VOKRA

VANCOUVER ORPHAN KITTEN RESCUE ASSOCIATION

Children and Cats: Important Information for Parents

Living with a cat can be very rewarding for children. Cats can help boost a child's self-esteem, teach responsibility, and encourage empathy. With the right match and supervision, cats and children can grow into wonderful companions for each other.

Selecting the Right Cat

Kittens and cats under 2 years old

- **Time & energy:** Require lots of patience, attention, and supervision.
- **Safety concerns:** Young cats can be easily frightened or accidentally hurt by curious children who want to pick them up or tug their tails and ears.
- **Rough play:** Kittens have sharp claws and teeth, and may unintentionally scratch or bite. All interactions with small children must be closely supervised.

Cats over 2 years old

- **Easier adjustment:** Once settled, older cats usually need less supervision and time than kittens.
- **More predictable:** Their temperament is easier to gauge. Some may already be used to living with children, especially if adopted from a shelter.
- **Best choice:** For families with children under six, adopting a cat over two years old is generally recommended.

Starting Off Right

To build a safe and positive bond, always supervise your child when interacting with your cat.

- **Holding:**

    - Encourage children to sit down when holding the cat.
    - Some cats don't enjoy being held—allow them to sit beside your child or approach on their own terms.
    - Have your child sit on your lap while the cat comes closer, so you can guide gentle touches.
- **Petting:**
    - Teach children to pet softly.
    - Let the cat decide when to leave—never force it to stay.
- **Treats:**
    - Have your child offer treats on an open palm, not pinched between fingers.
    - This helps the cat form positive associations with your child.
- **Playtime:**
    - Show children to use toys (balls, toy mice, or fishing-pole wands), not hands.
    - Play builds trust and creates fun, safe interactions.
- **Training:**
    - Training games (like coming when called or sitting for a treat) strengthen the bond.
    - Some shelters and organizations offer cat training classes for families.

Cats and Babies

If you're expecting, see our handout: **"Preparing Your Pet for Baby's Arrival."** Introducing cats to infants requires patience and planning.

Managing Behavior

- **Be patient:** Cats need time to adjust to children, just as children need time to learn how to interact appropriately.
- **Avoid punishment:** Scolding or punishing your cat can make them fearful of children. Instead, redirect behavior to acceptable alternatives.

- **Warning signs:** Growling, hissing, or biting means your cat is stressed and the situation needs **immediate attention.** See our handout: **“When the Behavior Help Line Can’t Help”** for professional resources.

✅ **Remember:** Supervision, patience, and positive reinforcement are the keys to helping children and cats live safely and happily together.