Foster Cat and Kitten Tips

For an instant “playground” for your foster cats, take a medium to large sized cardboard box and tape the flaps shut. Use a serrated kitchen knife to cut a few holes in several of the sides and/or the top. Make sure the holes are large enough for your cat to get through. Put a toy mouse or jingle ball inside the box. You can even duct-tape several different sized boxes together – either vertically or horizontally – so your cats can climb and play from one box to another. You may even find your cats like to sleep in the cozy corners of these boxes. If you are fostering sick cats, be sure to throw your cardboard play structure away when you return your fosters to AHS so your next foster cats don’t pickup any germs.

Consider purchasing a laser pointer from a pet store or grocery store. The cheapest one you can find will be sufficient. Cats and kittens LOVE to chase the red dot of the laser pointer. It’s wonderful exercise and mental stimulation for them. Their playful antics will keep you laughing as they stalk the red dot up the wall, under the blanket, or around the floor!

Canned food can be used to socialize cats. If you have a timid foster cat that doesn’t want to come out of hiding, or a foster cat that is acting a little snarky toward the other cats, consider putting out a small dollop of canned food in dishes placed fairly far apart from one another. Canned food is often such a special treat that timid cats will eventually come out of hiding for it. Snarky cats will often learn to get along with their siblings if they begin to eat in the same vicinity. As they become friendlier toward each other, you can slowly move their food bowls a little closer together.

Use a large metal dog crate to help fearful, timid, or aggressive cats adjust to their new environment. Instead of letting a fearful or timid foster cat hide under your bed for days, ask AHS to borrow a metal, collapsible large dog crate. This type of crate is large enough to hold a bed, food bowls and a litter pan (which AHS can also provide). You may want to start out by partially covering the dog crate with an old sheet so the cat feels secure and protected and then gradually remove the sheet. This is also an excellent strategy for an aggressive cat that is not interacting well with you, or perhaps for a cat that has just returned from surgery and needs a quiet, secure area to recuperate for a few days.

If you are fostering a large litter of kittens, use a large, round plastic “chip and dip” tray to feed them from. These can be bought at the grocery store (especially during the summer months) for around $5.00. They are sturdy, easy to clean, and ALL the kittens can fit around it and eat at the same time so they don’t have to compete for food by all crowding around a smaller food bowl. This is especially important for the smallest kitten in the litter who may not have the strength to compete for food. A large feeding station such as a chip and dip tray ensures that even the littlest kitten has a place at the table. These chip and dip trays work just as well for litters of puppies too!

Here’s an inexpensive toy idea! Save the tops from your milk jugs and use them as cat toys. Cats will bat the screw-on milk caps around the floor like hockey pucks! They also like the “zip-type” milk tops that look like a plastic curly Q. Great fun! Just be sure to monitor you foster cat/kitten to ensure they don’t try to ingest the item.

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Cats love to look out the window. You can make an instant window perch by stacking a few plastic storage bins near the window. Even a TV tray, an extra chair, or a small table placed near the window with a towel on top of it makes an excellent window perch for your cat. Consider hanging a bird feeder where it can be seen from the window and your cat will be kept busy for hours!

Cats and kitten love to bat around things that dangle. Feather wands can be quite expensive and cats can destroy them quickly. You can make simple dangle toys by taking ordinary string or yarn and tying it around a toy mouse or threading the string through the openings of a plastic jingle ball. You can dangle these homemade toys in front of your cats or inch them along the floor and cats/kittens seem to enjoy them as much as the more expensive store-bought feather wands.

Some cats can be fussy about their litter boxes. Some cats don't like litter boxes with hoods/tops on them. Some cats won't use a litter box that isn't regularly scooped out and kept clean. Some cats prefer that their litter box be placed in a quiet, private area. Some cats don't like scented litter. If you are fostering multiple cats, be sure you have enough litter boxes. Generally, you should have at least one more litter box than the number of cats you are fostering. For example, if you are fostering 3 cats, you need to set up at least 4 litter boxes.

Here are 2 ideas for inexpensive fun cat toys: Ping-pong balls! You can buy a package of them for just a few dollars, and your cats will love them rolling them around and chasing them. Pom-poms! At any craft store, such as Michaels, you can buy bags of various sized pom-poms. The small ones are great toys for kittens, and the larger ones work well for adult cats. They will have hours of fun batting them around and carrying them in their mouths like prey. Be sure to wash them or throw them out before you bring new animals into your house, if you are fostering sick cats.

We value your input as a foster parent! If you have any tips you’d like to share, please contact Evie Schenkel at foster@ashevillehumane.org or call (828) 768-5451. Together, we can make our foster program even better!