry, and sometimes it is only when she is nursing that you can hope to trap a very wary female.

This works best in an area where it is secure enough to leave a trap safely unattended. Feed the mom and kittens in the same place and time as always. Place the food in the rear of the trap behind the trip plate. If at first the mom will not enter the trap to eat in the rear, start by placing the food by the entrance of the trap, then inside, then over a period of days gradually move it closer to the back. If you are not able to leave the traps unattended, monitor the traps while the cats eat to ensure traps are not stolen, then remove the traps afterward.



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You probably won't see all the kittens at first. There are usually a couple of very cautious ones who won't dare to follow mom the first day or two. Only once mom and all the kittens have been seen going into the trap to eat without hesitation are you ready to start trapping.

Try to trap mom first and get her safely out of the picture with no kitten witnesses. Moms usually leave the den in midafternoon to look for food while the litter is still sleeping. This is the perfect time to set the trap for her and whisk her away to a basement, garage, or bathroom for holding, after covering the trap with a sheet to keep her as calm as possible.

Getting mom spayed should be a priority and not forgotten just because there are kittens to deal with.

You can trap mom in the conventional way with a box trap, but with the kittens, use the bottle-and-string technique or use a drop trap. This way you can be sure a second or third kitten is not in the way of the door or gets caught when the door comes down. You may even get lucky and get two or three kittens at a time as they crowd into the back of the trap around the dish of food.



*Get the most cautious kittens first.* Do not rush and trap the first and bravest kittens to go into the trap. Learn how many there are before you start trapping and keep track of which ones are the last to come to the party. Late afternoon near dusk is the usual time for kittens to leave the den and come to the feeding station where you've trained them to go into the trap without hesitation. The cautious ones will be traumatized if they witness the brave ones getting trapped.

When you start to trap the kittens, let the brave ones eat and go if necessary to wait for the cautious ones. You'll always get another chance with the brave ones. The

cautious ones are smart, and they won't give you a second chance for a long time if you blow it the first time. They are used to mom being away for periods of time, so don't worry about that. Wait until the most cautious one — or hopefully two — are in the trap eating together to pull the string for the first time. Even if a couple of the braver ones witness this, they'll come back soon enough, but not vice versa.



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The more cautious ones will hightail it back to the den and not come out for a day or more if they witness the trapping of the braver ones, or if half their family mysteriously disappears. Get them first and you'll be done with everyone in short order. Even if the brave ones have eaten and gone, they won't hesitate to come back the next day and eagerly load into the trap. Don't be in a hurry. Wait until you get the cautious one(s) first, with no other cautious witnesses, if at all possible.

Despite your best efforts, you may find that you have trapped all except the most cautious kitten and she won't go near the trap now. In that case, put mom or another kitten sibling in a trap and put that trap inside a larger trap or under a drop trap. (A small cat or squirrel trap fits inside the bigger raccoon or feral cat traps.) The kitten will often come out to see the mom and can be trapped in a regular trap using the bottle-and-string technique, or with the drop trap.

If the reverse happens and you do not trap the mom first, you can use one of the kittens to lure mom into a drop trap or into a conventional box trap using the bottle-and-string method.



Six weeks old is old enough for kittens to be separated from their mom. Start the kittens right away with socialization for adoption, and TNR mom and return her for continued outdoor care. Don't forget to have her eartipped!

For more information about trapping kittens, see Urban Cat League's video, [Trapping Feral Kittens & Mom – A Strategic Approach](#).

# Kitten Socialization

Kittens under 8 weeks of age can usually be socialized without much difficulty following the guidelines detailed below. Kittens over 8 weeks of age who've had no positive interaction with humans often take much longer to socialize. However, using the guidelines below you can successfully socialize kittens — and sometimes fearful adult cats! While these techniques are usually successful, there is always a risk that the cat might not respond as well or as quickly as you might like, so always take into account that you might need a contingency plan in place. In attempting to socialize an older kitten or cat, Bideawee's Feral Cat Initiative recommends starting with a 2-week trial period. If the cat isn't making progress by then, it's best to spay, eartip, and return her to the colony immediately, before it becomes unfamiliar to her.

## Location

The best places to socialize kittens are anywhere where the socializer can get on the same level and comfortably interact with the kittens without them feeling towered over or backed into a corner, or giving them an opportunity to hide out of reach. Many large-dog kennels are roomy enough for the socializer to sit inside and have the added advantage of more frequent exposure to typical human activity if placed in a busy room of the house. Most bathrooms work very well, although they are isolated from continual household activity. If using a bathroom or other small room, be sure to block off all hiding spots behind or under furniture and fixtures. Radio and television sounds can contribute to getting outdoor ferals accustomed to the indoor environment.



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The double-decker wire catteries on wheels can work very well to start socialization but at some point you must let the kittens out in a confined space where they can choose to approach you. They can be wheeled into a small room to be let out for hands on work or wheeled back into the living area for exposure to general activity between socialization



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sessions. Try to choose the setup which gives the kittens the best exposure to you and household activity.

Small cages don't work well since the cats always feel cornered when we reach in and they have no room to make the important "mind shift" where *they* choose to approach *us* out of self-interest in order to get the food they desire. They need to have the option *not* to be near you in order to make that decision to approach.

## Incentive: Food!

Cats socialize themselves by choice. We only provide the incentive...food! Food is the most important tool to facilitate the socialization process. Growing kittens have an insatiable appetite which will give them the courage to approach you and be touched when they might normally never allow you anywhere near them. Never put food down and walk away. It removes their incentive to welcome you into their world. No free rides!

The following guidelines are not hard, fast rules. You may find that the kittens skip to advanced stages very quickly or you may find they follow a sequence of their own design.



then take any remaining food away with you when you leave. Always leave water of course, but no food unless you are there with them.



**Evaluation.** If the kittens are healthy, using the litter box, and will eat in front of you, you can safely begin delaying meals just enough to give you the advantage of hunger. (If not, you may decide to give them a "free ride" until this situation stabilizes. Once they seem calmer or the vet gives the OK, you may begin the "tough love" stage of socialization where you space out the meals so that the kittens are eager to learn.)

**Tough love.** Never put food down and walk away. If the kittens will eat in your presence, progressively pull the dish as close to you as possible. Stay with the kittens until they have finished eating and



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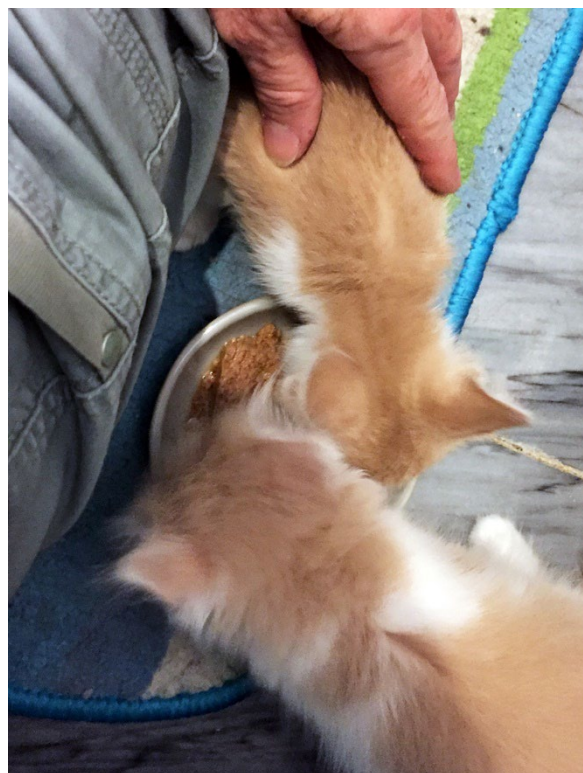
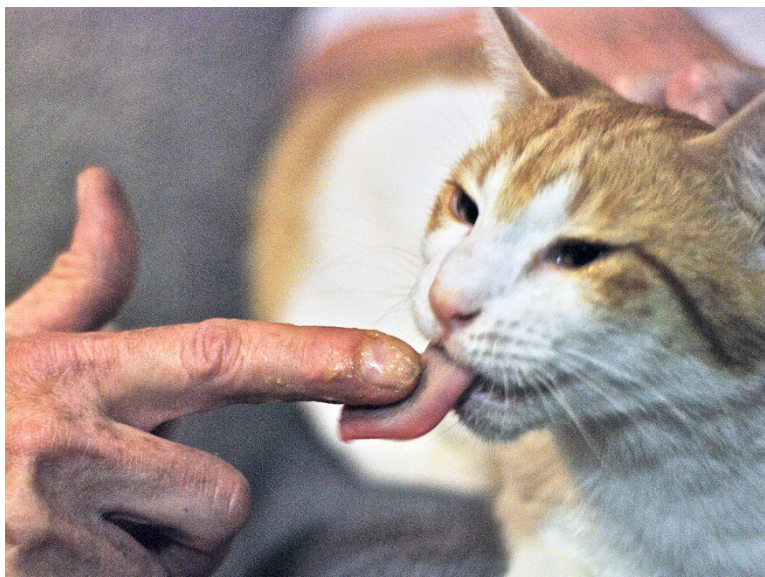
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**Eating off of your finger.** When the kittens have progressed to eating from a dish right beside you with your hand touching the dish, start offering something tasty off of a spoon and then your finger. Puréed-meat baby food in jars are favorites, especially turkey, chicken, or beef flavors (with no rice or vegetables).

Until they realize the baby food's consistency, they may want to gulp bites before they learn to lick it. Let them first learn to lick from a spoon, popsicle stick, or tongue depressor because they may want to chew your finger instead of lick it. They figure out how to not bite quickly, but in the meantime, ouch! Your hand reaching close to them, without them retreating in fear, is the lesson they are learning through hand-feeding.

You may want to try this sooner if they won't move close to you to eat from the dish. The order is not important, as long as they are improving on some level. Be flexible but don't let them hold you hostage at the stage of their choice. "Get tough" and make them work for it.



**Leading them onto your lap.** Once they are used to eating off your finger, use that to lead them up into contact with your body by their choice. You can also try putting a dish in your lap and let the entire litter climb up onto you to eat. The braver ones will start and the shy ones may need to be worked with individually at their level. Lead the braver ones as close as possible and see if they will make eye contact with you while licking from your finger. That's a biggie for them! Put the fast learners in a carrier while you work with the shier ones. Put a dish inside and close the door on them, if they aren't quite ready to be picked up easily.

**Initiating contact.** Initiate contact at the beginning of a session where the kittens are particularly hungry and eagerly engrossed in eating. Start with them eating from a dish or while eating off the finger and eventually progress to touching them and petting while they are in your lap eating. Start in the head and shoulder area only. If he runs off, lure him back with baby food on the finger and any bad experience should be soon forgotten. (This

approach to handle mistakes works at any stage. Back up to a stage that they've mastered and work back up to where they "freaked out." Don't stop the session until they've forgotten the bad experience and are happily doing one of the steps with which they feel comfortable.)

**Preparation for lifting.** Expand petting and touching around the head and shoulders by moving to touching the underbelly to desensitize them for being picked up. Also try nudging them from one side to the other while they are engrossed in eating. Just having your hands near them and gently pushing them around is an important preparation to being picked up.

**Moving on the ground.** Set up two dishes and gently lift/scoot a kitten the short distance from one dish to the other, very close to the ground. If the kitten is engrossed in eating she won't mind being lifted if it goes smoothly and quickly. If not, lure her back, back up, and start over.

**Picking them up.** Start sitting on the floor so the first real lift is still close to the floor from their point of view. Have a full jar of baby food opened and ready before you try the first pick-up. Try it when they are engrossed in eating right next to you rather than scrambling after them on the run. Lift them under their chest with a small dish of food right in front of their nose the whole time. Hold them as loosely as possible onto your knees and eventually to your chest. Young kittens are often reassured if they feel the warmth of your body and can feel your heartbeat when held against your chest. If it works, you can try holding them as you rise up onto your knees the next day, and eventually holding them as you stand up. Make sure they are very comfortable with the small lifts before you ever bend down from towering above fully standing to pick them up. When you can do that, you're home free!



**Handling without food.** After a good long session where the kitten(s) are very full and getting sleepy, try gentle petting and work up to holding and petting without food being present. If this works you should be able to try it at other times between meals. It may be hardest just before feeding when the kittens are very hungry and confused and stressed by being held when they have only food on their minds. There's usually at least one "love bug" in every litter who will give you hope for the others.

**Transitioning to adoption.** Before putting them in a cage in an adoption center, test them with a few different socializers. If their next caretaker can continue the baby food training, there is often a smooth transition. Older and especially shy kittens do better when they go directly to their new homes and bypass a shelter or adoption event setting altogether. A crash course in socializing for the adopting family may be needed to assure that the transition to the home goes well. If the adopter starts them in



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the bathroom rather than turning the kittens loose to the run of the house, it will assure that they can bond with the kittens and that the kittens will know where the litter box is. If not the kittens often run off under the couch to hide for the foreseeable future. Give them a copy of this guide so they can understand what the kittens have accomplished and how they can continue the progress.

## Interactive Play

Most feral kittens are frightened or confused by interactive play when first exposed to humans. Outdoors, their toys were things like dry leaves and waving blades of grass. There is no rule for when to introduce it, or when they will accept it, but the best way to start interactive play is with a toy that isn't too threatening. A string on the end of a stick or other toy that allows you to entice them from a distance allows them to join your game without being face to face with you.



For kittens and cats, play drive equals prey drive, so make the toy mimic real prey as much as possible. Don't make the toy come at the kitten; that's not how prey animals behave, and it'll probably scare the kitten. Make the toy "run away" from the kitten and her instinct will tell her to chase and grab it. Be sure let the toy sit still occasionally so the kitten can stalk it; that's part of the fun. The kitten knows the toy is fake prey that you control, and that is good! You're helping the kitten satisfy her hunting instinct, and that is a bonding experience.

Some people have found that interactive play was the breakthrough activity much more so than using food. Be flexible to discover what breaks the ice best and branch out from that. Use whatever proves to be their favorite thing as a reward for new steps or to break through a plateau. Once a step has been mastered, only offer regular food as a reward for that step saving the favorite treat for breaking into new territory. Remember the mantra, "tough love."

For more information and a video about taming feral kittens, visit the [Helping Feral Kittens Become Friendly](#) section of Kitten Lady's website.

For more information about taming feral kittens — and potentially making progress with cautious older kittens and adult cats, too — see Urban Cat League's video, [Taming Feral Kittens and Cats](#).



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# Medicating Feral Cats and Kittens

Feral kittens and cats who have recently been brought indoors for taming may need treatment for fleas, ear mites, viral or bacterial infections, intestinal parasites, ringworm, or other medical conditions. The challenge for caretakers is to find ways to treat them without using stressful and traumatic restraint. Forcibly restraining a feral kitten or cat for treatment can embed a fear of being handled that won't easily be forgiven.

What follows are some of the more common conditions that feral cats and kittens develop, along with some simple treatment options.



## Fleas

You can forget about a flea bath when safely handling the feral cat or kitten with fleas is impossible! A safe and effective hands-off flea treatment for cats and kittens is to add crushed Capstar (nitenpyram) to the cats' food. Dosage is based on weight.

CAT WEIGHT	CAPSTAR DOSE
1.5–2 pounds	¼ pill (2.85 mg)
2–4 pounds	½ pill (5.7 mg)
4+ pounds	Full pill (11.4 mg)

You do not need a prescription for Capstar, and you can purchase it online through any of the pet medication websites, or even at some pet supply stores. Capstar has no unpleasant taste, it kills fleas in 3–6 hours, and its effectiveness lasts for 24 hours.

Capstar, however, does not kill flea eggs that may be on a cat's body, so it is important — when you can handle the cat safely — to follow up with a long-acting prescription topical treatment such as Advantage, Frontline, or Revolution. Apply one of these products to the skin between the cat's shoulder blades as directed, and it will continue working for one month. These medications also help treat ear mites and roundworms, as discussed below

You can also talk to your veterinarian about the various oral prescription drugs that kill fleas and ticks for one month in cats as young as 8 weeks.

Here's another tip: If you find you can handle kittens, a bath with a 1:100 solution of mild dishwashing detergent (e.g., Dawn) and water kills fleas on contact. Sometimes a flea comb dipped in the soapy



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water is enough to comb out all the fleas if it's just a few. Be sure to put a soapy ring around the cat's neck and anus at the start of the bath to prevent the fleas from escaping into ears and you-know-where.



## Ear Mites

Ear mites are uncomfortable for a cat or kitten, and they are contagious, but they are not life-threatening. As mentioned above, Revolution is an effective prescription treatment that requires only brief handling of a cat or kitten. If you can do it safely, Revolution should be administered as directed by your veterinarian two times (a month apart) for treating ear mites, but one application will often kill all the mites. As an alternative, your vet can clean and treat the ears to kill mites when the kittens have their spay/neuter surgeries if you can't safely treat them before then.

## Viral Infections

Treating viral eye infections can be very difficult, but this must not be neglected. Feline herpesvirus is one of the most common culprits, and scarring and loss of vision is common when it goes untreated. Make sure you take a cat or kitten with an eye infection to a veterinarian so you can get the correct diagnosis and prescription, since treating a cat with the wrong eye medication can be useless or even harmful. For example, if the surface of the eye has been harmed, a steroid ointment could cause permanent damage. Your veterinarian can also advise you on how to safely apply eye ointment to cats.

To undo their bad experience of being restrained and treated for an eye problem, spend extra nurturing time with kittens before and after you administer each dose.



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## Bacterial Infections

Antibiotics have no direct effect on viral infections like upper respiratory infection (URI), but often vets will prescribe them to treat or prevent a secondary bacterial infection. An antibiotic can usually be mixed easily into food, so you will not need to handle the cat or kitten. Make sure you can follow the directions precisely or don't use antibiotics. They are not a "hit or miss" medication to be played around with. Ask your vet if you're not sure about dosages! Kittens with URI who are bouncing around, playing, and most importantly, eating normally, usually don't need antibiotics to get well.



When a feral cat or kitten does need antibiotic treatment, a one-time injection of Convenia (cefovecin sodium) works well to treat a number of conditions for one to two weeks. This includes infected wounds. Vets also use Convenia prophylactically when a cat has teeth pulled.

## Ringworm

If you suspect that your foster kitten has this fungal infection, the most accurate way to know for sure is by having your veterinarian diagnose it by growing a culture from a skin sample. If you can't handle the kitten to take a skin sample per the vet's instructions, the kitten will have to be brought in for the vet to do it. Ringworm is treated with topical medication; ask your vet for advice on the least invasive approaches to treating fearful feral cats.

## Parasites

Feral cats and kittens are susceptible to several different kinds of parasites, including roundworms, coccidia, and giardia. Because roundworms are so common, all kittens should be given pyrantel pamoate proactively for roundworms. This medication must be given twice, with the second treatment following two weeks after the first. Pyrantel pamoate can easily be put in the kittens' food and they will gobble it up without detection. It's a very effective and safe medicine, but it will not resolve other parasites.

### Common Types of Feline Intestinal Worms

(Not to Scale)



Diarrhea or abnormal stool is often a warning sign that a cat or kitten may have a parasite in his or her system. Diarrhea can be very serious to kitten health and should not be neglected. An exact diagnosis can be difficult to get, but if diarrhea persists, take a stool sample (the fresher, the better) to your veterinarian for testing. If the fecal test is positive, ask your vet to make sure that the drug that's prescribed can be disguised in food.

## Treating While Taming

When a medical condition arises, if at all possible you should consult a veterinarian who understands the challenges of taming and building a feral cat or kitten's trust, and who can recommend the least invasive treatments. They will work with you to get kittens to optimal health without using treatment methods that undo your hard socialization work. If you don't know a vet who can do that, ask around for a recommendation from one of the many groups working with feral cats. There is also a list of feral-friendly veterinarians in New York City available in the [Feral Cat Initiative](#) section of the Bideawee website. The kittens, and you, deserve all the help and understanding you can get!



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