



FERAL CAT SPAY/NEUTER PROJECT

What to Do if You Find a Litter of Kittens

Kitten season refers to the time of year when many kittens are born. This time can vary, but usually there is an increase during the Spring and Summer seasons. With many of the local spay/neuter clinics closed due to Covid-19, that means that less people have been trapping feral cats. Once clinics open up, we may find that there is an increase in the number of pregnant female cats or moms with litters of kittens.

If you find a litter of kittens during the pandemic, or any time of the year, what should you do? This document is here to help, starting with a flow chart and walking you through your next steps.

Let's start here:



*Flowchart from Alley Cat Allies

First, make sure that the kittens are truly abandoned. Leave the kittens alone and watch them for about 8-12 hours to make sure their mom is not around. If the kittens appear to be clean and at a healthy weight, it is most likely that their mom is taking care of them.

If the kittens are in an unsafe area, move them to a safe place nearby so the mother can still locate them.

If the kittens are dirty and appear unhealthy, contact a local community cat group to help determine if the kittens need your assistance. If you are local to the Seattle area, we would recommend contacting the [Community Cat Coalition](#) or [Alley Cat Project](#). You can also use the infographic below to guide you:



- Cold** Young kittens cannot regulate their own body temperature, and rely on mom, their siblings, and nesting material to keep them warm. They may lose some heat when mom is not with them, so unless they ALSO fit any of the other descriptions below, leave them and check again in 2-4 hours to see if mom came back.
- Dirty** A good mama cat keeps her babies meticulously clean. Kittens that need your help may have dirt, feces, or crusted urine on their bodies. They may be wet. Their genital areas may be red and inflamed, indicating urine scalding.
- Thin** Kittens with a mom should be eating frequently. Their bellies will typically have a full, rounded appearance. Sunken bellies, visible bones, and pale skin can indicate that the kittens need help and aren't being fed.
- Noisy** Orphaned and hungry kittens will cry loudly. **But loud kittens alone does not indicate that they are orphaned.** Mom does not stay with the kittens all day long, and might be on her way back. She might even be watching you in the shadows, waiting for YOU to leave her babies alone. Leave these kittens alone for 2-4 hours, then check on them again. If they are quiet when you return, that means mom has probably been back to care for them, and you should let her keep up the good work.
- Sick/
Hurt** Sick kittens might have discharge from the eyes and nose. Their eyes may be crusted shut. They may have wounds or open sores.



These kittens are clean, quiet and dry. They are plump and have full bellies with light pink coloring, showing that they are warm.

They do NOT need your help!



This kitten is noisy, dirty, and sick. It has nasal discharge and crusted-shut eyes.



These kittens are thin, wet, and cold. You can see their backbones.



This kitten is thin, wet, and cold, and has discharge from the eyes.

These kittens DO need your help!

**Infographic from [Operation Catnip](#)*

If you see the mom, leave the kittens alone for now until you can trap the whole family. You want to have a plan in place before setting traps! When the kittens are 7-8 weeks old, you can trap the entire family, including mom. Mom can be spayed right away, and released, if she is feral. If the kittens are closer to 7 weeks, you may need to foster and socialize them for a week or so until they are ready for surgery at 8 weeks and 2 pounds.

Use this picture to help determine the age of the kittens:

TEENY TINIES

The tiniest, most vulnerable kittens require gentle and frequent care.

NEWBORN



- umbilical cord attached, eyes closed, ears folded
- can't regulate body temp.

1 WEEK



- eyes closed, ears folded, no umbilical cord
- eyes open at 8-12 days

2 WEEKS



- eyes completely open, blue color
- wobbly on their feet

TEENY WEANIES

As kittens age, you'll help them reach important developmental milestones.

3 WEEKS



- incisors emerging, ears unfolded
- discovering litterbox

4 WEEKS



- canines emerging
- vision improving; walking confidently

5 WEEKS



- premolars emerging
- weaning slowly onto wet kitten food

BIG KIDS CLUB

These social, independent, and coordinated kittens are almost ready for adoption.

6 WEEKS



- all milk (deciduous) teeth have emerged
- eating confidently

7 WEEKS



- transitioning to adult eye color
- coordinated and playful

8 WEEKS



- once 2 pounds, kittens can be spayed/neutered and placed in their forever home!

*Image from the [Kitten Lady](#)

Knowing if the kittens are male or female can also be helpful when scheduling their spay/neuter appointments.

On a **male** kitten the genitals appear circular in shape:



**Image from the [Kitten Lady](#)*

On a **female** kitten the genitals will be closer to the anus, and will appear like a line or teardrop shape:



**Image from the [Kitten Lady](#)*

Contact the [Community Cat Coalition](#) or [Meow Cat Rescue](#) for vouchers to help cover the cost of their spay/neuter surgery. Then email us at questions@feralcatproject.org to schedule their appointments. Let us know how many are in the litter, how many males/females, and how old they are.

Want to learn more? Check out these resources below:

Alley Cat Allies - Article: [Feral Cats and Their Kittens Better Left Outdoors](#)

Alley Cat Allies - Webinar: [Help I found a Kitten!](#)

Best Friends - Article: [Caring for Abandoned Kittens](#)

Community Cat Coalition - Article: [Taming Feral Kittens](#)

Neighborhood Cats - Article: [Fostering Feral Cats Safely](#)