



Helping your nervous kitten adjust

Step 1. Set up your space

In a quiet room that can be closed off from the rest of the house, provide food, water, litter box, toys, and places to perch, hide and scratch. During the first few days, allow ample alone time for your kitten to adjust to and feel safe in their new space. Make sure they're eating, drinking, and using the litter box, even if it's just when no one's around.

Step 2. Eating in your presence

Put yummy treats/wet food in a bowl near the kitten and sit a few feet away while they eat. If they don't eat at first, scoot a little farther away until they feel safe enough to eat. You can gradually get closer in small increments – as long as they keep eating, that's a sign that you can keep going! But if they stop, go back to your last spot.

Step 3. Eating from your hand

It's best to start by offering food on something like a spoon or popsicle stick before fully introducing your own hand. Just like in the previous step, gradually bring your hand closer, but move it back if they stop eating and work at that distance for a little longer. Once they're eating from your hand consistently, move on to the next step.

Step 4. Allowing brief touch

Slowly and gently offer one hand toward them and immediately offer food with the other hand right after. Pull both hands away at the same time so that they only get treats when the petting hand is present. As they get used to your empty hand coming close, start incorporating light touch and pet on the cheeks, chin/neck, or behind the ears.

Step 5. Increase petting and scratching

As your kitten continues to allow touch, or even enjoy it (by leaning into your hand or purring), increase the duration, intensity, and frequency of petting as long as they seem to tolerate it well. Continue to reward them with treats after you're done petting, and give them frequent breaks!

Step 6. Seeking attention

Once your kitten starts to come seek attention from you even when you're not offering treats, that's a great sign that they're come to love the affection you offer. Good signs include kneading ("making biscuits"), purring, nuzzling your hand to encourage more petting, and more. Great job helping your scared kitten feel safe and loved!



Helpful Hints:

- Go slow and steady, always allowing your kitten the choice to interact. If they're not choosing to, come back later and try again.
- Use a soft quiet voice, slow but intentional movements, and avoid direct eye contact – this can feel threatening to cats.
- Keep sessions short to start – up to 5 minutes. As your kitten grows more comfortable with you, you can make them longer!
- Some kittens prefer some treats to others, so you may have to try a variety to see which motivates them best. If your kitten starts to show stress or discomfort, such as retreating, looking for a hiding spot, or showing aggression, go back to the previous step or stop the session and come back later so they can decompress.
- Cats thrive on consistency and routine, so the more you can keep to a regular schedule of spending time with them, the better.
- Don't forget that cats (especially kittens) are prey animals, not just predators. They can hunt but can also be hunted, so they have natural-born instincts to either fight, flee, or freeze when they feel threatened. By being patient and building trust, you can show them that you are a source of safety, not danger.