

Kitsap Humane Society
Foster Care Program

Kitten and Bottle Baby Handbook



RESCUE * REHABILITATE * REHOME

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Introduction

Welcome to the team of dedicated kitten foster volunteers! Kittens under the age of 8 weeks need a mother—either a cat or a human surrogate. They are very vulnerable in a shelter and the chance to get them into a foster home within 24 hours is a chance to save their lives. This handbook is meant as a supplement to the Foster Care Program Manual and not a replacement.

GUIDELINES:

- Foster kittens can carry illness into your home that could affect your health and/or the health of your resident animals and future foster animals, so maintaining the 2 week quarantine is vital. See the section on Panleuk in the Foster Care Program Manual.
- The Kitsap Humane Society does not have the funds to pay for damage the animals may cause, nor can it be held responsible for damages to personal property or illness to personal animals.
- Young children should not handle the newborn foster kittens as they are extremely fragile. Once the kittens can walk and play on their own, children must be supervised closely and taught proper handling techniques.
- Foster volunteers should wash their hands before and after handling animals, fecal waste, or litter boxes.
- Foster volunteers should routinely clean the foster kittens' quarters and disinfect the entire premises before new kittens are introduced. See the section on Disease Control in the Foster Care Program Manual.
- Foster volunteers can have a maximum of 2 litters of kittens at a time, and must keep each litter of kittens separate until everyone is healthy and has gone through the quarantine period, and even then it is usually better to keep the litters separate.
- Foster volunteers must be able to bring the kittens to the shelter for their vaccines and boosters every two weeks, and for medical check-ups as needed.
- Foster kittens are ready to have spay/neuter surgery and are available for adoption when they are healthy and weigh 2lbs. The foster parent must contact the Foster Care Coordinator (FCC) to schedule surgery appointments.

Supplies

- **Carrier or box:** KHS can usually supply foster families with carriers that must be returned with the kittens when they return for adoption. A cardboard box is a great way to keep small kittens confined and warm. As they become more ambulatory, turn the box on its side within a confined area to give them a familiar safe place to nestle into.
- **Small litter box for kittens:** Cut-down cardboard boxes or pie tins work well, just be sure that it is low enough for a small kitten to step into! Rolled-up towels on sides of the litter box can act like a ramp.
- **Cat litter:** Any non-clumping variety of litter will work. Kittens are curious by nature and will try to eat the litter at first. If the litter is clumping, it may cement in the kittens' intestines and be fatal.
- **Water bowls:** Should be heavy and difficult to tip over.
- **Food bowls (at least 2):** One is for the eat-at-will dry cat food, the other for canned food. You can use pie tins, paper plates, or any relatively flat plate or saucer. Bigger litters will need multiple bowls.
- **Food:** You should have dry kitten food, canned food (any brand for adults or kittens as long as it is pate, not chunks or shreds), and all-meat baby food (must not contain vegetables or onion/garlic powder). Have food and water available at all times, and offer a few varieties in the case of picky eaters.
- **Heat:** Unless the nursery is at least 85° and your kittens are 2 weeks or older, you need to supply extra heat. **BE SURE THAT THE KITTENS HAVE ROOM TO MOVE AWAY FROM THE HEAT!**
 - **Heating pad:** Place it under several towels, and make sure that it covers only half of the floor area of their box. **The heating pad should be on "low" or "medium" to prevent overheating the kittens.** Make sure to cover any electrical cords as well, so that the kittens are not tempted to play and bite on them.
 - **Hot water bottles or rice bags:** Heat in a microwave until warm to the touch without being uncomfortable. These should also be covered by towels, and should be changed regularly to ensure that they stay warm for the kittens to snuggle up against.
 - **Infrared lamp:** Securely attach overhead a sufficient distance from the kitten box to maintain a temperature of approximately 85⁰ in one section of the nursery. Ensure that any electrical cords that are within reach of the kittens are properly covered so the kittens are not tempted to play and bite on them.
- **Clean towels and blankets:** You will want to change bedding daily, so having plenty of extra towels on hand is a lifesaver! Hand towels can make bottle feeding much more comfortable for the kittens and less messy for yourself.
- **Toys:** Plastic, disinfectable toys are good to reuse for new litters. Kittens can also amuse themselves with empty toilet paper rolls that you dispose of after each litter. Be sure to "kitten-proof" your home because kittens will play with anything and everything. Their climbing abilities will develop as they grow, so anything of value should be kept out of reach!
- **Scale:** A food or postal scale will be very helpful in monitoring small kittens' growth to ensure that they are consuming enough and to catch early signs of any potential issues. You can also predict when they will be 2lbs and ready for surgery if you know approximately how much they gain each day or week.

General Care of Kittens

- Living quarters should be cleaned every day. When cleaning, place the kittens in a separate (sanitizable) area until the living quarters are COMPLETELY dry. All surfaces, bowls, toys, etc. should be disinfected so you should keep the kittens in a room without carpeting, upholstery, or hardwood floors. See the section on Disease Control in the Foster Care Program Manual.
- Very young kittens should be kept in a large box or cat carrier lined with a towel for easy cleaning. It is crucial to keep the kittens warm and small litters or singlets will need help in staying warm. See the section on Heat under “Supplies”.
- Kittens less than 2 weeks old typically do not urinate/defecate on their own and will need to be stimulated if they do not have a mother cat. This should be done every few hours (usually before and after feeding) by gently rubbing a warm moist cotton ball on the kitten’s anus and genital area. Avoid excess irritation.
- Keep the kittens clean. A mother works hard to keep her kittens clean, grooming them thoroughly to remove any sticky messes they may get into, such as kitten food or feces. A flea comb will get rid of dried feces in the fur and you can gently clean a kitten with a warm, damp cloth, using short strokes to mimic a mother's tongue. Sometimes cat litter and dried feces can become caked on the underside of the tail or between the kitten's toes; this may be softened and removed by dipping the kitten's back end into a basin of warm water. Be sure to be gentle and dry them well so they don't get cold.
- It is recommended to keep a daily journal on their weights, appetites, energy levels, stool consistencies/color, if there is any discharge from the eyes or nose, and other notes.
- Be sure to ALWAYS keep your foster kittens indoors, and in their carrier when outside or in a car.

Socialization and Handling

Socializing the foster kittens to humans and other animals is a very important part of the foster parent job. Any introduction of cats to other cats, or cats to dogs should be made with great care and under constant supervision. Outgoing, friendly kittens can be cuddled and played with freely, after spending a couple days acclimating to a comfy box in a quiet room. Shy kittens will need more encouragement to be convinced that humans are kind and loving. If kittens are apprehensive, spend time simply being in the same room—sit on the floor quietly reading or doing another task, and try to resist the urge to handle them. Allow them to explore and it won't be long before they are crawling all over you. You can pet them and talk to them gently while they are eating to further reinforce positive associations. Hand feeding is also a great way to gain trust.

Kittens and puppies deprived of human attention will naturally be fearful of people and household situations. Picking up your young foster animals frequently to check for proper temperature and weight is an important first step in forming a bond. Whenever you handle the babies, slip one hand under its chest, holding the front legs with your fingers. At the same time support the hind legs with your other hand. Never pick up your foster by the scruff of the neck or by its legs. Mishandling can be painful and rapidly turn a docile pet into a defensive and unhappy animal. Even the youngest kitten and puppy may hiss, spit, growl, and snap at you until it becomes accustomed to your touch.

Children and kittens/puppies can become the best of friends, but must be supervised at all times. Be sure you take the time to teach them that kittens and puppies can be easily hurt if played with too roughly, and always allow the animal to be left alone if it desires. As the animal gets older, playtime can be increased in frequency and length.

Bottle Feeding Guide

BASICS:

You will need to purchase an animal nursing kit at a pet store that includes a bottle, extra nipples, and a cleaning brush. Cut a small “X” or poke a series of holes with a paperclip in the tip of your first nipple. You know that you have made the nipple opening just big enough if, when the bottle is held upside-down, formula drips slowly from it. Too small an opening will make the kittens work too hard to get their formula, tiring them out before they’ve had enough to eat. Too large an opening will force too much formula into them, too fast. Commercially available kitten milk replacer (KMR) should be given at the kitten's body temperature. It is best to warm reconstituted formula in a hot water bath and test it on your wrist before feeding. Once the can is opened or the powder reconstituted, unused formula should be kept refrigerated and discarded after 24 hours. NEVER give a kitten cow's milk (or anything else besides the specified formula).

FEEDING TIME:

Before each feeding, sterilize the bottles and nipples by boiling them in water. It is best to feed the on a counter-top or in your lap; this allows them to feed with all four feet planted and their heads level, much as they would if they were nursing from their mom. Some kittens prefer to nurse standing on their hind legs while holding the bottle, or while wrapped in a hand towel like a burrito. Gently open a kitten's mouth with one finger and place the tip of the nipple on their tongue. If they won't eat, try petting them down the back. Pull lightly on the bottle to encourage vigorous sucking. Be sure to tilt the bottle up slightly to prevent the kitten from inhaling air. Do not force the kitten to nurse, or allow them to nurse too fast. Never feed a kitten while they are cradled on their back—if the fluid goes down the wrong way, it may end up in their lungs. After each feeding, the kitten should be burped. Gently massage their back or pat it lightly.

Overfeeding is as dangerous as underfeeding kittens! Keep an eye on your kittens at feeding time and monitor how much each is eating. Ensure that each kitten is receiving the proper amount of formula (see the section on Development and Care) by measuring out the proper amount for each kitten before feeding. If a kitten is not willingly eating the entire amount, or appears full early, do not force them to eat by squirting the formula into their mouths, as there is a high risk of aspiration. It is best to monitor their weight closely at this age to ensure they are getting the proper nutrition.

WEANING:

Weaning is the process of teaching the kittens to eat on their own. Start by introducing the kittens to solid food by offering warmed canned food mixed with a little KMR in a shallow saucer. You can also soaking dry kibble in KMR until it is a mush-like consistency. Begin by placing one kitten near the plate of the slurry mixture; if they start eating, their littermates will probably catch on. Without a mother to show them, many kittens do not know how to lap or chew and will end up walking, sliding, and tracking it all over the place at first. Sometimes one will begin lapping right away and bite the edge of the plate while they figure it out. Some will lick the slurry off of your finger and then you can slowly lower your finger to the plate and hold it to the food. The kittens need to learn to eat with their heads bent down and it can take a few feedings to master.

If they do not seem interested enough to even sniff your finger, try gently opening the kitten's mouth and rubbing a little of the food on their teeth and they'll hopefully start licking your finger. After offering the slurry, bottle feed to ensure that they get enough food. Be sure that the kittens have access to fresh water in a low, stable bowl at all times.

Development and Care

Kittens typically gain about a pound a month, or 3-4 oz per week, but their weight can vary depending on their health and genetics. They must be 2lbs before they can have spay/neuter surgery.

<1 WEEK OF AGE:

Feeding: Bottle feed formula per manufacturer's instruction every 2-3 hours until kittens are full but not bloated—usually kittens will consume at least 1/2 tablespoon of formula per feeding.

Environment: The temperature of the nest box should be 85-90 degrees. Chilling is the number one danger to newborn kittens.

Behavior & Training: At one week of age, the kittens should weigh 4oz, and should be handled minimally. Kittens will sleep 90% of the time and eat the other 10%.

1-2 WEEKS OF AGE:

Feeding: Bottle feed formula per manufacturer's instruction every 2-3 hours until kittens are full but not bloated—usually kittens will consume at least 1/2 tablespoon of formula per feeding.

Environment: Floor temperature of the nest box should be 80-85 degrees.

Behavior & Training: Kittens at 2 weeks of age will weigh about 7-8oz. Ear canals open between 5-8 days. Eyes will open between 8-14 days. They open gradually, usually starting to open from the nose outward. Short-haired cats' eyes will usually open earlier than those of Persian ancestry. All kittens are born with blue eyes, and initially no pupils can be distinguished from the irises—the eyes will appear solid dark blue. Healthy kittens will be round and warm with pink skin. If you pinch them gently, their skin should spring back. When you pick a kitten up, it should wiggle energetically and when you put it down near its littermates it should crawl back.

2-3 WEEKS OF AGE:

Feeding: Bottle feed formula per manufacturer's instruction every 3-4 hours until kittens are full but not bloated—usually kittens will consume at least 1 tablespoon of formula per feeding.

Environment: Floor temperature of the nest box should be 75-80 degrees.

Behavior & Training: Kittens will weigh about 10 ounces. Their ears will become erect. Kittens begin to crawl around day 18. Kittens can stand by day 21. Kittens will begin to play with each other, biting ears, tails and paws even before their teeth have come in. Kittens learn to sit and touch objects with their paws. Kittens begin their socialization phase—they would normally be strongly influenced by the behavior of their mother for the next six weeks. To further socialize kittens, increase the amount of handling and get them accustomed to human contact. It is important not to expose them to anything frightening; children may seem intimidating and should be supervised closely while visiting to ensure gentle handling.

3-4 WEEKS OF AGE:

Feeding: Bottle feed formula per manufacturer's instruction every 4-6 hours until kittens are full but not bloated—usually kittens will consume at least 2 tablespoons of formula per feeding. At this stage kittens may start to wean (see the section on Weaning under “Bottle Feeding Guide”).

Environment: Floor temperature of the nest box should be 70-75 degrees from this point onward.

Behavior & Training: Kittens will weigh about 13 ounces. Adult eye color will begin to appear, but may not reach final shade for another 9 to 12 weeks. Kittens' eyes begin to function like adult cats' eyes. Kittens will start attempting to clean themselves, though you will have to continue to do most of the cleaning. Begin litter

training; use a low box with one inch of non-clumping litter or shredded newspaper (see the section on Supplies). After each feeding, place each kitten in the box and encourage them to walk around in it. You can stimulate them while in the box to eliminate. While keeping the litter box clean is important, it may help to leave a small amount of feces and urine in the box to remind them where to eliminate while they are learning. It is a good idea to confine the kittens to a relatively small space, because the larger the area the kittens have to play in, the more likely they will forget where the litter box is.

4-5 WEEKS OF AGE:

Feeding: If not weaned, bottle feed formula per manufacturer's instruction every 8 hours until kittens are full but not bloated—usually kittens will consume at least 3 tablespoons (1-1/2 oz.) of formula per feeding. They can usually drink and eat from a saucer by this age.

Behavior & Training: Keep the litter box clean and away from their food.

5-6 WEEKS OF AGE:

Feeding: Feed slurry 4 times a day. Thicken the mixture gradually. Have dry food and water available at all times. Some kittens will not like canned food. For reluctant eaters, try mixing any meat-flavored human baby food with a little water. The meat flavor is often more appealing to the picky eaters. Be sure the brand you get does not contain onion powder as this ingredient is hazardous to kittens.

Behavior & Training: At about five weeks, kittens can start to roam around the room, under supervision. They will weigh around 1lb (16oz) and the testicles of male kittens will become visible. Play with your kittens daily! It is a good idea to wear long sleeves and pants, as their claws are sharp. Some kittens may be fearful at first; do not force yourself upon them. You can get them used to your presence by sitting in the middle of the room and talk on the phone or read out loud; this way they hear your voice but do not feel threatened. Get them accustomed to the sounds of the TV, vacuum cleaner, and other household sounds.

6-7 WEEKS OF AGE:

Feeding: They should be eating canned and dry food. If one kitten appears food-possessive, use a second dish and leave plenty of food out so that everyone is eating. Bear in mind that a kitten at this age has a stomach roughly the size of an acorn, so, although they may not eat much at a single sitting, they like to eat at frequent intervals throughout the day so having food available at all times is important.

Behavior & Training: By this time, you have "mini-cats." They will wash themselves, use scratching posts, play games with each other, their toys, and you, and many will come when you call them. Be sure to reintroduce them to their litter box after meals, during play sessions, and after naps.

7-8 WEEKS OF AGE:

Feeding: Offer wet food 3-4 times a day (each kitten will be eating a little over one can of food per day) and have dry food and water available at all times. If you have a litter with a mom cat, she should only be allowing brief nursing sessions, if any. DO NOT feed the kittens table scraps.

8+ WEEKS OF AGE:

Feeding: Offer wet food 2-3 times a day and have dry food and water available at all times



Behavior & Training: By the end of the 8th week, kittens should weigh around 2 pounds. If all the kittens weigh two pounds, they are ready for their spay/neuter surgery and to be available for adoption!

Illness

A healthy kitten has bright eyes, a sleek coat, and a plump belly. Younger kittens are content to sleep between feedings and as they approach 8 weeks they begin to spend more time playing. Normal body temperature for a kitten is 100-102.5 F. Unfortunately, kittens do become ill and sometimes die while in foster care, so it is important to prevent disease and treat it as soon as it appears. You should always notify your Mentor if a kitten seems sick. They may give you advice or tell you to bring the kitten in to see Vet Services.

A note about treating your kitten: in general, if you need to treat a kitten, try to medicate them in an impersonal way. If you hold the kitten in your lap to medicate them, they will associate being picked up with being medicated, and think the worst every time you try to cuddle with them. It is better to put the kitten up on a countertop and wrap them in a towel to administer medication.

For more information, see the section on Illness in the Foster Care Program Manual.

<p><u>MEDICAL NON-EMERGENCIES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Runny discharge from nose or eyes • Lack of appetite and/or weight loss • Lethargy and/or unusual behavior • Coughing and sneezing • Lack of bowel movement for more than 24 hours • Several bouts of vomiting or diarrhea • Large distended belly • Non weight-bearing lameness persisting for more than 12 hours • Swollen, painful joints or a gait that appears as if the animal is “walking on eggshells” • Lameness that initially improves but does not resolve in 24 – 48 hours • Incessant scratching of self <p>If your foster animal experiences one or more of these signs, please contact your Mentor for advice or to set up a Vet Check.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">  MEDICAL EMERGENCIES  </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diarrhea for more than two days, especially if light colored—yellow or bloody • Vomiting for 24 hours or more • Not eating for more than 12 hours • Listless behavior or dehydration (pulled skin stands up over the nape of the neck for more than 3 seconds) • Very high/very low temps (anal, above 102.8F/below 100.2F) • Any difficulty breathing • Any problem associated with systemic signs, such as lethargy, loss of appetite, weakness, and fever • Bleeding • Trauma <p>If your foster animal experiences one or more of these signs, please call the <u>Veterinarian</u> listed on the Foster Request Form if it is after hours, and notify the FCC. If the emergency is during business hours, please bring the animal to KHS and notify the FCC.</p>
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Common Ailments

DIARRHEA:

Diarrhea is common in kittens and be caused by parasites, viruses, bacteria, food changes, stress, overfeeding, or other causes. If the diarrhea is mild and the kitten is otherwise alert and playful, you can try giving it less food but more often and try adding 1/8 teaspoon of pumpkin puree (not pumpkin pie filling) to the food to help get rid of the diarrhea. Be sure to notify your Mentor if your kitten has any loose stool. If the diarrhea persists or if dehydration occurs, follow the protocol in the section on Medical Emergencies.

Coccidiosis, a protozoa, causes diarrhea and can be tested for. This single celled parasite is most common in kittens, but can be occasionally found in adults. Treatment consists of about ten days of medication in either liquid or pill form. Two other protozoa that can cause kitten diarrhea are Cryptosporidium and Giardia. Also human pathogens, these protozoa produce watery diarrhea which can spread among all other cats and can sometimes resolve without treatment, but sometimes it requires specific medication. Both can be diagnosed from a fresh stool sample, so be sure to bring one to your Vet Check appointment.

Several large worms can be found on the feces of kittens. Roundworms are long and thin (resembling spaghetti) and can get them from the environment and/or from their mothers. These worms can come up in both vomit and stool. The cysts of roundworms can persist for years in soil and be spread to other cats or human children, so it is important to schedule the dewormer boosters every two weeks with the FCC. Dogs and cats get tapeworms (small, rice-like segments) from ingesting an infected flea, which usually happens while grooming. Cats can also get whipworms, which require microscopic examination to see the cysts so be sure to bring a stool sample (and sample of the worm, if applicable) to your Vet Check appointments if appetite, stool consistency, vomiting, or lethargy are present in your foster kitten.

The bacteria Salmonella, Campylobacter, Clostridium, and others can cause diarrhea in kittens and all require microscopic examination and/or a bacterial culture for diagnosis, and can be treated with antibiotics. These and some other fecal pathogens can be spread to people if you are not diligent about hand washing.

Finally, there are a number of viral causes of diarrhea, with Panleukopenia being the most devastating. Adult cats are generally protected with commercial Panleuk vaccines. See the section on Panleuk in the Foster Care Program Manual.

EAR MITES:

Ear mites are tiny parasites that live in the ear canal. They cause intense itching, noted by scratching behind the ears and violent head shaking. Inside the ears you may see a crumbly, dark brown discharge that may smell bad (the discharge closely resembles coffee grounds). Ear mites are contagious to other cats and can be treated with ear drops or an injection.

FADING KITTENS:

Once in a while, one or more kittens in a litter that were healthy and vigorous at birth will begin to "fade" after a week or two of life. They will stop growing, begin to lose weight, and stop nursing and crawling. They may cry continuously and lose the ability to stay upright. The mother cat may push them out of the nest, where they often chill and starve to death. Kittens fade very quickly—they will not last 48 hours without veterinary care, and probably will not recover even with intensive care.

There is no clear cause or reason for this condition - it has been linked to birth defects, environmental stress, and infectious disease. Early veterinary treatment is imperative, but even with tube feeding, rehydration, and monitoring, most fading kittens will die.

FELINE LEUKEMIA (FeLV) AND FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY (FIV):

FeLV and FIV are retroviruses cats get from other cats (or their mothers). In the early stages, infected cats appear healthy but over months to years, they develop a severe, ultimately fatal disease. The blood test for FeLV can be performed at any time and will be helpful for deciding which kittens should be fostered or if kittens need to be isolated. On the other hand, testing for FIV is more difficult until a kitten is four-six months old, although tests run at 6-8 weeks provide useful preliminary information.

FLEAS:

Fleas are insects that love to feed on kittens. The common flea is hardy; it can live up to 4 months without feeding, and has a life span of up to 2 years! Although each flea only consumes a small drop of blood, fleas commonly attack in large numbers and an infestation can lead to anemia and even death. Fleas can also harbor tapeworms, so a large part of tapeworm treatment is flea control. For these reasons, it is essential that your home be free of fleas before bringing home a small kitten.

If your foster kitten has fleas, it is important to remove them without harming the cat and wash all bedding in hot soapy water. One safe way to remove fleas from very young kittens is daily flea combing. Keep a jar of soapy water near you to dip the comb into after each stroke. If the kitten is less than 4 weeks old and infested, bathe with mild dish soap using warm water and immediately towel dry thoroughly afterwards. If the kitten is over 4 weeks old, the Veterinarians at KHS will administer flea treatment. **DO NOT** administer your own flea treatment.

UPPER RESPIRATORY INFECTION (URI):

URI is unfortunately common in animal shelters. It is caused by airborne viruses and bacteria that are contagious and spread very quickly. If you notice any symptoms of URI, notify your Mentor as soon as possible.

Signs of URI to watch out for:

- Sneezing and discharge from eyes or nose
- Congested breathing
- Loss of appetite
- Lethargy
- Dehydration

VOMITING:

If your kitten is vomiting, it is possible that they are eating their meals too quickly. You should watch them when they eat and not allow them to eat too much too quickly. One episode of vomiting is generally not concerning, but if your foster animal vomits multiple times, notify your Mentor and they will advise a Vet Check.

Mothers with Kittens

If you get a litter of kittens with a mother cat, you are in luck! She will do most, if not all, of the care necessary for the kittens and teach them everything they need to know to be awesome cats, from eating dry food to using the litter box to soliciting attention from humans. It is important to have a warm, comfortable place for mom to nurse her babies, but it is equally as important to give her space to stretch her legs. A bathroom with the small kittens set up in the bathtub is ideal because she can easily hop out of the tub to get some alone time. Like her kittens, mother cats should never go outside while in foster care.

While she is nursing, be sure to have water, wet food, and dry food available to her at all times because almost all of her calories will be spent feeding her babies. Because of this, nursing queens can be lethargic but otherwise healthy. You should still be aware of dehydration (see the section on Giving Medications and Skills in the Foster Care Program Manual), rapid weight loss, lack of appetite, or severe lethargy, which indicate illness. If you have a sick mother cat, she might not produce enough milk for her babies and/or not want to care for them. You might also have a mother cat that is not interested in caring for her babies for whatever reason; in these cases, you will have to supplement with bottle feeding and other care.

SOCIALIZATION:

Most mother cats will be attentive to her babies and social with humans, and will teach her kittens to be that way. However, KHS occasionally gets mother cats who are unsocial or semi-feral and in these cases, it is especially important for you as the foster parent to socialize the kittens. As soon as the kittens are at the age that they can start being handled and socialized (see the section on Development and Care), they should get regular human interaction. If the mother cat inhibits socialization or won't let you near her babies and they are fully weaned, the FCC might suggest returning her to the shelter before the kittens are ready to come back. Kittens should generally stay with their mothers for as long as possible, so the decision to separate early will be made on a case-by-case basis.

WEANING:

An attentive mother should teach her kittens to eat on their own and use the litter box. You should have wet and dry food available for the mother at all times, and the kittens will start eating it when they are 4-6 weeks old. If you have stubborn kittens that want to keep nursing (sometimes the mother cat will allow this, other times she'll move away) but has the proper dentition for wet or dry food, keep the mother cat separate most of the time to encourage the kittens to eat on their own. Always offer food and try encouragement techniques before allowing the mother to nurse again. Weighing the kittens frequently will be crucial in knowing if they are getting enough food.

**Thank you for caring for kittens in need!
We couldn't do it without you!**