



KITTENS FOR DUMMIES

The roughhousing engaged in by a kitten is instinctual and natural. Although the kitten will get carried away using her teeth and claws, she is basically acting out a predatory play behavior. She is practicing her stalk, attack, and killing maneuvers on you! A kitten acts this way because she has boundless energy. Of course, in between these energy bursts, there are those angelic catnaps. Consider adopting two kittens. They would release their energy on each other and not on you.

If you have wisely selected your new kitten, you have chosen one that was properly socialized. Proper socialization means that when your kitten was still nursing, the owner took her out of the litter to be held and handled by all sorts of people—big and small, male and female. The kitten learns early on that people are gentle, fun to touch, and occasionally have great food treats.

It is important for you to expose your new kitten to all kinds of people. When your kitten is sleepy or wants to cuddle in your lap, you have an excellent opportunity to teach her that touching in certain sensitive places is not to be feared. Softly rub her toes, lift her lips, touch her teeth, fold back her ears and run her tail through your closed hand. In other words, alleviate her fear of being touched by people. Your veterinarian will love you!

Teach your kitten to go into a carrier by placing food tidbits inside and letting her go in and out freely. Give her praise for doing this by saying, "Good Kitty!" This will make it easier for you and less traumatic for her when you do have to take her to the veterinarian or go on a trip. With your kitty in the carrier, take short trips at first—from one room to another, then to the car and back, and then a drive around the block. Eventually, your kitten will get accustomed to traveling in her carrier.

Before weaning, a kitten that plays too roughly with her mother will be warned immediately by a growl. Similarly, if your kitten plays too roughly with you, scream loudly, "OUCH!" until she stops, then praise her for ceasing her rough play. It is important always to follow a reprimand, "Ouch" or "No", with "Good Kitty" when the behavior stops. Never punish your kitten by hitting, chasing, or throwing something at her. For a cat, these acts constitute abuse, and surely this form of punishment causes a cat to become aggressive. If your kitten is getting too rough in a play session, after saying "Ouch" or "No Biting" or whatever verbal signal you want to use, discontinue the play. A kitten wants to play so badly that after the play is ended a few times because of rough play, she will soon learn to play your way.

Keep lots of toys available for energy releasers and use a string or a squeak toy to divert the biting and keep kitten's attention on proper play toys and not your hands!