



NYC Feral Cat Initiative

Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals® 



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SAVING LIVES: TAMING FERAL KITTENS FOR ADOPTION

I. Why Tame Feral Kittens for Adoption? – (handout #1)

- A. Improve Community relations by reducing size of colony
- B. Reduce colony to a manageable and affordable size for caretakers
- C. Resources are available to keep or adopt-out individual feral cat or litter(s) of kittens
- D. Act Locally – It's your call what to do on your own turf!

Some Reasons NOT to attempt Taming a feral kittens

- A. Habitat is safe and committed caretakers are in place for long-term daily care
- B. Adoption resources are non-existent and/or no realistic plan for life-long indoor care
- C. Time, space and resources not available to expect completion of the taming process
- D. Think Globally - Every feral adopted takes away another adoption; More euthanasia at ACC

II. Variables and Prospects for Taming and Adoption

- A. Age –Beyond 5-8 weeks increasingly difficult to tame – (handout #2)
- B. Sex - Fight or Flight instinct develops more quickly in females – (handout #3)
- C. Nature AND Nurture - Genetics + Mom's opinion of humans

III. Suggested Methods for Trapping Feral Kittens and Mom – (handout #4)



Always trap feral kittens, Don't chase 'em down and grab 'em –

IV. Techniques for Taming Feral Cats - Avoid fight & Discourage flight – handout #5

- A. Fast-Track techniques for taming kittens for adoption
 - 1. Indoor cooling-down period, evaluation/observation
 - a. Health Check, timing for Spay/Neuter
 - b. Start them out with Clay Litter
 - c. Choose best location available for taming – (handout #6)
 - 2. Eating in front of human –
 - a. avoid direct eye-contact
 - b. project a drowsy disinterested energy
 - c. check your expectations at the door
 - 3. Feeding by hand
 - a. Gerber #2 and Beechnut - Beef, Chicken, Turkey, No Ham please!



4. Luring onto lap with food or interactive play
5. Initiating touch
 - a. Enlist the help of a feline Nanny if necessary
6. Desensitizing belly before starting any picking-up work
7. Holding close to the ground, working up to picking them up
8. Handling without food incentive
9. Use pen to transition for free-run indoor living
 - a. Roll pen up to bathroom or small room to start with maximum control
 - b. Use mealtimes and laser pointer to corral kittens back into pen
- B. Slower Organic process for taming adult feral cats and kittens when not pressed for time

VI. Preparing Tamed Cat(s) to Meet Prospective Adopters

- A. Exposure to strangers BEFORE meeting prospective adopters
- B. Create comfort zone with carriers by leaving out in the living area
- C. Make a video of the cats at peak performance with humans in a trusting environment
 1. Advertising on the internet (Craig's list versus Petfinder.com)
 2. Making a flyer using internet websites: www.nokillnow.com/flyermaker.htm
- D. Showing in an adoption facility versus showing from the foster home
- E. Extra interactive playtime with a variety of toys as prep for "audition" with adopters

VII. Preparing the Adopters for success – DON'T BLOW THE ENDGAME!

- A. Interview-Educate on what to expect and show how to succeed bonding with a *former-feral*
 1. The most important interview question: "Where are they now?"
- B. Evaluate expectations – Adoption Contract and Fee, Check references!
- C. Show a video of the cat relaxed, playful, on best behavior. Seeing is believing!
- D. Watch TOUGH LOVE part II on You Tube to show techniques they can use to bond with cat
- E. Home visit to plan a strategy. Discuss space for Confinement period, food & Litter
- F. Delivery of Pen and set-up. Review plan for bonding during confinement period
- G. Deliver Cat and put in confinement pen or room. Discuss Food & Litter
- H. Follow-up calls and emails for progress reports, offer support, gentle reminders
- I. Pick up pen. If all is going well the kitten(s) will ignore you.

VII. Handling Ferals safely

- A. Safe-Handling Equipment Recommendations:
 - Feral Cat Recovery cage from www.animal-care.com
 - Rolling Cattery – ProSelect pen from PetEdge.com
 - Feral Cat set up for Evaluation/Cool Down - check You Tube and neighborhoodcats.org
 - Squeeze cage for Feral Cat Vet Visits from www.animal-care.com
 - Top-loading carrier for Tamed Feral Vet visits ([weigh empty carriers and transfer cages](#))
 - Handling gloves for working with feral kittens
 - Medicating Feral Cats & Kittens – (*handout #7*)

VIII. Feral Cat Resource List:

UrbanCatLeague.org (Blog, Video, Printer-friendly hand-outs)
NYCFeralCat.org





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TAMING FERAL KITTENS AND CATS FOR ADOPTION

handout #1

Why Tame Feral Kittens For Adoption?

With so many young kittens and older cats in shelters awaiting adoptions, you might ask with good reason; “*Why would anyone think it was a good idea to be taming and adding even more kittens to the thousands of cats needing adoptions?*”

Among the diverse workshops sponsored by The NYC Feral Cat Initiative is a very popular one called “*Taming Feral Kittens for Adoption.*” From a program promoting TNR (Trap, Neuter, Return) as the key to bringing the feral cat population under control, teaching kitten taming may seem to some to be a contradiction of the fundamental mission. Nonetheless, hundreds of TNR caretakers have attended the workshop over the years to learn techniques for taming those hissing, scratching and spitting feral kittens caught in the margins, as each new TNR project is undertaken.

In case you didn't know, under 8 weeks of age these little banshees can be quickly socialized to human contact and then safely placed in the arms of prospective adopters. Training attendees to tame kittens less than 8 weeks of age takes up the first 15 minutes of the workshop. Discussion about taming kittens older than 8 weeks of age fills up the remaining 2 hours and 45 minutes of the workshop.

With unconditional support of TNR as a global solution, I would heartily agree that one might choose to neuter feral kittens and return them to live with their mother and their colony with good conscience in many cases rather than taming them for adoption. A safe outdoor life is enjoyed by many feral cats who live to a ripe old age with daily care, all-weather shelter provided in a safe locale surrounded by tolerant, if not compassionate neighbors. This of course is an ideal list of conditions and many colonies thrive where their devoted caretakers face a far less ideal situation.

Removing and taming the youngest kittens for adoption when a TNR project is just getting under way, or is still incomplete can be a good strategy to benefit all concerned. Where TNR has been neglected for too long, the large number of cats in the area is often a major complaint of those residents intolerant of the cats. If the litters of young kittens can be removed from a colony, community relations are often improved with such a visible reduction in the number of cats. Also, the life-long cost of feeding the colony will be reduced, allowing for a better quality of ongoing care.



Once a TNR project is completed and all of the nuisance behaviors of unneutered cats are diminished, the open-minded 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 strong-smelling marking of territory and fighting males defending territory. **However, when community relations are at a breaking point and one is trying to get a TNR project off the ground, reducing the number of cats by removing the youngest kittens for adoption can jump-start a TNR project and win over many residents that remain resistant to the proven-effectiveness of TNR. The benefit of taming feral kittens for adoption is measured in terms of the long-term acceptance and welfare of the feral colonies they leave behind, and not any sense that a cat always has a better quality of life living indoors.**

To risk offending some hard working rescuers, I believe strongly that completing the TNR of the entire colony to stop reproduction should always be the primary focus and goal. Unfortunately, flying under the banner of a supposed ongoing TNR project, the practice of “skimming” litters of kittens from a colony that never gets fully neutered is all too common. This is clearly not TNR, but nonetheless gives TNR a bad name since those without an understanding of TNR will view the failure to stop the reproduction as a failure of TNR.

To repeat, increasing the number of cats needing adoption, and taking adoptions away from the tame and friendly kittens already in shelters 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 TNR project, improving the quality of life for residents, caretakers and cats alike.

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TAMING FERAL KITTENS AND CATS FOR ADOPTION

handout #2

Why Taming Feral Kittens is so Successful Under 8 Weeks of Age

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www.socialferals.blogspot.com



There are many biological reasons that make kittens emotionally predisposed to accepting humans so readily at this age: During the weaning period from 4-8 weeks, kittens start the transition from complete dependence on mom to being completely independent. Some have likened the impact of this stage to the transformation of a Caterpillar to a Butterfly. Nature converges many things to make the readiness to quickly learn a completely new way of life from mom very strong at this point. For one thing, at this age, mother's milk is no longer enough nutrition to support the kitten's rapid growth. The kittens are anxious to accept a new source of food energy that can meet the demands of their growing bodies. Using food to tame kittens (as demonstrated in the Urban Cat League video TOUGH LOVE) is very effective at this age when they are craving nutrition and mentally open to new things. Taming to humans obviously wasn't part of nature's plan for this period in a kitten's life, but this is when that is most successfully accomplished.

It's during this weaning period that Mom would normally start bringing prey to the kittens to introduce a new energy source and start to teach them to hunt for themselves.



Nature encourages this process by making mom increasingly intolerant of nursing, thereby increasing hunger in the kittens, adding an eagerness to learn to hunt. While nursing, moms have been steadily losing weight, using up their body stores. Nature needs her to stop nursing and caring for the kittens to regain her condition to be ready for the next breeding cycle. The growing teeth of the kittens and their claws needing her belly add a lot to make mom more interested in teaching them to hunt than continue nursing. Along with hormonal changes in mom, all of these influences come together for a very efficient transition to the kitten's independence. ***If you want to tame kittens for indoor life and/or adoption, this age at 4-8 weeks is your crucial window of opportunity.***



To further impress the importance of this timing, science has shown that while kittens are very ready to learn and change habits at this age, they are also very stubborn to later change or give up any impressions formed at this age. It is important to create the good association with humans before they have learned otherwise. Once a fear of humans is ingrained, it is very hard to change their young minds after the fact.

It is also around 6 weeks when the kittens start leaving the den, that a new communication 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 be learning that directly from her. They can re-learn differently with the prompt introduction of a counter incentive of food and nurturing from humans, but they aren't easily convinced to change their minds after this second month of life has passed. The period between 4-8 weeks is when nature has biologically predisposed kittens to learn and absorb basic life lessons at warp speed. Whichever teacher gets there first gets to have the strongest influence on their opinions for a lifetime. Cats are very adaptable and will change their opinions over time but nature has stacked the deck against any "Johnny come lately" lessons in the joys of a life with humans. Start the taming early, be consistent and get it done as young as possible!!! Otherwise be prepared to be very patient and forget any time line. It can be done, but there are no guarantees as to how long it might take to gain an older cat's trust.





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handout #3

Why Do Older Female Kittens Seem So Much Harder to Tame Than Males ?

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Question: I'm no expert, but I've tamed a few litters of kittens and find that past 8 weeks the females are progressively harder to tame than the males. What do you think?

Answer: Yes, I agree. I think Mother Nature gets the credit for this phenomenon. Up until 8 weeks, kittens are pretty much defenseless and it is mom's responsibility to make sure they are warm, eat and don't fall prey to predators. Kittens under 8 weeks are programmed by Mother Nature to be fixated on mom, stay near her and do whatever she says. Once they hit 8 weeks, kittens are on a super fast-track to independence. That means, hunting and feeding themselves and getting ready to reproduce. Male kittens seem to get more of a limbo period from Mother Nature since their role in reproduction is pretty minimal, and their child-care role is non-existent. Taming a male kitten even up to 6 months can sometimes be done without much fanfare with consistent hard work.

Here's the info that for me makes ALL the difference between socializing female kittens between 2 months and 4 months: ***Female kittens can become pregnant as early as 4 months old.*** Think about it. In the time between two months of age and four months, the female kitten must learn a mind-bending number things. She must become self sufficient hunting and feeding herself.



She must be prepared to have a family in the street as a single-parent and all that entails. Finding a safe spot to deliver her kittens where she can protect them and defend them from predators is a very advance level of development. With kittens, she must make a hundred decisions every day how to keep them alive and feed herself plus produce milk for them.

Male kittens are on a much slower track of development and have pretty much of a free ride during this same period of time as long as they learn to hunt for themselves and stay out of the way of the dominant males in the colony.

The key to understanding the challenges of socializing older female kittens comes back to something I've discussed frequently in this blog, the FIGHT or FLIGHT instinct. The "Fight or Flight" instinct goes from pretty much zero at 8 weeks to warp drive in a matter of a few weeks in female kittens. Imagine how much mental development it takes to go from complete dependence on mom to being ready to be a mom yourself in 2 months time.

Female kittens this age really need the "option" to stay away from the socializer and approach of their own choice. Give them space and use their hunger to get them to muster up the courage to come up to you to eat. Cornering them or forcing them in any way to be held or handled will have diminishing returns. You may be able to get away with it with young kittens and older male kittens but the older females are programmed to panic in that situation.

A mom cat who has kittens back in the nest is not going to take any unnecessary chances while out getting a meal. Her priority is making sure those kittens survive. Even though the kitten is only 3-4 months old, Mother Nature has already infused her with the instinct to not take ANY unnecessary chances. Why let those humans touch and pet you when it isn't a matter of life or death. Hunger is pretty much the only thing you have to work with at this age with female kittens. The thing in your favor is that female kittens of this age are very intelligent and once they realize you only mean them well, it's almost instant that they hold strong with the progress you make and move steadily forward. This is all the more reason not to give them any reason to think they can't trust you by forced handling. Of course there are exceptions and individual scenarios but you are right as far as I have observed. Older female kittens are a much bigger challenge than their mushy brothers.





Always TRAP feral kittens, DON'T CHASE 'EM DOWN and BAG 'em!

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We always recommend trapping feral kittens, even when one can chase them down and grab them. Chasing down feral kittens is always a bad idea even when successful. The stress and anxiety for the kittens usually takes weeks to overcome. I imagine their instinct must convince the kittens that the person chasing them is set upon eating them. When that same person tries to pet them, hold them, and nurture them, guess how successful they are likely to be.

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

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

BEFORE STARTING ANY TRAPPING, I feed the mom and kittens for several days from a trap I secure open with a cable-tie to make sure no one gets trapped before I'm ready. I put a big bowl of food in the back of the trap and a trail of food from front to back. **The objective is to make sure even the shyest kittens and mom are not afraid to go into the trap BEFORE you start trapping.** Trust me, doing this will save you hours and days of trap-watching. If you can't leave a trap out safely, try it even for the short time you are there feeding each day. Pad-lock the trap open and to a fence if there is any risk of the trap being stolen or tampered with. Hide it under a bush if you can safely leave it for all the cats to get confident going into it without hesitation.



Normally, moms trot out their litters to the feeding station at about 6 weeks old. If you saw when mom got skinny you can set up the trap (tied open) about six weeks later and start "training" mom to go into it even before she brings the kittens along too. Nursing moms are extremely hungry and sometimes, it is only when nursing that you can hope to trap a very wary female.

You probably won't see all the kittens the first day or two. There are usually a couple very shy ones that won't dare to follow mom the first day or two. Once mom and ALL the kittens have been seen going into the trap to eat without hesitation, **ONLY THEN** are you ready to start the trapping project.

I always try to trap mom first and get her safely out of the picture with no kitten witnesses. Moms usually leave the den in mid-afternoon 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 or garage, covering the trap with a sheet to keep her as calm as possible. (read blog # 17 about making sure the vet is experienced enough in spaying a lactating female)

I trap Mom in the conventional way, setting the trip plate but with the kittens, I switch to the bottle and string technique shown in the 2nd picture below. This way I 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 2 or 3 kittens at a time as they crowd into the back of the trap around the dish of food.

GET THE SHYEST KITTENS FIRST. Don't be in a hurry and greedily 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. 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. The shy ones will "freak" if they witness the braver ones getting trapped. When you start to trap the kittens, let the brave ones eat and go if necessary to wait for the shy ones. You'll always get another chance with the brave ones. The shy ones are the smart ones and they won't give you a second chance for some time if you blow it the first time. They are used to mom being away for periods of time without worrying so don't worry about that. Wait until the shyest 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. The shy/smart ones will high-tail it back to the den and not come out for a day or more. 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 coming back the next day and eagerly loading into the trap. Don't be in a hurry. Wait until you get the shy one(s) first, with no other shy witnesses if at all possible.



Even when I've given this advice, I often get the call asking, "what do I do now, I trapped all except



but the shyest kitten and she won't go near the trap for 3 days now? In that case, I put mom in a trap and put that trap inside a larger trap or under a drop trap. (A small cat trap fits inside the bigger raccoon traps) The kitten will often come out to see the mom and can be trapped using the bottle and string shown in the other photo, or the pull string shown for the drop trap.

Notice that the string is taught and ready to be pulled. This way it will not distract the cat in the trap as the string is pulled. They can be out and gone before you even get the string straight and taught. You can order a good drop trap from <http://www.animal-traps.com/>

Six weeks old is ok to separate mom and kittens. Start the kittens right away with socialization for adoption and TNR a feral mom and return her for continued outdoor care. Don't forget to have mom ear-tipped!



In the reverse situation, when mom isn't trapped first and won't go near the trap, here is what I do. Again the bottle and string are necessary because putting another trap inside a trap renders the trip plate unusable. Tie off the string taught for the same reason described below. Some people tie the string to the bottom of the bottle for less of a visual distraction. Hopefully the kitten will call out to mom. For the photos, the trap is out in the open, but trapping may work better in a secluded area or with the end of the trap covered so mom will need to go into the trap to approach the kitten.





Pictured above is a way to use the Pull-String Technique without the bottle. Lift the trap door open with a loop of sturdy wire and set a pin tied to a string through the loop to hold the door up. This picture is looking straight down on the top of the trap. Just a tip for "techies," if you want to get fancy.





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TAMING FERAL KITTENS AND CATS FOR ADOPTION

handout #5



The Urban Cat League Technique for SOCIALIZING FERAL KITTENS

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Kittens under 8 weeks can usually be socialized very quickly 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, with consistent effort and extra sessions, these same guidelines can be effective to socialize kittens up to 6 months old and even with some adult feral cats.

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.

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 sessions. Try to choose the set up which gives the kittens the most "quality" exposure to you and household activity even when you aren't actively working with them.

Small cages or carriers 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. *If you must use a carrier, cage or cattery to house the kittens, keep it in a busy part of the house and then bring it into the bathroom or small room and let them loose for the work sessions.*

CATS SOCIALIZE THEMSELVES BY CHOICE. We only provide the incentive... FOOD!

NEVER PUT DOWN THE FOOD AND LEAVE THE ROOM! It takes away any incentive for them to welcome you into their world. **NO FREE RIDES!**



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.

The following guidelines below 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.

1. 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.*

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

3. 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.



4. 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.

5. 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.)

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. 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!

9. Handling without any food - After a good long session where the kittens are very full and getting sleepy, try gentle petting and work up to holding and petting without the incentive of 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 that will give you hope for the others.



10. Transition to adoption -Before putting them in a cage in an adoption center, test them with a few different socializers. Enlist friends to test how they do meeting strangers. *Remind anyone meeting the kittens for the first time not to stare at them or face squared off to them like a predator would do.* Have them come in slowly, sit on the floor and try the petting while they eat and try the hand feeding when hungry. Prospective adopters often love this interaction and it may be the “magic moment.”

Have prospective adopters, watch our taming video, TOUGH LOVE, linked from urbancat.league.org website so they'll understand how to bond with their new adopted kitten using the same techniques you used to tame them.

If the volunteers at the adoption center can continue the baby food training there it is often a smooth transition. Older and especially shy kittens do better when they go directly to an adoption and bypass the adoption center 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 the bathroom rather than turning the kittens loose to the run of the house, it will assure that they can bond with the kittens first 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 adopters a copy of this print-out too, so they can understand what they kittens have accomplished and how they can continue and sustain the progress. Check in regularly to know how it's working out. A timely intervention can solve most any problem and prevent a failed adoption.

11. 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. Leave toys for them to play with alone at first and then pick a favorite one and tie it with string to the end of a stick, wooden spoon or chop stick. Try to gently entice them from a distance, allowing 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. Laser pointers are a favorite toy and a great tool for getting kittens back into the pen if you are doing the multi-location technique for added exposure to the household AND rolling them into an enclosed room for work sessions.

12. 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.*

Email us questions or tips you discover from your own experience and creativity!
urbancatleague.tamingferals@gmail.com Remember the Mantra “**Tough Love.**”

Check the urbancatleague.org website's socialization page for a printer-friendly version of this hand-out.





NYC Feral Cat Initiative

Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals® 

TAMING FERAL KITTENS AND CATS FOR ADOPTION

handout #6

COOLING-OFF PERIOD - Good Pen for Taming

Reprinted with permission from UrbanCatLeague.org - www.socialferals.blogspot.com

This Pro-Select brand pen is the best one I've found to use to help tame feral kittens. Available through *PetEdge.com* Item # ZW003

Dimensions 35 1/2" X 22 1/4" X 48"

<http://www.petedge.com/product/Home-Kennel/Cages-Crates/Cages-Crates/Easy-CatCage/pc/194/c/310/sc/502/55204.uts>

It's on wheels so you can wheel the kittens around to the place where they will get the most exposure to the sights and sounds of indoor life. I roll it into a small room or up to the bathroom door for taming sessions at feeding time. The rest of the time I wheel them out into the active household so they aren't in "solitary confinement" when I'm not actively working with them. I've discussed this technique in several of the other blog entries but it's a great combination being able to work with them hands-on in a small space AND bring them out into the household in between. The doors are large enough to get a litter box in and out easily.



There are DELUXE shelves you can order extra to add lots of space to keep the bed, food and litter separate for a great quality of life while in the pen.

More info about taming feral kittens at www.nycferalcat.org



A laser light is a great help for leading them into the pen to close them in, but usually at feeding time they just hop in on their own if you make it a habit of feeding them in the pen. Even when they are doing really well and almost ready for adoption, I continue to feed in the pen with the door open so I can close them in and/or get my hands on them without the stress of chasing them around.

We have several of these catteries and even loan them out to adopters for the first couple weeks so they can bond with the cats before turning them loose into the new home. It's a good transition because we can bring the litterbox, beds and smell they are used to along with them to the new home. This works when the adopters can't put them in a bathroom for the first few days to bond with them before turning them loose. I put it together alone but always welcome help of a second person to make it easier.

I buy the fleece covers for the shelves. It's tight but they also fit over the divider shelves. Item # ZW84195



<http://www.petedge.com/product/ProSelect-Fleece-Cat-PerchCover/44478.uts>

I recommend buying the DELUXE SHELVES too, item #ZW84198. I put 2 side by side to make a large shelf for beds up away from the litter. With all 3 as shown they can divide the pen in half.

Cats love the ferret hammocks which are very inexpensive. Item # zw6232 Cats prefer the hammock suspended tightly from the sides of the pen, not droopy as shown. The more tightly it is hung it swags down with their weight but it is much easier for them to get into.





NYC Feral Cat Initiative

Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals® 

TAMING FERAL KITTENS AND CATS FOR ADOPTION

handout #7



Helpful Tips for MEDICATING FERAL KITTENS AND CATS

Reprinted with permission from UrbanCatLeague.org, written by Mike Phillips, L.V.T

With sickly feral kittens try to use your vets most effective but least invasive treatment available. Forcibly restraining kittens unnecessarily to medicate them can set back the taming process and sometimes make complete taming impossible.

Along with any medical treatments remember to feed the most nutritious food possible. A healthy immune system can combat many ailments, but it needs premium quality food to fuel the battle. Natural Balance, Petguard, Wellness, Nutro, Eukanuba are among the best for nutrition. Friskies and Wiskas are inferior, but the better of the grocery store brands. Stay away from grocery store brands when you have a sick cat. The moisture from wet food is much preferable to dry food. (Disclaimer: Keep a sick cat eating even if it only wants a less nutritious brand. Eating "something" is the most important thing.) Building a healthy immune response through a top quality diet can often heal a feral cat when you can't handle her safely to medicate properly. Here are some of the simpler medical treatment options, which don't require stressful or traumatic restraint:

FLEAS:

When safe handling is impossible, forget about a flea bath! **CAPSTAR** pills crushed in food are a safe and effective flea treatment for cats and kittens 4 weeks and older. A half pill is the safe dose for 4-8 week old kittens. CAPSTAR does not require a prescription and can be purchased online at any of the PetMeds-type websites, or even some pet supply stores. CAPSTAR kills fleas in 3-6 hours at which time the cat/kitten may be brought anywhere without fear of risking flea infestation if you dispose of the old infested bedding. The pills can be crushed and sprinkled onto a small amount of a tasty food. They have no unpleasant taste. CAPSTAR has no residual effect so the cat/kitten must not be re-exposed to fleas. It does not kill eggs on the cat so follow up with a long-acting topical treatment when you can handle the kittens safely like Advantage, Revolution, Frontline, etc. continue working for one month). PROGRAM is the follow-up pill to go with CAPSTAR for long-term flea control and works well with outdoor adult ferals. IF you find you CAN handle the kittens in time, a bath with Dawn dishwashing detergent kills fleas on contact. Sometimes a flea comb dipped in the soapy water is enough to comb out a few fleas. Put a soapy ring around the neck and anus at the start to prevent the fleas from escaping into ears and you know where. REVOLUTION has the benefit of also treating ear-mites and roundworms (see below).

EAR MITES:

REVOLUTION requires a prescription but will effectively treat Ear-Mites (it also treats fleas and roundworms at the same time). Briefly handling of the cat/kitten is necessary to squeeze a small amount of the REVOLUTION liquid onto the cat's skin between the shoulder blades. This can be done at the time of a vet exam or after the Spay/Neuter surgery. Other EAR MITE treatments require fourteen days of twice daily eardrops with a refrigerated product like TRESADERM. This is stressful



and traumatic for fearful kittens. Giving cold eardrops twice a day for two weeks is not a good recipe for taming. Some say REVOLUTION needs two treatments, but in the right dose, it has worked well for us every time. The vet can clean and treat the ears with Acares or Ivermectin to kill the mites when the kittens get their Spay/Neuter surgery if you can't treat before then.

Ear mites are contagious and uncomfortable, but not life threatening. If you find you must wait for a vet visit to get them treated the kittens will be ok to wait a bit, but treat a.s.a.p.

VIRAL INFECTIONS:

Treating eye infections can be very difficult but must not be neglected. Scarring and loss of vision is common with untreated Herpes Virus eye infections (Herpes is the R in the FVRCP vaccination). Make sure you have the correct diagnosis since treating with the wrong eye medication can be useless or even harmful. Let the vet prescribe the eye med since you could do harm with the wrong one. For example: if the surface of the eye has been harmed, a steroid ointment could cause permanent damage. If you are required to use the standard tubes of eye ointment (Terramycin, Vetpolymycin, etc.) or drops, remember that if the tip of the tube touches the eye, you may spread the virus to everyone else you treat with that tube. Ideally patients have their own individual tube. If this is financially impossible, take your time and be extra careful. To undo the bad experience of being restrained and treated for the eye problem spend extra nurturing time with the kittens before and after treating the eyes with the proper eye ointment or drops. Terramycin ointment is said to be the most effective against Herpes however it also stings the most. If the eyes aren't in too, too bad shape, the vet may agree that gentler drops and gentle cleaning may be enough rather than the irritating Terramycin. Antibiotics have no direct effect (read about Zithromax below) on viral infections like URI (Upper Respiratory Infection) but often vets will prescribe one to treat or prevent a secondary bacterial infection. This is usually easily mixed into food without handling the cat. Make sure you can follow the directions precisely or don't treat the cat with Antibiotics. Antibiotics are not a "hit or miss" medication to be played around with. Ask the vet if you're not sure! Kittens with URI that are bouncing around, playing and most importantly eating normally, usually don't need an antibiotic at all to get well.

Zithromax (Azithromycin), has been found to be very effective for resolving kitten and adult Herpes eye infections. Although it is an antibiotic and we all know they can't cure viral infections, vets are documenting that an Azithromycin course of treatment often resolves Herpes eye infections.

Azithromycin can be compounded with flavors and stirred into food, avoiding the need to restrain the animal to treat it. It can be ordered with a prescription from VetCentric.com and mailed to you if your vet or pharmacy doesn't do compounding. The medicine itself is not perishable, so stick with the non-perishable flavorings. We use the "Roasted Chicken" and not the perishable "Tuna" which needs refrigeration. The success of this treatment for herpes is unexplained and "off-label" so your vet may not be aware of this seemingly miraculous if counter-intuitive treatment for Herpes eye infections. When eye ointment treatments are impossible, Azithromycin could save the day. It can also be used as the preventative treatment for a secondary bacterial infection. There is another drug Famciclovir that is sometimes used for a difficult viral or herpes eye infection.

PARASITES: (Frequently the cause of Diarrhea)

STRONGID or (PYRANTYL PAMOATE) for **ROUNDWORMS** is given to all kittens as a matter of course (must be given twice, two weeks apart). This can easily be put in food without handling and gobbled up without detection. Strongid is a very effective and safe medicine but will NOT resolve other parasites such as COCCIDIA or GIARDIA. These others are less frequently seen, but very common. 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 to your vet for testing. The test for **GIARDIA** is more expensive and not normally run as a matter of routine. Be sure to ask the vet if he thinks it is warranted to pay the extra to also run the Giardia test. The routine treatment for Giardia is



a very bitter drug called *Metronidazol* or *Flagyl*. It is impossible to disguise this drug in food. A MUCH better alternative for treating Giardia in the feral cat or kitten is **PANACUR** liquid suspension(not the powder). It has a chalky taste that gives you a much better chance of sneaking it into food. It's a once per day treatment for only 5 days that is much shorter than the bitter pill regimen. For **Coccidia** there is a one-time treatment called **PONAZURIL**. It is tasteless and easily mixed in food. Some vets repeat the treatment and doses vary but it is much better for feral cats than the traditional long course of treatment with minty flavored ALBON liquid.

Whenever diarrhea is present, feed a high fiber cat food like W/D to physically push out as many of the parasites as possible. Adding a tablespoon of unspiced canned pumpkin to the food can add fiber to regular wet food. High fiber food may sometimes be enough to clear up a simple case of diarrhea but be ready to get a proper diagnosis and treat with meds if the diarrhea persists.

RINGWORM:

One of my professors told me, "It takes 21 days for Ringworm to heal if you treat it, and 3 weeks if you don't treat it." I found this to be true once treating two young feral kittens. One with sulfur dips and conifite lotion requiring repeated vet trips that terrified her. As a result, she was never comfortable being handled. Her sister was too feral for the vet techs to even handle for the treatments, and she healed on her own with good nutrition in the same amount of time. She is now a loving lap cat while her sister still hates being touched. One effective oral drug we've used, Itraconazole can be flavored at the Pharmacy and you can sneak it into the food for ferals. For years PROGRAM, a flea treatment, was being used to treat Ringworm but the recent vet literature says it doesn't work at all. For hard to treat ferals, we recommend you target good nutrition to build a curative immune system response if a vet treatment is impossible. It does resolve in time.

ANTIBIOTICS:

Cefovecin (**Convenia™**) is a one-time injection that provides 7-14 days of antibiotic treatment. This means that a feral cat with an infected wound could get this one shot instead of a long course of antibiotics. This use on cats is termed "Off-label use" because Cefovecin (Convenia™), has only been tested and approved for treating dermatological problems but doctors have found it to be practical for feral cats AND has the 7-14 days of residual effect. Studies have shown that the only side effects (rarely seen) may be some nausea for a couple days but don't last for the entire 7-14 days. Not all veterinarians agree that Convenia is appropriate for post-dental or Urinary Tract infections. They express that the bacteria commonly found in the mouth and bladder are not in the spectrum that Convenia treats effectively. When appropriate, the chewable Batril tabs mix very well into food.

If your veterinarian doesn't understand the challenges of taming and building the kitten's trust, there are many other vets who do, and will work with you to get the kittens to optimal health without using treatment methods that undo your hard work toward socialization. Ask around for a recommendation from one of the many groups working with feral cats. For NYC there is a list of feral-friendly veterinarians at The NYC Feral Cat Initiative's website nycferalcat.org

The kittens AND YOU, deserve all the help and understanding you can get!! Check the urbancatleague.org taming page for a printer-friendly version of this handout.

