

# Stockton Animal Shelter

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## Kitten Adoption Handbook



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## CONGRATULATIONS!

Dear Kitten Adopter,

Congratulations on your new family member! Bringing a kitten into your home—and your life—is a big commitment, one that comes with many benefits and joys. We are thrilled you have decided to take this step.

Cats truly have become part of our families—we buy them toys, we have their teeth cleaned, we share our apartments and houses with them. For their own safety and health, we keep them indoors, away from the many hazards of the modern world.

But amid this loving assimilation of cats into the core of the family, we tend to forget that cats are, well, cats. Not long ago, they were farm animals with a large territory to patrol, trees to climb, and license to stalk and hunt vermin and household pests. We radically changed the environment of cats in what amounts to an evolutionary blink of an eye, so it's up to us to help them be successful in that environment by providing plenty of activities, training, and outlets for their innate abilities.

Give your kitten those things, and in return she will give you not only years of love, companionship, and enjoyment, but also better health and a longer life—at least statistically speaking.

For our part, we are committed to helping you make your new family member's transition into your life a success.

Sincerely,

The Stockton Animal Shelter and Animal Protection League



## SET UP FOR SUCCESS

### Meeting Your Kitten's Needs

Adding any new family member, especially the four-legged kind, requires a certain amount of equipment and some adjustments to your home for everyone's safety and comfort.

Here's a list of must-have supplies for a great start with your kitten:

#### Basics

- ☐ Food
- ☐ Water and food bowls
- ☐ Cat bed or cuddler
- ☐ Scratching post
- ☐ Cat carrier
- ☐ Collar
- ☐ Litter box
- ☐ Litter, litter scooper
- ☐ Enzymatic cleaner

#### Kitten Care

- ☐ Cat toothbrush, cat toothpaste
- ☐ Nail trimmer
- ☐ Grooming brush
- ☐ Flea control treatment

#### Training and Mental Stimulation

- ☐ Harness, leash
- ☐ Food dispensing toys (KONG® Cat Wobbler, treat balls)
- ☐ Interactive toys (wands, laser toys, feather toys, mitt toys)
- ☐ Play-alone toys (squeaky toys, fluffy balls, crinkle/crackle balls)
- ☐ Soft treats, crunchy treats, freeze-dried meats
- ☐ Catnip, catnip spray, catnip toys

### Setting Up Your Home

#### Safe Haven

As tempting as it is to give your kitten the run of the house right away, moving into a new home is a stressful experience for cats. Having a safe, confined area instead—a safe haven—allows your kitten to make a gradual transition to her new home. The safe haven is where your kitten will stay until she is completely comfortable with her new home (which could take days or even weeks), as well as a place she can retreat to anytime she needs a little space and alone time.

**Where?** The ideal safe haven is small, quiet, and easy to close off with a door. It should be mostly free of furniture, especially anything your kitten can hide in or stay out of reach. The best places for a safe haven are the bathroom, a small bedroom, or a large, well-ventilated closet.

**What?** Furnish the safe haven with a bed or cuddler, water and food bowls, some play-alone toys, a scratching post near the bed, and a litter box as far away from the bed and food as possible.

**Tip:** More than one cat? Then giving your kitten a safe haven is even more important.

## Kitten-Proofing Your House

Remember, cats are curious by nature. Keep your kitten safe from these common household hazards:

**Plants.** Many plants (such as plants of the lily family, onions, and garlic) are toxic to cats. Put your plants in areas your kitten can't access. Alternatively, spray them with bitter apple to discourage your kitten from eating them. Provide safe herbs such as catnip or alfalfa for your kitten to chew on.

**Poison.** Human medications (especially aspirin, acetaminophen, and NSAIDs), veterinary medications, insecticides, rodenticides, household cleaners, chemicals, and paints can all cause severe injury or death to cats. So can chocolate. Secure all cupboards, closets, and cabinets—use childproof latches when possible.

**Chemical rub-off.** Use natural, nontoxic cleaners in your home. Cats are fastidious groomers and easily pick up chemical residue on their fur and paw pads from contact with harsh cleaning agents. Ammonia-based cleaners and phenol disinfectants are particularly dangerous.

**Strings.** Kittens love string games and are quick to pounce when they see an opportunity. But swallowed string can cause intestinal damage and may require expensive surgery to remove. Keep tinsel, thread, dental floss, rubber bands, yarn, cords from blinds, necklaces, dangly earrings, and anything similar out of your kitten's reach.

**Cords.** Bundle up and hide any electrical wires or cords. Kittens find them tempting to chew on and may try to pull out plugs.

**Bags.** Kittens love the way plastic bags sound and move; however, plastic bags are not safe for kittens since they often try to chew on them or climb into them. Paper bags are a safer option, but make sure to cut off bag handles as kittens can get caught in them.

**Unsafe hiding places.** Block access to dangerous places for kittens, such as behind stoves, refrigerators, motors, washers, dryers, etc.

**Open windows/doors.** Contrary to popular belief, most cats that fall from windows don't survive. Make certain all your windows are kitten-proof (screens should be tight!) and can't be pushed open.

## For a Happy and Healthy Cat Play and Training

Environmental enrichment through play and training (yes, cats can be trained) means a healthier *and* easier-to-live-with kitten—and later, adult cat. Active cats with a stimulation-rich environment are less anxious, sleep more, and are more likely to maintain a healthy weight. Does that mean you must take up cat agility if you adopted a naturally active cat? Of course not, but occasionally winding up a motorized mouse isn't enough.

Here are some suggestions for activity sessions:

- Play with your kitten using interactive toys like wands, laser pointers, or feather toys.
- Set up an obstacle course for your kitten to negotiate to reach her food.
- Provide a multi-limb climbing tree or jungle gym.
- Train your kitten to walk on a leash with a harness and stroll in a quiet, safe area.
- Train your kitten to fetch, sit, shake, come when called, and other tricks.

**Tip:** Apart from leash walks, we recommend keeping your kitten indoors. For more information about indoor vs. outdoor cats, see Entertaining and Training Your Kitten on page 10.

### **Mental Stimulation**

Bored cats are a lot like children. Unless you give them something fun to do, they will make their own fun. An energetic cat might climb the curtains; a more sedate cat may take over a windowsill and not move at all. Kittens are naturally more active than adult cats, but it's important to keep your cat physically and mentally active as she grows. Encourage this by giving her a variety of toys, puzzles, and other brain teasers.

Here are some options\* for exercising your kitten's mind:

- Brainteaser toys (of the pick-a-prize, play-n-squeak, or seek-a-treat variety)
- Play-alone toys (cat mobiles, toys that move or squeak, ball toys, feather toys)
- Homemade jungle gyms, e.g. using cardboard boxes, paper bags, and cushions
- Visual stimulation, e.g. fish tanks (securely covered), screensavers, and Video Catnip™ DVDs
- Food-dispensing toys, cat KONG, treat balls

\*Always choose safe, kitten-appropriate toys. Beware of small, loose objects or string that can be ingested. Check with your vet before introducing your kitten to a new product. Rotate your kitten's toys to alleviate boredom.

### **Kitten Care** **Grooming**

Cats have a lot of fur, and despite meticulous self-grooming, they do shed. Brushing and combing are excellent ways to bond with your kitten, keep all that fur under control, and deal with any fleas. Frequent brushing can even do away with fur balls. Use a soft- to medium-bristle brush, start while your kitten is still young, and groom her regularly. To make sure she enjoys the experience, give her little tasty treats while you groom her.

### **Food and Water**

Have one food bowl (use ceramic or stainless steel, never plastic, which can cause an allergic reaction) or food-dispensing toy for each cat in the household, and feed your kitten in a separate room. Ditto for water bowls. Pay careful attention to how much food your kitten eats. It's crucial for her growth and health that she eats well, and any loss of appetite should cause concern. Discuss feeding with your veterinarian the first time you visit with your kitten.

**Tip:** Milk is a no-no. Cats don't need it; in fact milk makes many cats ill if they drink it, because they don't have the enzymes to break it down.

### **Medical Concerns**

Kittens and cats hide illness very well, so watch carefully for signs of illness. Some things to watch:

- Is your kitten eating, drinking, and using the litter box regularly?
- Is she lethargic?
- Does her coat look less healthy? Has she stopped grooming herself?
- Does she strain or cry when using the litter box?
- Does she have diarrhea? (Can be very serious in kittens.)
- Is she sneezing? Does she have watery eyes?
- Is she shaking her head a lot or scratching at her ears?

Kittens can go downhill quickly, so any of these signs mean it's time to contact the vet.

**Visits to the Veterinarian**

Your kitten needs to visit the veterinarian often at first to get her necessary vaccinations, but even as an adult cat, she should have annual vaccine booster shots and checkups, because many illnesses can be detected in their early stages. Be prepared, too, for emergencies. Have the name of emergency veterinary services handy, and know how to get there in a hurry if necessary.

**Multi-Cat Households**

If there are other cats in your household, a slow introduction is very important. Keep in mind the size difference between your kitten and your adult cats. They may enjoy playing together, but the larger cat can inadvertently injure the kitten, so supervise play at all times. Conversely, older cats may be annoyed by the energy level and playfulness of a young, active kitten.

For more information, see *Cat to Cat Introductions* in the Cat Behavior Library section of the San Francisco SPCA's website ([sfspca.org/behavior](http://sfspca.org/behavior)).

## ARRIVING HOME WITH YOUR KITTEN

Resist the urge to lavish your kitten with attention the moment you bring her home—it's tough, we know. But it's important to let her adjust to her new home (and territory) in her own time. A calm, unhurried transition at a feline-appropriate pace can prevent many stress-related behavior problems, such as digging, biting, scratching, excessive grooming, and litter box aversion.

Here's how to do it:

### The First Hour

1. When you arrive home, take the cat carrier into your kitten's safe haven. If you haven't set up a safe haven yet, do so before opening the carrier.
2. Open the carrier and let your kitten decide whether she wants to come out to explore. Please note your kitten may stay inside the carrier for hours.
3. Whether or not she comes out of the carrier, leave your kitten in her safe haven for at least 24 hours.

### The First Few Days

Visit the safe haven often during the day, but let your kitten decide the pace of interactions. Never force attention or petting on your kitten; she will ask for it when she's ready. Limit the number of family members who visit at once, so she isn't overwhelmed.

When your kitten is completely comfortable in her safe haven, feels at home with everyone in the household, and paws at the door asking to be let out, open the door and let her explore the rest of the house at her own pace. However, for as long as she's a kitten, confine her to her safe haven whenever you can't supervise her.

**Tip:** It's common for a kitten to take a few days to adjust to her new home, but it may take several weeks.

### The Bedtime Routine

From nature's side, cats are most active at dusk and dawn, but domestic cats are creatures of habit. If you'd like your cat's activity schedule to suit your lifestyle—rather than late night workouts followed by her pouncing on you in bed and meowing for food at 5 a.m.—then shape those habits while she's still a kitten.

- Play with your kitten every day at times that work for you. If you go to bed at midnight, set playtime for 11:30 p.m. Or, if you go to bed at 10 p.m. and get up at 6 a.m., set playtime for 6:30 a.m.
- Establish a special location for play—and don't make it your bedroom. Use a cat-appropriate space, such as near a cat tree or condo.
- Pick up all toys (and items your kitten likes to play with) at night and put them away.
- Put your kitten in her safe haven at night and ignore any tantrums (unless you suspect illness).

**Going Forward: Creating a Routine**

- Feed your kitten the same brand of food at the same time every day.
- Set aside some time to play with your kitten in the morning and evening, when cats are most active.
- Groom and pet your kitten every day.
- Clean the litter box at approximately the same time every day.
- Establish a noise and activity level for your household that isn't stressful to your kitten.
- Reward your kitten consistently for behaviors you like, such as using her scratching post.

## LITTER BOX OVERVIEW

The best way to introduce your kitten to her new home is to confine her to one room or area—her safe haven. A further benefit to this approach is that it helps prevent litter box problems. However confident and ready to explore your kitten is, keep her confined to the safe haven until she has used the litter box at least once.

### Litter Box Do's and Don'ts

#### DO

- Have enough boxes. You need one box per cat in the household, plus one extra.
- Experiment to find a litter your kitten likes: clumping, non-clumping, pellets, etc. For kittens under 6 months old, we recommend non-clumping, non-scoopable clay cat litter or biodegradable litter just in case they swallow the litter.
- Keep the litter box immaculate; cats are extremely fastidious.
- Use mild dishwashing liquid or hot water and vinegar to clean the box.
- Scoop the box every day. Clean the box every two to three days, or at least weekly.
- Place the litter box in a quiet, private area away from food and water bowls.

#### DON'T

- Use scented litter. Perfumed smells tend to repel cats.
- Get a box that's too small; your kitten needs space to turn around, dig, and cover.
- Leave waste sitting in the litter box; nobody likes a dirty bathroom.
- Use strong chemicals or disinfectants to clean the box.
- Use a litter box liner or a restrictive box.
- Place the litter box near anything noisy, like a washing machine or furnace.
- Place the litter box in a high-traffic area in your home.

**Tip:** If you have a multi-story house, have litter boxes on each level.

### Litter Box Problems

First, it's important to know that your kitten won't use the bathroom outside her litter box out of spite. She has not learned reliably to use the box, is either stressed, or avoiding the litter box because she doesn't like it. Cats can form aversions to the litter box for a variety of reasons, so do a bit of sleuthing. Litter box problems are common and usually very fixable.

#### Troubleshooting Litter Box Problems

1. *Always begin by consulting your veterinarian to rule out medical causes.*
2. Check all the do's and don'ts above to make sure you're following the guidelines.
3. If the problem could be stress-related (new cat in the area, construction outside), deter stray cats from your yard and restrict your kitten's view/access to windows, noisy areas, etc.
4. Could it be roommate squabbles? Confine your cats to separate areas of the house. For more information, see *Cat to Cat Introductions* in the Cat Behavior Library section of the SF SPCA's website ([sfspca.org/behavior](http://sfspca.org/behavior)).

For detailed information, see *Litter Box Problems* in the Cat Behavior Library section of the SF SPCA's website ([sfspca.org/behavior](http://sfspca.org/behavior)). If the problem persists, consult a certified animal behaviorist or veterinary behavior specialist.

**Tip:** Never yell at or punish your kitten for not using her litter box. It will only make her afraid of you.

## ENTERTAINING AND TRAINING YOUR KITTEN

To be physically and behaviorally healthy, your kitten needs outlets for her innate feline abilities, now and as she grows. That means opportunities to stalk, hunt, pounce, climb, hide in safe shelter, and watch interesting small-animal activity like fish in a bowl, birds outside a window, or screensavers with moving critters. She also needs plenty of respectful attention from and interaction with you.

### Indoor vs. Outdoor

We recommend keeping your kitten indoors. This may sound like an unnatural life for a cat—and in a sense, it is. But like it or not, we humans have created a world that isn't safe for cats to roam free in, whether in cities, suburbs, or the countryside.

Compare the hazards of these two lifestyles:

#### Outdoor Hazards

Getting hit by a car  
Fights with other cats and wild animals  
Diseases (feline leukemia, FIV)  
Parasites (fleas, worms, ticks, mites)  
Chemicals (antifreeze, rat poison)  
Getting trapped in garages, basements  
Inclement weather, hunger, and thirst  
Being stolen or mistreated by strangers

#### Indoor Hazards

Boredom  
Weight gain due to inactivity  
Household poisoning or accident

Given that you can easily alleviate—or completely eliminate—the indoor hazards by playing with your kitten, enriching her environment in various ways, and kitten-proofing your home, it's easy to see how the indoor-only lifestyle is superior.

However, if you decide your kitten should have outdoor experiences, here are ways to do so safely:

- Install the CAT FENCE-IN™ backyard netting system.
- Build an enclosure (many cat magazines have plans and ideas).
- Train your kitten to wear a harness and walk her on a leash in a quiet, safe area.

### Preventing Escapes

For some cats, transitioning to an indoor-only lifestyle may be an adjustment, especially if the cat has lived outdoors in the past or is naturally adventurous. Here are some tips to keep your kitten safe:

- Avoid getting into the habit of saying hello or goodbye to your kitten right next to the doorway.
- Instead, designate another spot away from the door for all greetings and departures. This should be a spot your kitten likes, such as her cat tree or condo.
- When entering the home, walk directly to the designated spot before greeting your kitten.
- Say goodbye here rather than the door as well. Distract your kitten by leaving her with a treat or a toy.

## How to Play with Your Kitten

Fun toys that encourage your kitten to entertain herself are great. But truly stimulating and satisfying play involves a playmate—you. We recommend at least two interactive play sessions per day of about 10–15 minutes. Great times are in the morning before you leave or start work, and in the afternoon/evening shortly after arriving home or finishing work.

### 1. Set the Stage

Create a jungle gym or obstacle course in your living room with cardboard boxes, chairs, and paper bags (never plastic) with the handles cut off as proxy bushes and trees. Create tunnels by rolling up area rugs. Add interest with egg cartons, shoeboxes, and paper tubes scattered along the way.

### 2. Provide Realistic Prey

Over time, get an assortment of “prey” so you can vary the game. Great options are toys that resemble the look and movements of birds, rodents, insects, and snakes. For interactive play, nothing beats the fishing-pole variety of those toys. When you play with your kitten, try to mimic the relevant prey animal’s behavior. Birds, for example, flap their wings, land occasionally, take a step or two, then take off again. And give your kitten time to plan her attack so her mind is engaged, not just her reflex to swat at anything that dangles.

### 3. Make It Fun

Allow your kitten to make many satisfying captures during a play session. Keep this in mind if you use interactive toy alternatives like laser light pointers or soap bubbles. Fun as they can be, don’t rely solely on these; it’s too frustrating for your kitten to never actually get to catch her prey.

### 4. End the Game Gradually

Always wind play sessions down gradually, not abruptly. Do this by making the injured prey slowly “die.” This sets off end-of-hunt responses in your kitten, lowering her excitement and energy level.

Put all interactive toys away between play sessions; they should be reserved for playtime with you. Instead, leave out furry mice and other toys that are safe for solo play.

## Environmental Enrichment

Enriching your kitten’s environment is key to having a healthy, happy feline. Just as zoos provide toys, puzzles, and food challenges to alleviate boredom and stress in wild cats, you can use environmental enrichment to reduce urine marking, play aggression, cat-cat aggression, and fearful behavior in your kitten.

- Cats are hunters, so never free-feed. Have your kitten forage for her food by using treat balls and other food-dispensing toys, and by hiding dollops of food in different locations throughout the house.
- Get a cat fountain or use an old bowl for games that involve floating ping-pong balls or hollow plastic fish.
- Have a variety of toys for solo play and rotate them, so your kitten doesn’t get bored with her squeaky mouse or crinkle ball.
- Fish tanks with secure covers, cat videos of birds and small animals, and computer screensavers can entertain your kitten for hours.
- Use catnip in toys or simply as a stimulant once every two to three weeks to see your kitten enjoy some silly antics. Stop if she becomes aggressive while under the influence of catnip.
- Put a ping-pong ball in the bathtub; the slight slope toward the drain will help the ball stay in motion, and it won’t be lost under the sofa.

## **Training Your Kitten**

It's time to dispense with the myth that cats can't be trained. Not only can you train your kitten to come when called, do a high five, and go through an agility course, you can change unwanted behaviors, reinforce behaviors you like, and help her become less fearful and more confident.

### **Positive Reinforcement**

Training your kitten through positive reinforcement means using her natural motivations to teach her which behaviors you like and which you don't. The trick is to find the right motivations. Where dogs have been bred to work with us and respond well to praise and attention, cats are solo hunters and are much less social.

Determine your kitten's favorite things, such as play, toys, and treats, and use those to motivate her.

### **A Word on Punishment**

Never use physical punishment. A cat's response to yelling or physical punishment is stress—and stress is the leading cause of behavior problems such as aggression and house soiling. It also erodes the trust between you and your kitten and prevents learning.

### **A Word on Declawing**

Declawing involves surgical amputation of the first joint on a cat's paw and is most often done to prevent the cat from scratching furniture or people. The procedure comes with health risks and unfortunate behavioral consequences. We strongly advise against declawing, and instead recommend training cats to use scratching posts and trimming their claws regularly.

### **Unwanted Behaviors**

Using positive reinforcement methods doesn't mean you never say "no" to your kitten. You just say it in a way she understands instead of using human language.

Either:

**Avoid the situation.** Restrict your kitten's access to a place, person, or object.

**Redirect** her to an acceptable channel for her behavior, for example pouncing on a toy instead of your shoe, or scratching her post instead of the couch.

For more about cat training and behavior, see the book recommendations handout or visit Karen Pryor's website, [clickertraining.com](http://clickertraining.com).

### **Kitten Socialization**

Thorough, gentle socialization is key to raising a behaviorally healthy cat. Kittens need lots of affection and interaction from their family. Always handle your kitten with care (kittens are fragile), but definitely handle her. The more consistent, gentle petting she gets from you, the more friendly and easygoing she becomes.

Spend two or three sessions every day handling and petting your kitten. Talk to her in a soft voice and gently pet her all over her body, including ears and mouth. This will help her feel comfortable when the veterinarian needs to examine her. Likewise, massaging her toes and paws will put her at ease when claw-clipping time comes.

Like human babies, kittens need lots of naptime, so let her get her beauty sleep, no matter how adorable she looks. If your kitten squirms when you pick her up, don't force her to be held.

Instead, let her continue to explore at her own pace—just plan to have more frequent, brief cuddle sessions. Don't let anyone over-pet her—especially on her stomach and back. This type of handling is uncomfortable for her and she may respond by nipping, swatting, or “bunny kicking.”

When you have quiet guests visit, introduce them to your kitten. Getting to know a lot of people helps her understand that visitors are okay. Again, never force the issue. Lure her to interact with your guest by using a toy on a wand or stick, but otherwise let her choose whether or not to approach the guest.

Try to expose your kitten to people of different ages, sex, sizes, and ethnicity, as she can become fearful around people if she meets too few of them growing up.

**Tip:** Children in the household? Supervise all interactions and teach them to handle your kitten safely, respectfully, and appropriately.

## WHEN PROBLEMS ARISE

Keep in mind that most of what we label “problem behavior” is normal feline behavior, and none of it is meant to spite or frustrate us. Your kitten is simply being a kitten.

Cats do what they do because they want food, play, attention, social time with you, etc. Pleasing—or annoying—us isn’t part of the picture. Fortunately, you can use what your kitten wants to train her to behave in ways you like. With patience and consistency, most problem behavior can be changed for good.

### Troubleshooting Problem Behavior

#### PLAY AND BITE/SCRATCH

Can be due to:

- Playful energy
- Attention-seeking
- Overstimulation

#### **When I walk through the house, my kitten pounces on my ankles.**

Painful as this can be for you, it is normal play behavior in cats. Redirect your kitten’s playfulness to an appropriate toy, and consider having more interactive play sessions to give her other outlets for her energy. You can also put a bell on her collar so you can hear her coming and redirect her before the assault.

#### **When my kitten is curled in my lap and I’m gently petting her, she suddenly bites or scratches me.**

This is called petting-induced aggression or overstimulation. Your kitten is trying to tell you about her tolerance level for petting, and the best cure is to listen carefully. Look for subtle body language that signals overstimulation, like tail swishing, twitching ears, cranky meowing, staring, body stiffness, or hissing. If you see any signs, stop petting her. Over time, you should be able to recognize her signals, and she will not be forced to escalate them.

Also be careful not to pet your kitten’s belly or misinterpret the “elevator butt” (pushing the lower back upward) as an invitation to pet this area. Studies show most cats prefer petting on their heads and cheeks.

#### LITTER BOX ISSUES

Can be due to:

- Undiagnosed illness
- Stress or anxiety
- Territoriality
- Soiled litter box
- Aversion to litter type
- Aversion to litter box location

#### **My kitten goes to the bathroom in the laundry basket, on my bed, or on the carpet.**

If your kitten squats to relieve herself anywhere other than the litter box, your first stop is always the vet’s office to rule out a urinary infection or other medical reason. After that, systematically go through the guidelines on page 9 to eliminate stress triggers and to find just the right litter, type of box, and location for your kitten.

**My kitten sprays urine on my front door or walls.**

If your kitten or adolescent cat squirts urine on vertical surfaces, that's classic marking behavior most often set off by stress or territoriality. The triggers can seem innocent to us: new furniture in the living room, a strange cat strolling through the yard, or social tension between feline housemates.

Clean marked locations thoroughly with enzymatic cleaners, and discourage stray cats from coming near your house. Try to identify stressors in your kitten's life, then work to change or remove them, for example by blocking your kitten's view of strange cats, confining your cats to separate parts of the house, etc.

If your kitten's issues persist, consult a qualified behaviorist.

**SCRATCHING OBJECTS**

Can be due to:

- Nails that need trimming
- Stretching after a snooze
- Territoriality
- Stress relief and mood boosting

**My kitten scratches my new leather couch/the antique rug/my wicker chair.**

This is another normal feline behavior that can cause friction at home. The important thing to remember is that your kitten has no concept of the value of things and isn't deliberately destroying your possessions. She's merely doing what comes natural to her and feels good.

First, keep your kitten's claws neatly clipped. Just like fingernails, claws grow continuously and must be trimmed every few weeks to every few months, depending on the cat. To learn how, read *Cat Claw Clipping* in the Cat Behavior Library on the SF SPCA's website ([sfspca.org/behavior](http://sfspca.org/behavior)).

Second, make sure your kitten has several sturdy scratching posts of varying textures. Place them strategically around the house, close to items you don't want her to scratch. Temporarily cover any furniture she's already begun to scratch with an unattractive surface like Sticky Paws®. If necessary, use treats or play to entice your kitten over to the post (never carry her there or physically force her), and praise her lavishly when she uses it.

If you suspect territoriality is the cause, a spray such as Feliway®, which contains a synthetic copy of the facial pheromone cats use to rub on their territory to feel safe and secure, can help. To learn more, visit [www.feliway.com](http://www.feliway.com).

**FEARFULNESS**

Can be due to:

- Lack of socialization
- Traumatizing events
- Genetic predisposition

**My kitten hides when we have guests.**

Many fearful kittens do bond strongly with their caretakers over time, but some remain shy with strangers for life. If you have adopted a fearful kitten, she may never develop into the life of the party. To give her the best possible life, follow these guidelines: Provide plenty of cozy hiding places for her to hang out when visitors come over. If you hold a dinner party or have noisy work done to your house, confine your kitten to her safe haven. Never pull her from her hiding place or force her to be held.

## COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

**Myth: My kitten scratches the couch or urinates on the carpet out of spite. I know because she looks guilty.**

**Reality:** When you return home to find scratch marks on the couch or a puddle on the living room carpet, it's easy to think your kitten did those things because she's angry with you. But guilt is a wholly human concept. The "guilty" body language when your kitten slinks away doesn't mean she feels bad about what she did—those were natural behaviors to her—it means she's reading subtle cues in your body language that tell her something is wrong.

Don't take her scratching or urinating personally. Instead, try to figure out the real reason. Stress? Territoriality? An aversion to her litter box? It could be many things.

**Myth: Rubbing my kitten's nose in her urine or feces will stop her from soiling the house.**

**Reality:** Absolutely not. The only thing your kitten will learn from this experience is to expect irrational and unpleasant behavior from her human caretakers. In fact, just like newspaper swatting and scolding, it will likely teach her not to go to the bathroom in front of you, which makes it harder to persuade her to use only her litter box.

**Myth: Cats can't be trained.**

**Reality:** They most certainly can be. Cats are different from dogs and don't respond to many common dog training techniques. But just like chickens, dolphins, giraffes, and hippos, cats can indeed be trained. Integrating training games in your kitten's everyday routine is a great way to enhance her well-being and quality of life.

**Myth: Female cats don't spray/mark around the house.**

**Reality:** Yes, the primary offenders when it comes to marking behavior are intact males. But both neutered males and spayed females sometimes spray urine on vertical surfaces like doors, walls, and furniture. Most often, this behavior springs from stress or territoriality—or a combination of both.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

We hope the information in this handbook will be helpful during your kitten's transition into her new home!

If you have further questions, please contact the Stockton Animal Shelter at 209-937-7445.

To stay up-to-date on news from our shelter, follow our Facebook page!  
**[www.facebook.com/StocktonAnimalShelter](https://www.facebook.com/StocktonAnimalShelter)**

Other useful resources:

San Francisco SPCA: [www.sfspca.org/resources/library](http://www.sfspca.org/resources/library) and [www.sfspca.org/behavior](http://www.sfspca.org/behavior)

Humane Society of the United States: [www.humanesociety.org/animals/cats](http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/cats)

ASPCA: [www.asPCA.org/pet-care/cat-care](http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/cat-care)



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