

KITTEN PROGRAM

TRAINING MANUAL

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PROGRAM GOALS

Every year, hundreds of kittens under 4 weeks of age are brought to the Dumb Friends League, many without a mother to care for them. This delicate population requires special care and attention to prevent illness and behavioral issues. Kittens under the age of 4 weeks are an issue for many shelters, as they do not have the resources to properly care for them.

The Kitten Program will incorporate both onsite facilities as well as foster homes. The Foster office, with the support of Veterinary Services, will supervise and manage the care of these kittens. The departments have created operating procedures specific to the needs of this population.

Our goal with developing a successful Kitten Program is to increase the number of kittens that enter the shelter and are able to be placed into homes. By addressing their medical and behavioral needs early on, we can not only save more lives, but also place happier, healthier kittens into loving homes.

This handbook will be a useful tool in helping volunteers, foster parents and staff understand the life and needs of a neonatal kitten.

THE POPULATION

The term neonatal kitten refers to a kitten from birth to 3 to 4 weeks of age. The first few weeks of a kitten's life are extremely fragile because they rely on their mother for all care: warmth, food, urination/defecation. Kittens under 2 weeks spend the majority of their time sleeping and a small amount of time eating.

At birth, kittens weigh roughly 3 to 4 ounces. They are unable to see or hear and rely on warmth and smell to guide them to their mothers. Kittens begin weight gain almost immediately and will almost double their weight by week 1 with proper care and nutrition. Kittens gain roughly a half an ounce each day.

For the first few weeks of life, kittens are unable to regulate their body temperature. In the first week of life, normal body temperature ranges from $94.5-97.5^{\circ}$ F. In the second and third weeks, normal body temperature ranges from $98-100^{\circ}$ F. Body temperatures of less than 94° F are associated with severe gastrointestinal disease. Even with the best human care and/or a mother's care, many kittens will not survive their first weeks of life, and mortality rates have been reported between 10-30%.

Candidates for the Dumb Friends League Kitten Program

This program is specifically for kittens that do not have a mother upon entering the shelter. At intake, the foster staff will determine the best placement for kittens. Finding any potential surrogate will be the first step. If no surrogates are available, the kittens will be considered for bottle-feeding depending on overall health.

Queens (mother cats) will be kept with their litters unless it becomes detrimental to the litter's health.

Where Do These Kittens Come From?

Many of the kittens the League takes in are found. In many cases, their mothers are feral cats that have left the nest and/or been scared off by human interaction. If neonatal kittens are left on their own, their mortality rate is almost 100 percent. Kittens are also sometimes surrendered by their owners. While our staff speaks to the owners about keeping the kittens with their mothers, many are unable to handle the responsibility of having a litter of kittens in their home.

SUPPLIES PROVIDED BY THE DUMB FRIENDS LEAGUE

General care

- Bedding, towels and wash cloths
- Cat carrier

- Collars
- Food and dishes
- Litter box and litter

- Medical supplies (vaccines and medications)
- Toys

Neonatal care

- Appropriate sanitizer/cleaner
- Bottles and nipples
- Cotton balls
- Karo Syrup/sugar Syrup
- KMR
- Scale
- SnuggleSafe/heating pad
- Syringes

- Thermometer
- Tupperware container
- Unscented baby wipes

VACCINATIONS & DE-WORMING

Upon entering the shelter, kittens that are at least 2 weeks of age will be given a de-wormer in order to help prevent and/or treat common intestinal parasites.

Kittens are vaccinated at 1 pound and/or 1 month with Modified Live Virus, FVRCP (Fel-O-Guard Plus 3) and Killed Virus bivalent calici (CaliciVax) vaccines. They will also be given a booster every 2 weeks until 16 weeks of age using Killed FVRCP combined with bivalent calici (Fel-O-Vax PCT + CaliciVax).

Kittens will also receive a de-wormer at each vaccination.

KITTEN DEVELOPMENT MILESTONES

	Eyes	Ears	Umb. Cord	Incisors	Canines	Premolars	Weight/Activity
DAYS							
0-3	closed	flat to head	attached	none	none	none	normal weight: 90-110g
3-5	closed	flat to head	dry, will have fallen off by day 5	none	none	none	< 4 oz.
5-7	closed	flat to head	none	none	none	none	< 4 oz.
7-10	mostly closed, may be slightly open	flat to head	none	none	none	none	4-6 oz. should have doubled birth weight
10-14	mostly open, blue in color	mostly flat to head	none	none	none	none	5-7 oz.
WEEKS							
2-3	open, bright blue	rounded shape	none	none	none	none	6-8 oz. beginning to crawl around
3-4	open, bright blue	erect	none	becoming visible	none	none	8-12 oz. starting to walk, wobbly
4-5	open, bright blue	erect, pointed shape	none	erupted	beginning to erupt/ erupted	beginning to erupt	up to 1 lb. pouncing, leaping, weaning, D/U on their own
6-7	open, color changing	erect, pointed shape	none	erupted	erupted	erupted	1-1.5 lbs. active, prime socialization period
8	open, perma- nent color	erect, pointed shape	none	all deciduous teeth in	all deciduous teeth in	all deciduous teeth in	1.5-2 lbs. appropriate for adoption if > 2 lbs.

FIVE MAIN TASKS WHEN CARING FOR NEONATAL KITTENS

- 1. Providing adequate and consistent heat/warmth
- 2. Feeding nutritiously and properly
- 3. Stimulating defecation and urination
- 4. Providing help when weaning
- 5. Helping aid in kitten's socialization and development

Warmth

Until around 1 month, kittens are unable to regulate their body heat. The mother cat (queen) acts not only as a food source, but also keeps the kittens quite toasty! A kitten's temperature ranges from 94-100°F depending on age.

An ideal temperature for a kitten kennel and area is 85 degrees. However, using heating pads and other heating equipment in a small and confined area, such as a crate, will provide enough warmth. Please cover the crate with a towel or blanket when not working with the kittens. Human heat isn't enough to keep a kitten warm or to warm it if its temperature is low. For kittens under 1 month, always make sure that they have access to a heating source.

- SnuggleSafe discs stay warm for hours. Since they are flat, they also give kittens the opportunity to move away from the heat source.
- Kittens should be able to have a place to go if they get too hot.
- The heating source should always have a blanket or towel around it—kittens should never be placed directly on a heating source.
- If a kitten feels cold/chilled, take a rectal temperature. If its rectal temperature is below the listed parameters, it is hypothermic and will require warming therapy. It is important to warm it slowly, wrapping the kitten in a towel and placing it near a heating source. Kittens that appear cold/chilled should not be fed until they have reached a normal temperature.
- A kitten's temperature is taken rectally. Please apply a water-based lubricant to the thermometer tip prior to taking a rectal temperature.
- Make sure all bedding is clean and dry. Damp bedding can be dangerous to a kitten's health.
- Cover the crate with a towel or blanket to prevent drafts and cooling.

Kittens that aren't given proper warmth can suffer from hypothermia. If the kitten does not return to a normal temperature, hypoglycemia can occur, significantly dropping its blood-sugar levels. This can be fatal. Please refer to Fading Kitten Symptoms & Protocol if this occurs.

Feeding Time

Kittens are fed using kitten milk replacer. Cow's milk and other common varieties do not contain appropriate nutrients. The Dumb Friends League uses *KMR*. This is the only brand authorized to be used. Changing a kitten's diet can be detrimental to its health and development. Any prepared milk replacer will only be used for 24 hours and then discarded. The following guidelines demonstrate appropriate feeding schedules and feeding amounts based on the Dumb Friends League-approved procedures:

Kitten Age	Frequency of Feeding	Max Time Overnight
0-2 weeks	Every 2 hours	3-4 hours
2-3 weeks	Every 3 hours	4-5 hours
3-4 weeks	Every 4 hours	5-6 hours
4-6 weeks	Every 4-5 hours	6-7 hours
6+ weeks	Every 6-8 hours	10 hours

Maddie's Fund Feeding Guidelines

Age	Weight in Grams	Weight in Ounces	Daily Volume of KMR (ml)	At Each Feeding (ml)	# of Feedings
Newborn	100	3.5	27	4	7
	125	4.4	34	5	7
	150	5.3	40	6	7
	175	6.2	47	7	7
~ 1 week	200	7	54	8	7
	225	8	61	9	7
	250	8.8	68	10	7
	275	9.7	74	11	6 to 7
~ 2 weeks	300	10.6	81	12	6 to 7
	325	11.5	88	13	6 to 7
	350	12.3	95	14	6 to 7
	375	13.2	101	15	6
~ 3 weeks	400	14.1	108	16	5
	425	15	115	17	5

Kitten Milk Replacer & Feeding Techniques

In order to help a kitten's stomach adjust to the milk replacer, the League uses a gradual increase in the amount of KMR the kitten is fed:

- The first 4 feedings are at a ratio of 8 parts water to 1 part KMR.
- The second 4 feedings are at a ratio of 4 parts water to 1 part KMR.
- All other feedings are at a ratio of 2 parts water to 1 part KMR.

Milk replacer needs to be refrigerated when not in use. All formula made needs to be used within 24 hours. When feeding, make sure the formula is warm, since kittens are unable to digest cold formula. <u>Do not</u> heat the formula in the microwave; instead set the bottle or syringe in a bowl of warm water. Heat the KMR similarly to how you would heat a human baby's bottle. Do not leave formula out while feeding—bacteria can grow quickly!

A kitten that has eaten enough will typically detach from or push away the bottle. However, there are dangers to over feeding and under feeding kittens, so always <u>weigh</u>, feed, weigh. Kittens that have eaten enough typically have a larger, pear-shaped belly, with small bubbles/milk around their mouth.

Bottle feeding and syringe feeding are the easiest ways to feed kittens. In both methods, the kitten needs to be placed on its stomach in the position it would be if it was nursing from mom. *Do not place a kitten on its back*—this can lead to aspiration and other medical problems. The position of the head should be a roughly 45 degrees.

The weight of a kitten should be documented prior to and after feeding on the Daily Care Sheet. This gives the most accurate calculation of how much the kitten has eaten.

It can be beneficial to "groom" and "massage" kittens bodies while they are feeding, as this mimics a mother's care.

Bottle-feeding Techniques

- Open the mouth gently with the tip of your finger and slip the nipple in. Once your kitten gets the hang of bottle feeding, it will search out the nipple enthusiastically! You will feel a "vacuum effect" when the kitten gets into suckle mode.
- When bottle feeding, the kitten should be positioned on its stomach, as this would be the normal positioning if it was nursing on its mother. Do not bottle feed kittens on their backs as it increases the risk of aspiration pneumonia.

- To keep air from getting into the kitten's stomach, hold the bottle at a 45-degree angle, keeping a light pull on the bottle.
- The kitten should be allowed to suck at its own pace.
- If a kitten refuses to take the nipple or won't suckle, try rubbing it on its forehead or stroking its back. This replicates the activity of a mother cat's cleaning and can effectively stimulate the kitten to nurse.
- Sometimes a kitten is simply picky. There are two kinds of nipples, one shorter and one longer, so try different nipples to see if it prefers one over the other.
- When a kitten has had enough formula, it will usually unlatch from the nipple on its own and its tummy will be very rounded, almost pear-shaped.
- Patience is key in helping the kitten bottle feed; it can take a while to catch on.

Syringe-feeding Techniques

Syringe feeding can be used for fussy kittens that won't take the nipple; it can also be used as a tool for kittens that are weaning.

- Weigh the kitten so you know how much it needs to consume.
- Fill a clean 1cc or 3cc syringe with warmed KMR.
- Syringe a few drops into the kitten's mouth. Wait for the kitten to swallow, and then keep doing this until the kitten has consumed a sufficient amount.
- Kittens should be offered a bottle as well. Syringe feeding should not be utilized all the time.
- NOTE: It can seem like you are giving a kitten a lot of KMR, but the kitten may not be swallowing much of what you are feeding it. Be patient—syringe feeding can take a while. The only accurate way to know if the kitten is eating, and how much, is to weigh the kitten, then feed, then weigh. Always weigh, feed, weigh.

Aspiration

Kittens have been known to accidentally suck formula into their lungs. This is called aspirating. Kittens are pretty good at clearing the milk from their lungs on their own—you will see milk coming out the kitten's nose. If this happens, gently pat its back to help the kitten cough. If the kitten has stopped breathing, hold the kitten upside down and gently pat its back until it stops choking. Alert foster staff, as the kitten may need to be started on medication.

Elimination

Stimulation

Until about 3 weeks of age, kittens are unable to defecate and urinate on their own. Mothers are responsible for stimulating these actions from kittens throughout the day. Kittens will urinate after each meal and need to defecate at least once a day.

- After each feeding, use a damp washcloth, cotton ball or baby wipe (fragrance free!) to gently rub the genital area.
- Make sure to stop after the kitten goes to the bathroom—too much rubbing will cause chafing.
- Make note of any diarrhea or oddly colored urine. Anything out of the ordinary should be noted on the Daily Care Sheet.

Urine Abnormalities

Urine should be light yellow. Any changes in color can indicate underlying disease. Most often, however, changes in urine color pertain to the hydration of the kitten.

SYMPTOM	POSSIBLE CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Dark yellow or brownish urine	Severe dehydration	Notify foster staff
Intense yellow urine	Moderate dehydration	Make sure the kitten is getting enough water in its diet. If persistent for more than 2 urinations, please notify foster staff.

Defecation

Most neonatal kittens will have brownish-yellow defecation, which can be fairly soft. Even the smallest changes to diet can cause diarrhea in kittens (regardless of age). Quick diet changes can be detrimental to the gastrointestinal health of a kitten.

Any odd color or consistency of stool that lasts 2 or more feedings needs to be noted. Please contact the Foster office if this occurs.

Brown	Normal color.
Bloody	Red mucous blood seen in loose stool. May indicate parasitism or panleukopenia virus.
Mucous	Can be seen when straining is occurring or with excessive diarrhea.
Black	True dark black color in stool. Can indicate bleeding in the upper GI tract.
Yellow to White	May indicate a bacterial imbalance. With diarrhea, consider coccidia.

Dehydration

One of the more common medical concerns when feeding young kittens is dehydration. This can be easily rectified by giving a kitten a subcutaneous injection of fluids. Dehydration needs to be dealt with quickly.

HOW TO CHECK FOR DEHYDRATION			
Well-Hydrated	Dehydrated	Seek Medical Attention	
A well-hydrated kitten's skin will easily "snap" or fall back into place.	If the skin slowly falls back into place, the kitten is dehydrated and will need medical care.	If the skin stays tented, the kitten needs immediate medical attention.	

Weaning

Kittens should be weaned between 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ weeks and 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ weeks of age. At this time, the kitten's teeth should be visible under the gums and will start to erupt soon. It will start biting the bottle more often around this time as well. Weaning is a process and will not happen overnight. During the weaning process, half of all kittens will have diarrhea as the stomach adjusts to the diet change.

A gruel mix of Hill's[®] Science Diet[®] kitten wet food and milk replacer is used to wean the kitten:

- It is best to gradually increase the amount of wet food added to the KMR over several days.
- Kittens should be fed every 4 hours when weaning.

Weaning can be a slow and difficult process, but all kittens should be eating on their own by 5 weeks.

Weaning Techniques

- Kittens are ready to wean when able to lick (careful!) formula from your finger or a spoon.
- As the kittens catch on (patience!), gruel can be thickened.
- Feed kittens from a shallow dish. Many kittens bite the edge of the dish or plate at first.
- Place the kitten near the food. If it cannot "figure it out," place some gruel around the mouth or inside the mouth.
- Things can get messy; many kittens will walk through the food bowl at first! Feed the kittens on a surface that can be easily wiped down.
- Don't leave gruel in the kennel until the kittens are eating easily and cleanly.

Suckling

It is natural for kittens to suckle on each other or on your skin, even after they're finished eating. This is harmless unless you notice that it is causing extreme irritation to other kittens' fur or skin, and especially if suckling occurs in the genital region. If you notice suckling is a problem with the litter, please notify foster staff as suckling of

the genitalia can cause severe and sometimes fatal problems. It is a good idea to check each kitten's genitals regularly to ensure that there are no signs of suckling. If a kitten's genitals appear red or irritated, or if you notice a kitten straining to urinate or defecate, please contact the Foster office as soon as possible.

Bathing

Kittens may occasionally need to be bathed. The need for bathing will increase during the weaning process until kittens are successfully eating on their own. It is best to try to clean kittens by rubbing the dirty areas of the kitten with a warm, slightly damp wash cloth or unscented baby wipes. Once a kitten is clean, make sure to dry it with a separate, dry towel.

• <u>If a kitten needs a full bath:</u> Use warm water and a drop of Dawn dish soap or baby shampoo. Wrap the kitten in a towel after the bath.

Socializing and Play

Kittens have a critical social period from 2 to 7 weeks old which is why it is very important to give them positive experiences with new things.

At around 3 weeks of age, kittens begin to develop the cognitive abilities that lead to play. Their motor skills are rapidly increasing, allowing them the ability to move around. Handling the kittens on a daily basis once they enter this stage is beneficial to their growth and development as friendly felines. Foster parents should expect to spend time playing with and petting the kittens at this point. A great way to ensure that petting is positive for kittens is to pet them while they are eating.

At 4 weeks, kittens truly begin to develop their adult cat-like qualities. Litters will naturally play with each other, but play should also be supported with toys, not fingers! Interactive play with a wand-style toy is a great way to encourage kittens to play at this age and help them build confidence as well as coordination.

As kittens begin to develop their adult cat-like qualities, it's important for them to also start having positive experiences with new things like handling, new people, new animals, new objects, and new noises. Slowly introducing some of the following things to kittens can help ensure they are not fearful of them as they grow and develop into friendly felines.

HANDLING	UNFAMILIAR PEOPLE	OTHER ANIMALS
Just like with petting, handling kittens while they're eating is a good way to ensure that handling is positive. • Full body pets • Gently squeezing paws • Checking ears • Picking up • Holding on your lap	Have new people offer the kitten treats and do interactive play, then build up to them petting. NEVER hand the kitten to a new person to hold. • Women • Men (with beards, tall men, men with deep voices) • Children (babies, toddlers, teenagers) • People of different ages and ethnicities • People wearing hats, glasses or hoodies	The kitten does not have to meet all other animals. Exposing the kitten to other animals at a distance, while pairing with positive things like treats and play can still be a positive experience. NEVER let anything chase the kitten. Cats Dogs Small mammals Birds Wildlife (through the window)

NEW OBJECTS	NEW NOISES
New items can startle the kitten, start by exposing the kitten to new items at a distance, then build up to the kitten interacting with the item. • Cat carrier	New noises can startle the kitten, start by exposing the kitten to low levels then gradually increase the intensity of the noise. You can purchase CDs of different noises.
Things that move: the vacuum, a broom, an umbrella	ThunderFireworks
	Dog barkingVacuum cleaner
	• Alarms
	Hairdryer
	Doorbell

Why should single kittens always have a friend?

Kittens, like all animals, are molded by early experiences with the environment, other species and other cats. For kittens, the age between 2 to 7 weeks is a key stage for learning and socializing. During this time, their brain is developing. Research from Tufts University shows that if kittens are not socialized during this time frame, they don't develop the brain of a normal cat. So, what is socialization? Socialization for kittens involves positive experiences with other animals, people, smells, sounds and textures. Another imperative part of socialization is littermates and the queen. If kittens don't have positive experiences with the environment, as well as live with other kittens and the queen, they will more likely have behavior issues, such as house soiling and aggression, during adulthood. This shows the vital importance of proper handling, gentle handling and protecting them against aversive experiences. (Source: Dr. Doman, Tufts University Catnip Newsletter).

COMMON ISSUES AND CONCERNS

CONDITIONS REQUIRING IMMEDIATE ACTION

Call the Foster office immediately for the following conditions.

- Kitten has bloody diarrhea
- Kitten is listless
- Kitten has repeated vomiting not associated with eating (more than 3 times in 8 hours)
- Kitten has neurologic signs
- Kitten aspirated during feeding
- Kitten has difficulty urinating or defecating (not able to express bladder or has not defecated in 48 hours)

CONDITIONS REQUIRING MONITORING

Call the Foster office as soon as possible for the conditions listed below and monitor the animal over the next 24 hours.

- Kitten has sneezing, wheezing, nasal discharge and/ or coughing
- Kitten has ocular discharge
- Kitten has loose stool at 2 or more feedings
- Kitten has occasional vomiting (more than 2 times in a 24-hour period)
- Kitten has decreased appetite
- Kitten has any weight loss, pre weaning

- Kitten is limping
- Kitten did not eat at all during last 2 meals, but seems otherwise normal
- Kitten is dehydrated, but has been eating and drinking normally
- Kitten has lost weight, but has been eating well

FADING KITTEN SYNDROME

Fading Kitten Syndrome is a life-threatening emergency in which a kitten—sometimes one that was previously healthy—"crashes" and begins to fade. Fading Kitten Syndrome can occur secondary to an underlying disease process or can occur as a result of inadequate nutrition or husbandry. Problems during pregnancy can also result in fading kitten syndrome after birth. Kittens are treated the same regardless of the underlying cause; treatment is aimed at addressing dehydration, hypoglycemia, and hypothermia. Many kittens do not respond to treatment and die or are euthanized as a result of Fading Kitten Syndrome

SYMPTOMS WHAT TO DO IN EARLY STAGES PREVENTION IS KEY. Early Symptoms (these symptoms are progressive) Poor stool If you are seeing late stage symptoms, call the Foster Emergency Line at 720.334.1422. Respiratory issues with weight loss • Start warming kitten slowly by wrapping in a towel Dehydration or blanket. Late Symptoms • Take kitten's temperature. • Low body temperature; kitten feels cool or cold to Add heating source to kitten (human body the touch temperature isn't enough). Remember to always • Extreme lethargy; not getting up, unable to stand, wrap the heating source with a towel so that the unable to hold head up kitten does not have direct skin contact with the Gasping for breath; mouth-breathing heating source. Meowing, crying out • As the kitten is warming up, give 2-3 drops of warm sugar water (see below) or rub a small amount of Dehydration Karo Syrup onto the gums. Bringing a kitten back from fading can be a lengthy process. It can require hours of the steps listed above, and often the kitten will still not make it

To make sugar water: Get a bowl or Tupperware container and add a few tablespoons of sugar in hot water. Stir it up so you get a sugar-water solution, as strong as possible while still pretty runny.

PANLEUKOPENIA

This is a viral infection in cats, closely related to the canine parvovirus. It is a highly contagious and easily spread single-strain virus that attacks the lining of the intestines and attacks the immune system. Panleukopenia can survive for a long time in the environment and requires deep cleaning and quarantines for the kennel space and/or foster home.

Young kittens are at a higher risk of the panleukopenia virus due to being unvaccinated.

Due to the high contagion risk and intensive treatment needed, as well as the high mortality rate for kittens with this virus, the Dumb Friends League does not currently treat panleukopenia. Kittens that fade rapidly and/ or die suddenly are tested for panleukopenia. Kittens that test positive for panleukopenia and are showing signs consistent with this disease are humanely euthanized.

Symptoms include fever, diarrhea, lethargy, vomiting, and loss of appetite.

DEATH OF A KITTEN

Even with the best care and consistent supervision, kittens still face a high mortality rate. Remember, without our help, these young animals have almost no chance of survival.

If a kitten passes away in your care, please note the time and place the animal in a plastic bag in your refrigerator or a cooler with an ice pack. Notify the foster staff, and please bring the kitten to the Dumb Friends League as soon as you can.

REFERENCES AND HELPFUL LINKS

Austin Pets Alive!

Feeding Bottle Babies

youtube.com/watch?v=Lifzi3oOVo4&feat

Feeding Gruel Babies

youtube.com/watch?v=nFNcs3mCCUQ

Maddie's Fund

maddiesfund.org/Maddies_Institute/Videos/Orphaned_Kitten_Care_How_to.html



LOCATIONS

Leslie A. Malone Center

2080 S. Quebec St. Denver, CO 80231

Buddy Center

4556 Castleton Ct. Castle Rock, CO 80109

Harmony Equine Center

5540 E. Hwy 86 Franktown, CO 80116

Solutions – Veterinary Hospital

191 Yuma St. Denver, CO 80223 303.722.5800

Solutions – Cat Spay/Neuter Clinic

191 Yuma St. Denver, CO 80223

Valley Humane League

6414 County Rd 107 S Alamosa, CO 81101 719.589.3385

CONTACT US

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Visit our website at ddfl.org for hours of operation at each facility or to schedule an appointment.