



## Tiny Tiger Training Course



by CommunityCatsnycacc

Congratulations on deciding to foster and socialize kittens! Spending time with these fuzzy little guys, though a lot of work, will also be a lot of fun. We have tons of tips on how to help your mini kitties feel at ease around people, and how to help them grow up to be loving companion animals. Now let's get down to

business!

It's really important to remember kitten socialization is an art. You may discover techniques that work well for you and the kitten—go with those discoveries!



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### Step 1: Why Do We Socialize Kittens?

All kittens require early socialization in order to become good pets. It helps kittens learn to interact with other cats and pets as well as people, and it requires positive interactions. Socialization also helps build confidence in young cats and makes them feel secure in their home environments.

Kittens under 8 weeks can usually be socialized without much difficulty. Kittens over 8 weeks of age who've had no positive interaction with humans often take much longer to socialize.

[https://youtu.be/IFiRZvBgx\\_c](https://youtu.be/IFiRZvBgx_c)

<https://youtu.be/JbeHav5oBEc>

## Step 2: 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 the kittens feeling towered over, “backed into a corner,” or hiding 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. A small room without hiding spots under couches and beds or behind furniture can also work very well. Radio and television sounds can contribute to getting outdoor ferals accustomed to the indoor environment.



### Step 3: Help Kittens Feel Comfortable

First things first, set up the crate they'll be staying in and make sure it's off of the floor – cats feel safer if they're higher up where they can see their surroundings. After you bring the kittens inside and get them set up in their crate, give them an initial two-day adjustment period before trying to socialize them too much—the change of scenery can be stressful! When you do start to spend time with them, begin by moving slowly and speaking softly, and try to keep loud TV or music down. For very young kittens, a soothing technique is to wrap a ticking clock in a towel—it reminds them of their momma's heartbeat.

After they've been with you for a few days, try leaving a TV or radio on so they can get used to people voices and sounds. If there aren't other pets around, you can leave the crate in a busy part of your home,

like the living room, so they can begin to see and hear other areas of the home.

Like anyone, kittens react positively to positive experiences and negatively to negative experiences. Don't hold back! Reward kittens when they do well, like come up for snuggles, and avoid scolding.

If a litter of kittens are slow to socialize, you might want to separate the kittens into individual crates or spaces so that they can rely on people more. Or you can make sure to spend some quality time alone with each one. When they feel more comfortable with you, they can be reunited with their brothers and sisters.

Be patient! Spitting, hissing, and hiding are all expressions of fear, not signs of aggression.



[https://youtu.be/\\_m\\_1EJdIKMU](https://youtu.be/_m_1EJdIKMU)

## Step 4: Socialize With Food

Kittens love food (who doesn't), and giving the little ones food creates an incentive for them to interact with you and also forms positive associations. Keep dry kitten food out all day, but when you feed wet food, stay in the room so they associate you with food and start to trust you. If they're scared at first, try to give them food on spoon. Over time, move the food plate closer to your body while you sit in the room, until the plate is in your lap and the kittens are comfortable crawling on you to get to it.

they stay put. Start petting their little faces, chins, and behind their ears and work up to petting all over. Also take your time building up to holding the kittens, and reward them with some canned cat food or chicken-flavored baby food on a spoon – kittens love people baby food! (Make sure it doesn't have onion—it's toxic to cats.) Don't give kittens food on your finger though, and don't allow them to play with your hand, or bite or scratch you. A bite from even a young kitten can be painful! Plus, it teaches the kittens that biting is OK (which it's not!).

Pet the kittens for the first time while they're eating so

<https://youtu.be/vpEcxlMhyQ>



## Step 5: Cats Socialize Themseves 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 takes away any incentive for them 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.

<https://youtu.be/qfrahjBNHM>

<https://youtu.be/jP8E-yFXCT4>





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## Step 6: The Social Box

Throughout the day when you are home you should do short socialization sessions in the small dog crate. Simply pop the kitten into the crate and watch TV, do the dishes, clean the house, relax and read a book. This forces the kittens to be present in the room and to get used to daily human life. Be sure the kitten has a litter box and toys. It's hard to be scared when you are having a great time!

<https://youtu.be/Fa1vg-cchmM>



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## Step 7: Evaluation

Once the kittens are healthy and are calm enough to eat with you in the room, you can safely begin delaying meals just enough to give you the advantage of hunger to speed up their progress in the socialization sessions. Kittens 6-8 weeks would hungrily eat 4 times per day. If you are only able to work with them twice per day, leave them just enough

food in between sessions so they are very hungry when you get home and can work with them. If they aren't progressing, you are leaving too much food. Feed kittens 3 months old and older only twice per day, and don't leave any food behind when you leave the room.

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## Step 8: First Sessions

Sit down on the floor with the kittens and put down the dish of food as far away from you as necessary that they will eat in your presence. Don't face off to them but sit in  $\frac{3}{4}$  profile and don't even look at them except glancingly. Progressively inch the dish as close to you as possible. With kittens 10 weeks and older, it may take a few sessions or even days before they are eating right near you. Stay with the kittens until they have finished eating each time and 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. You can also gently

option NOT to be near you in order to make that decision to approach. Cats are both prey and predator in the wild so their sense of fight or flight is constantly right there on the surface. If they have nowhere to flee when we reach at them, they can

roll small dry kibble to them across the floor. This works especially well with older kittens. The kittens may be frightened at first, so go easy until they figure it out. Progressively roll the kibble shorter distances until you are just putting them down on the ground right near you. The kittens may even start to eat them out of your open hand. This first technique doesn't work if the kittens are in a small cage, cattery or carrier. When you reach in at them, they have no room to make the important "mind shift" where THEY decide to approach US out of self-interest in order to get the food they desire. They need to have the

never relax enough to trust to approach us calmly and become confident and affectionate around humans. They need space to choose to change.

## Step 9: Eating Off Your Finger

This technique helps overcome the fear of hands reaching at them by putting a good association (food) with that experience. When the kittens have progressed to eating from a dish right beside you with your hand touching the dish, start offering something tasty off your finger. Gerber or Beechnut baby food are favorites in Turkey, Chicken or Beef flavors. You may want to try this early on if they won't move closer to you to eat from the dish. Try both and see which one works first. Until they realize the Baby Food's consistency, they may want to gulp bites before they learn to lick it. Let them learn to lick from the lid of the jar, a spoon, popsicle stick or tongue depressor if

they want to chew your finger instead of lick at first. They figure out to lick quickly, but in the meantime, ouch! The lesson here with hand feeding is to accept your hand reaching close to them, without them retreating in fear. Most kittens find Baby Food irresistible and will be soon climbing all over you to get a taste of it. Remember not to sit squared off and staring at them, especially older kittens. Once they are hand feeding and comfortable being near you, only then is the time to start looking at them more directly, talking to them and actively engaging them.

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## Step 10: Lead 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 to work with the shier ones if necessary. Put a dish inside and close the door on them, if they aren't quite ready to be handled safely easily.

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## Step 11: Initiating Touching

Initiate contact at the beginning of a session where the kittens are particularly hungry and eagerly engrossed in eating. Put down a large dish of food near to you and try gently touching them and petting while they are engrossed in eating. Start in the head and shoulder area only. Stop briefly if they resist and resume working up to petting a bit longer each time. Try different ones and move around the group to get a sense of which need the most work. If they run off,

lure them back with baby food on the finger and any bad moment 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.)

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## Step 12: Preparation for Lifting

When they are comfortable with petting and touching around the head and shoulders, add petting the back and scratching at the base of tail. Next try moving to touching the underbelly. This area is usually sensitive and needs to be desensitized for being picked up. Try when they are busy eating.

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## Step 13: Moving on the Ground

Try nudging them from one side to the other while they are engrossed in eating around a dish on the ground. Just having your hands near them and gently pushing them around is an important preparation to being picked up. Set up two dishes a foot apart 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 s/he won't mind being lifted briefly if it goes smoothly. If they run off, lure 'em back with a special treat, back up and start over. If they're hungry enough, it works.

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## Step 14: 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 try against your tummy and up

to your chest. Young kittens are often reassured if they feel the warmth of your body and can feel your heart beat when held against your chest. If it works you can try it up on your knees the next day and eventually standing up. Make sure they are very comfortable with the small lifts before you ever bend down to pick them up while towering above them fully standing. That'll be a day to celebrate!

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## Step 15: Socializing With Play

Playing with kittens can help them build trust for people. At least two hours a day of play (all together or broken up) can do the trick – it will go by fast, don't worry! Take time to socialize each of the kittens in a litter individually, while you're down on their level. Once you've spent enough time with them that they let you hold them, hold the kittens as much as possible. Make sure they are close to your body so they feel your body warmth and heartbeat. If a kitten is particularly feisty, put her in a front-carrying pack or

papoose (lightly, but snugly wrap) her in a towel with only the head out and hold her while doing things around the house. And around 3 to 4 weeks old, kittens will love to play with toys, and you should encourage that! Once the kittens are comfortable enough to fall asleep on your lap or purr around you, they can move from the kitten room to a larger, kitten-proof room.



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## Step 16: Interactive Play

“Most” feral kittens are frightened by interactive play when first exposed to humans. There is no rule for when to introduce it, or when they will accept it, but the best way to start is with a toy which isn't too threatening. A string on the end of a stick or some toy that allows you to entice them from a distance, allows them to get involved with your game without being face to face with you. 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 about other approaches to cat/kitten socialization, please view these other resources:

[http://cats.about.com/library/guest/ucfeature4b.htmhttp://catnet.stanford.edu/articles/socializing\\_ferals.html](http://cats.about.com/library/guest/ucfeature4b.htmhttp://catnet.stanford.edu/articles/socializing_ferals.html)  
[http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/feral\\_cats/](http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/feral_cats/)



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## Step 17: Introduce New Friends

The goal is to socialize the kittens so that they are comfortable around all people and pets and will be happy in their new homes, so introduce them to new some faces! As long as all are healthy, you can introduce kittens to a grownup cat, but keep a close eye to make sure everyone gets along OK. A neutered tom cat will likely play and groom the kittens, which is too sweet.

<https://youtu.be/3Nbd8EBcHWE>

<https://youtu.be/4gD4y99kBv0>

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## Step 18: Precautions

Kittens that were outside and are still frightened can hurt you if you are not careful, so don't hesitate to wear gloves or protective clothing if you feel it is needed. Don't take chances. Sometimes you have to scruff kittens by the back of their neck to gain control. To do it safely, use your entire hand and gently but firmly grasp the fur on back of neck without pinching, pull the cat up, and immediately support her hind legs.



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## Step 19: Keeping Kittens Safe

Do not use toxic cleaning products or leave them in the room with kittens. For cleanups, use diluted bleach solutions (one part bleach to 15 parts water) in small amounts. If kittens are in your bathroom, pull the shower curtain up and out of the way, so they can't scale it like the little monkeys they can be, and take all knick-knacks and cleaning products out of the room. And don't keep kittens in a room with a

reclining chair. The kittens can be injured or killed if they go inside the chair and accidentally get closed underneath. Double check windows and vents to make sure they are securely fastened – kittens can be little escape artists! With these tips, the litter of kittens you've taken under your wing will soon be on their way to being fuzzy, cuddly little friends!

