



Fostering Orphaned Kittens

(Bottle feeding and weaning borderline kittens)

ACCT Philly see thousands of kittens come into the shelter with no mother each year. Foster homes are a crucial way to ensure these kittens' survival by providing food, shelter and nurturing.

Facilities & Care Needed

The living area for a litter of kittens should be small enough that they aren't able to wander off and get lost or injure themselves. Make sure to "kitten proof" the area before placing the kittens in it. Block underneath furniture, check for hiding places like holes in walls or mattress, place baby gates at door and stairs to prevent quick escapes, and put away dangerous or breakable knick-knacks. A low traffic bathroom with tile or a large pet crate are great places to raise foster kittens over 4 weeks old. Kittens under 4 weeks should be kept in a much smaller area like a large open bin or box with high walls so that they don't wander off and get cold.

The bed for your kitten(s) should be low enough for small kittens to get in. Line the bedding box with towels, newspaper or other soft material to make them comfortable and warm. Be sure the bedding container is big enough for everyone so that they may sleep comfortably together. The kitten bed may be kept in a large carrier with the door kept open as this too can create a comfortable and protected feeling den. The kittens can be kept in a large pet crate with the door closed when kittens are very young (under 5 weeks) and when you aren't in the room to keep an eye on everyone.

Keep the kittens away from heaters or cold drafts. Heating pads or heat lamps may be needed to keep small kittens warm. A heating pad may need to be placed in the living quarters, set on "low." The pad must be placed beneath the bedding box, not in the bedding box. Be very careful as heating pads can become very hot and should NEVER be placed in direct contact with the kittens. The bedding box temperature should be around 85 degrees Fahrenheit.

The living quarters should be cleaned every day. When cleaning, place the kittens/cats in a separate area until the living quarters are dry. All surfaces, bowls, toys, etc. should be disinfected; therefore, you may want to keep the kittens in a room without carpeting. Likewise, the bedding should be kept clean, dry and fresh. If the kittens have accidents, the bedding may need to be changed more often than once each day. Bedding should be washed with detergent, bleach and a little fabric softener.

General Feeding Guide for Motherless Kittens

How and when to feed your foster kittens will depend on their age and if they are with or without their mom. **DO NOT GIVE KITTENS COW'S MILK.** Milk will upset their stomachs and they need the proper nutrients found in kitten formula or food for good health and growth!

General Feeding Amounts

<u>Age</u>	<u>Amount of Formula and Frequency</u>
Birth to 1 week	½ tablespoon (7.5ml) every 2-3 hours
1-2 weeks	½ tablespoon (7.5ml) every 2-3 hours
2-3 weeks	1 tablespoon every 3-4 hours
3-4 weeks	2 tablespoons every 4-6 hours
4-5 weeks (if not weaned)	3 tablespoons (1½ oz.) every 8 hours-5 weeks

Bottle feeding (typically kittens less than 3 weeks old without teeth)

ACCT Philly will provide bottles and formula to get started but you will also need to purchase kitten formula, available at pet stores. You can also purchase a nursing kit which usually includes a bottle, several extra nipples, and a cleaning brush. Kitten formula (such as KMR Formula or Just Born Formula, and others that are suggested by your pet store) is more economical if purchased in powdered form to be mixed as needed. If your foster kitten struggles to latch to the nipple, you may want to purchase a Miracle Nipple. Internet sources may offer very good values on these products.

Cut a small "X" in the tip of your first nipple with scissors. 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 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. Changing the formula brand could cause upset bellies and diarrhea.

Formula should be warmed to 100-102 F. The temperature can be tested on your wrist. If it burns your skin, it is too hot to feed to kittens. You can microwave it in the bottle for no longer than 10 seconds (be sure to shake the bottle well after heating), or placing the bottle in a bowl of hot water for a few minutes. Never let the formula boil. Before each feeding, you should sterilize your hands. It's a good idea to re-sterilize after you're done with the kittens each time. Bottles should be sterilized often.

Kitten positioning for feeding is very important; this is where the crucial surrogate-mom bonding happens. Different people have different "styles" of bottle-feeding. Kittens are most comfortable in a position similar to the position they'd be in if they were nursing from a mom cat. One position is simply to place the kitten on its stomach on a towel or cloth on which it can cling; it will "knead" its paws on instinct. You can sit cross-legged on the floor with the kitten inside your legs, and let the kitten place its paws on your leg as it nurses. Remember to keep a towel on your lap for this - and use a fresh, clean towel each day.

Open the mouth gently with the tip of your finger and slip the nipple in. Once your kitten gets the hang of it, they will search out the nipple eagerly. You will feel a real "vacuum effect" when the kitten gets into suckle mode. 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 vigorously on its forehead or stroking its back. This replicates the activity of a mom cat's cleaning and can effectively stimulate the kitten to nurse. Sometimes you will hear a "clicking" noise which means the kitten's nursing instinct is in gear and should be ready for the nipple. Sometimes a kitten is simply picky; they may need another type of nipple. You can also try the "burrito" method, but wrapping the kitten in a blanket or towel, confining their arms and hold them upright. This provides comfortable constraint and allows the kitten to focus on suckling.

Kittens that seem too weak to nurse can often be stimulated by rubbing some Karo syrup on their lips. If a kitten still refuses to nurse, and this happens beyond the first few "getting the hang of it" times, it can indicate illness. If the kitten does not respond in 10-12 hours then you should bring the kitten to ACCT Philly.

Nursing bottles are marked with measurements so it's easy to keep track. Kittens that are extra weak may need to eat more frequently.

Keep in mind that the younger kittens are, the more accustomed they are to staying "latched onto" a mom cat's nipple all the time, nursing small amounts periodically. If you notice that your kittens are not eating enough in one feeding, increase the frequency of feedings.

If you're feeding multiple kittens, you'll have better luck with them eating the required amount if you feed them each several times, taking turns. Feed the first kitten until it stops nursing, feed the second, etc. Then go back to the first and repeat this round-robin. Usually after 2 or 3 nursing turns, a kitten has had enough for one feeding.

When a kitten has had enough formula, it will usually get some bubbles around its mouth and its tummy will be very rounded, almost pear-shaped. After feeding, you should burp the kitten just like you'd burp a human baby; hold it upright against your shoulder and pat it on the back. Do not overfeed the kittens since this can cause diarrhea and other problems. Kittens under four weeks will happily sleep after they're fed and full; older kittens will want some serious play and cuddle time. It's natural for kittens to suckle on each other or on your fingers, even after they're finished eating. This is harmless unless you notice that this activity is causing irritation to other kittens' fur or skin.

Aspiration of fluids

Aspiration (inhalation of fluids into the lungs) of formula can be fairly common. If aspiration occurs, the kitten can be turned upside down and gently shaken once to help the fluid drain out. If this happens with very young kittens, a small bulb syringe or eyedropper can be used to suck the fluids out of the nostrils. Do not feed any more to the kitten until it has completely cleared the fluid from its lungs, usually by sneezing. Aspiration can be a dangerous situation, and can lead to possible pneumonia and death. If crackling or popping is heard as the kitten breathes, contact the ACCT Clinic or shelter staff immediately.

Borderline Kittens (typically kittens older than 3 weeks old with teeth)

Weaning

Weaning is accustoming a kitten to food other than its mother's milk. Weaning occurs at about 3-4 weeks, but keep in mind that some kittens take a bit longer, especially without a mom cat to show them how to eat solid food. You will know that a kitten is ready for the weaning process when it is biting its nipple often and forcefully, and able to lick formula from your finger.

The next step is to get the kitten to lap up formula from a spoon. Once they've mastered that, try putting the formula in a flat dish. Kittens can usually begin doing this around 4 weeks of age. At this point, mix the kitten formula with canned kitten food and make gruel and try to get the kittens to lap it up from a dish or a spoon. To help the process, try putting a small amount of wet/canned kitten food on your finger and gently place a little in the kitten's mouth. He should want more and begin to use his mouth, eating it off the plate.

Some kittens will grasp the concept right away; others take days. Sometimes one kitten will catch on first and the other littermates will copy and do the same. The kittens may step in the gruel, slide in it, and track it around. Keep bottle feeding while weaning to make sure they get enough to eat. Reduce bottle feeding as their solid-food consumption grows. Eventually, you can mix more canned kitten food with formula, gradually reducing the amount of formula until they're eating just the food. It is not uncommon for weight gain to slow and minor diarrhea to occur during weaning. To lessen the diarrhea, you may add a small amount of canned pumpkin (not pie filling) as fiber mixed into their food.

Syringe Feeding & Dry Food

When kittens begin to teeth and chew, it becomes a danger that they may swallow a chunk of the nipple. If a kitten has teeth but is not eating on it's own, as mentioned above, wet food can be added to the formula in increasing amounts to create a slurry. The slurry can be fed through a feeding syringe. If kittens are extremely messy eaters and the food is irritating their skin, this is a good alternative option. Small dry kitten kibble can also be soaked in formula or slurry to help kittens learn to eat on their own. Dry food should not be offered until at least 5 weeks or older to reduce the risk of choking.