

## DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF KITTENS

### 0-7 Weeks

During the first 3 weeks, sensory development is rapid. Kittens first show ability to orient by sound. Eyes open around 2 weeks, and by the third week, kittens have a well-developed sense of smell and can see well enough to find mom. By the fourth week, they begin to interact with littermates, can walk fairly well, and begin to cut their milk teeth. It is important for future adoption that kittens be handled regularly by people by their third week. Studies show that their brains develop better; they are most playful, and they learn more quickly if they are handled ½ to 1 hour a day during their first 7 weeks. Mother cats who like and trust people are emulated by their kittens. Feral mothers and strays, who are wary of people,

Also, during this period, kittens begin to practice predatory behaviors such as stalking, pouncing, and catching “prey,” to groom themselves and littermates, and to perfect motor skills.

### 7-14 Weeks

In this period, the kitten increases physical coordination and social skills through play and learns most through observing mom or other adult cats. Litterbox and scratching post should be available! In an environment not controlled by humans, the nocturnal activity pattern becomes dominant. In a home, cultivation of a diurnal activity pattern can be accomplished by reducing opportunities for play during the night, and by engaging the kitten often during the daytime. For kittens to learn how to live among cats, it's important that they have at least one role model cat through this period.

### 3-6 Months

Cats begin to recognize and practice ranking among their companions of all species. It's important to have a kitten spayed or neutered by 6 months of age, when sexual maturity occurs in unaltered cats. There's no good reason for allowing hormones to disrupt her/your life! Behaviors driven by sex hormones include territorial marking (urine spraying), escaping and roaming, and unpleasant vocalizations. Kittens may need reinforcement of diurnal activity patterns through this period.

### 6-18 Months

This period spans adolescence to early adulthood. During this time, a cat reaches physical, emotional and mental maturity. This is when you may experience changes by the cat similar to those from human teenagers. Discrimination increases rapidly, and the cat develops independent relationships with everyone in the household, sometimes rejecting a littermate in favor of another cat, a dog, or a human. As the cat's adult personality emerges, previous relationships often change. Positive reinforcement training methods can influence tolerance, though the preferences and dislikes established at this time are likely to life long.