

Cat: Cats and Kids



Congratulations on deciding to enrich you and your children's lives by adding a feline friend to your household! Here are ten steps to follow, to ensure happy and safe interactions for all.

Step 1: Choose the Right Cat

A very sociable cat or a kitten over 4 months is a good choice for families. Avoid cats that are fearful or don't like being handled. Always avoid cats with a history of aggression towards people. Choose a cat that can tolerate the activity level of your household. Our shelter personnel can help guide you in your choice.

Step 2: Proper Introductions

The first few days in a new home are often quite stressful for any cat and, on the other hand, very exciting for a child! Make sure to balance your child's enthusiasm for spending time with the kitty with the cat's need for adjustment and alone time. Provide your cat with a quiet and low traffic room in the home. If your children are under 10, this should not be the child's room. Allow the cat to acclimate to the new surroundings slowly.

Step 3: Safe Spaces

Whether it is at the top of a cat tree, or over a baby gate, all cats need to be able to get away when they want to. Teach your kids to respect these hideouts—a cat should know that she is not going to be dragged out of these special places. If you have toddlers, you may need to make these spaces inaccessible to them; for older children, explain the reasons and make sure they understand to follow these rules.

Step 4: Educate

Teaching the kids about cat behavior is very beneficial. Teach them basic body language so they know when the cat is happy and when she needs a break. There are some good handouts, books, and videos that cover these subjects—check with us for suggestions!

Step 5: Make It Fun

All children, even the youngest of children, can be involved in cat care: helping with feeding, playing with interactive, fishing-pole type toys, cleaning the litter boxes, or grooming. These positive interactions will make both the cat and the kid feel good!

Step 6: Keep It Safe

A cat who is chased or picked up incorrectly when she is trying to get away, is likely to scratch your child either by accident or in a defensive manner. Teach appropriate handling and keep kitty's nails trimmed.

Step 7: Do Not Disturb

Teach your kids to respect a cat's boundaries while eating, drinking, or sleeping and to never bother a cat who is using or about to use the litter box.

Step 8: Be a Good Role Model

Let your children see you handling the kitty respectfully, talk to them about why you are handling the kitty the way you are, and do not roughhouse with the kitty in play.

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Step 9: The Kids Are Not Responsible for the Cat

No matter how old your kids are, remember that you are the adult and are the responsible one—for the kids and for the pets! While duties can be assigned to children, such as refreshing the water and cleaning the litter box—they are to be monitored by parents!

Step 10: Supervise, Supervise, Supervise.

The best relationships are made when parents involve themselves in their kids' and cats' interactions. Watch for inappropriate behavior from both feline and human kids, and be aware of how the cat and kid feel about each other. These steps will help you and your family enjoy a positive, loving relationship with your new cat!