



What do I do if I find young kittens who have a mother?

Ask your neighbors and put up fliers to determine if this is a cat who has a home or if this is a stray cat. If this is a stray cat you want to catch the mother cat and her kittens. Kittens benefit from their mother's milk and attention. Keep them together in a confined area with a box or other shelter inside this area where the mom cat can hide (if she is feral). The kittens will come out to see you and the mom cat will hide in the box/carrier. Handle the kittens daily to get them used to people and then put them back with mom. If you have them confined and you can't touch the kittens because the mother cat is protecting them, then remove the kittens from her at 5 weeks of age and begin taming them. Click here for ideas about taming feral kittens: www.alleycat.org.

The most important thing you can do is get the mother spayed so she doesn't get pregnant again. She can be spayed safely while still nursing her kittens and she can also get pregnant while nursing her kittens, so don't wait too long to have the surgery done.

What do I do if I find young kittens and don't see their mother?

If you find young kittens and don't see the mother, don't panic and don't disturb the kittens. Mothers often leave their kittens to find food and water, to move the litter to a new location, or to breed. Leave the kittens alone for a few hours (if they are 0-4 weeks old) or overnight (if the kittens are older) to see if the mother returns. You can put out cat food for the mom and a box that the mother could use to keep her kittens in (don't put the kittens inside it, just put it near them). Don't disturb the kittens as this may discourage the mother from returning to them, or she may move them away from you.

The next step depends on the age of the kittens. If the kittens are 5-6 weeks old and can eat on their own then you can decide either to keep them as your own pets, find them homes on your own, or if feral you can tame them. You can also take the kittens to a shelter but remember that the kittens must be friendly in order to get into a shelter and be adopted and that the wait-list could be several weeks long. Most shelters are not able to place kittens that are less than 8 weeks old or kittens that are not tame.

If the kittens are younger than 5 weeks and their mother does not return after leaving the kittens overnight then they will need constant care to bottle feed. Bottle-feeding requires feeding the kittens frequently with special food called Kitten Milk Replacement (KMR) and it can be very time consuming. You can choose to take on this challenge or try to find a rescue group that will take in the kittens. Call local rescue groups for advice on how to care for young kittens or to get them into a foster home.

****Do not feed kittens any milk other than Kitten Replacement Milk (KMR) as they cannot digest other types of milk (i.e. cow, goat) and it will cause diarrhea.**

Click here for more information on bottle-feeding and caring for young kittens: Alley Cat Allies.

What to do if you find older kittens (over 8 weeks)?

Begin looking into spay/neuter options for the kittens immediately. Remember that cats can get pregnant as young as 5 months old (and will breed with litter mates) so don't wait until they look like adult cats. FCCO spays and neuters cats as young as 2 months old, as do many other spay/neuter organizations. Even if you don't plan on keeping the kittens, get them spayed or neutered before finding them a new home.

The best option for kittens is to make them your pets and to take responsibility for them. There are simply not as many homes as there are cats. The next best option is to get the cats to an animal rescue organization, take them to a shelter or try to find homes for the cats with your friends and family. Look up options in your area online or call a local shelter to find out what your options are. FCCO is not a shelter and does not provide any housing or adoptions of cats.

If the kittens are friendly they were probably pets or the offspring of a pet or tame stray. Put up fliers in your neighborhood and call around to the shelters to see if anyone is looking for the kittens. If you suspect that the kittens were abandoned then you can consider getting a police report. Abandoning cats is illegal. They probably won't be able to do much to find out who abandoned the cat but it may help to have a record if more cats are abandoned in the same location.

When should I get a feral/stray cat spayed or neutered and how young can cats get pregnant?

Get the cat fixed as soon as possible. Female cats can get pregnant as young as 5 months old and they can also become pregnant while still nursing their kittens. Cats *will* mate with their siblings and parents.

What if I trap a lactating cat?

If a lactating cat is trapped, do not release the cat before having her spayed as she may become suspicious of the trap and difficult to re-trap. If you know the kittens are less than 5 weeks old and not eating on their own, get the mom spayed and then return her to where you trapped her the same day. If the kittens are eating on their own, it is fine to keep mom confined overnight before releasing her.

While the mother cat is being spayed keep the kittens warm in a confined area. Although a nursing female cat will continue to feed her kittens after surgery, it is a good idea to have Kitten Replacement Milk on hand and to be ready to bottle-feed the kittens for a couple of days. If the kittens are younger than 4 weeks old, you will need to be prepared to feed them KMR while the mother is having surgery. It is important to get the mother cat back to her kittens as quickly as you can.

What if I don't know where the kittens are?

Tell the surgery clinic staff you think she has kittens but do not know where they are when you drop her off for surgery. This way they can make sure she is ready to be released when you take her home. She will find her kittens and they will be able to nurse. Set out a box and canned food for the cat so she has extra nourishment during this time and a safe place to move her kittens to.

What if the kittens are not tame and will not let me handle them to bottle feed?

You should be able to handle the kittens even if not tame if they are under 4 weeks of age. Wrapping them in a small towel while feeding will help. If you cannot handle them mix some KMR with canned food and make it available to the kittens every 3 hours or so. The kittens will let you know when they are hungry by meowing. When they are full they will stop eating and then the food dish should be removed.

What if I find a pregnant cat?

You can have the cat safely spayed while she is pregnant. If you decide to let her have the kittens before spaying her then be prepared to tame the kittens and spay/neuter them before finding them homes. Keep in mind that much of the year shelters and adoption programs are full and some have a waiting list to accept kittens.

What if I trap a mother cat who still has young kittens with her?

Go ahead and have the mother spayed. It may be your only chance to trap her. Ideally, you would trap the kittens as well and keep the mother and kittens together until the kittens are older and can be tamed and spayed or neutered.

A timeline for kittens

Approximate Age	Characteristics	Weight
Gestation Period	63 days	
Birth	Closed eyes / folded ears	3-4 oz.
5 Days	Loses umbilical cord	
5-13 Days	Eyes open	
14 Days	Teething begins	6-8 oz.
18 Days	Litter box use begins Ears straighten Crawling begins	
21 Days	Litter box training complete Starts eating wet kitten food	
28-35 Days	Weaning process begins Able to chew dry food Eyes become clear Ears stand fully upright	0.5-1 lb.
14-49 Days	Critical socialization window	
42 Days	Deworm and vaccinate (FRTC)	1 lb.
56 Days	Littermates can be separated	2 lbs.
70 Days	Kittens can be spayed or neutered	