the cat group

The Kitten Checklist

Thinking of getting a kitten?

Use this checklist to help you find a healthy, friendly kitten and to avoid some of the pitfalls which can occur



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ABTC Animal Behaviour & Training Council · APGOCATS All-Party Parliamentary Group on Cats · Battersea · Blue Cross · BSAVA · BVA British Veterinary Association · CFSG Canine & Feline Sector Group · Cats Protection · international cat care · mayhew for dogs, cats and communities · NOAH National Office of Animal Health · pdsa The Vet Charity for Pets in Need · UK Pet Food · PIF Pet Industry Federation · RSPCA · woodgreen · Governing Council of the Cat Fancy

INTRODUCTION

When you take on a kitten you are taking responsibility for a pet which may be with you for an average of 14 years, and often longer. Most people want a cat which is confident and happy to be around people. How you choose a kitten can have a great effect on both the welfare of the cat throughout its life, and your enjoyment of having it as a pet.

Whether you pay for a kitten or take on a free one, whether it is a non-pedigree (moggie) or a pedigree, and whether you get it from a charity homing centre, a home fosterer for a cat charity, a private home or a breeder, there are general things to look out for to ensure you bring home a healthy kitten which will live with you happily for many years. The same principles apply no matter where the kitten comes from and they focus on:

- **Health**
- **Behaviour**

This document looks at what you can find out even before you visit the kitten, what to research and what to look for when you visit the kitten.

The questions are a guide and prompt you to find out important things which could affect your kitten's health and wellbeing, and your future relationship with it. Answers suggesting caution may not be a reason to refuse to take a kitten, but it can inform you about what to expect or what you may need to do if you take the kitten home (eg, vaccination, neutering, worming). A brief explanation tells you why finding out these things is important.



Don't forget that many homing charities have lots of older cats which need homes and which may even suit your lifestyle better than taking on a young kitten.

This information has been put together by The Cat Group, a collection of professional organisations (listed right) dedicated to feline welfare. Further excellent advice on getting a kitten and what to look out for can be found on the websites of these organisations.

The Canine and Feline Sector Group has endorsed the checklist and the organisations within the group which deal with cats have added their logos.

the cat group

www.thecatgroup.org.uk

Battersea
www.battersea.org.uk

Blue Cross
www.bluecross.org.uk

British Small Animal Veterinary Association
www.bsava.com

British Veterinary Association
www.bva.co.uk

Cats Protection
www.cats.org.uk

Governing Council of the Cat Fancy
www.gccfcats.org

International Cat Care
www.icatcare.org

Mayhew
www.themayhew.org

PDSA
www.pdsa.org.uk

RSPCA
www.rspca.org.uk

Wood Green
www.woodgreen.org.uk

BEFORE YOU VISIT THE KITTEN

Things to find out before you visit the kitten

Often the first contact with the person, or organisation from whom you get a kitten is by phone or online – here is some basic information to gather. Remember that once you see the kitten it may be hard to resist it, so it is important to find out as much as you can before visiting. A 'pre-visit' with no expectation of purchase will also help to take the pressure off all the parties involved and may allow you to go away and think about your purchase if you have concerns.



1. WHEN WAS THE KITTEN BORN?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

A kitten must not be homed until it is at least 8 weeks old.



2. WILL YOU BE ABLE TO SEE THE KITTEN WITH ITS MOTHER?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

See the kitten with its mother at least once before you decide to purchase it or bring it home. Seeing a kitten with its mother helps to avoid kittens which may have been 'farmed' or imported illegally (and are without their mother); scenarios which can result in serious health or behaviour problems. Scenarios may vary slightly depending on where you are getting a kitten from and what age it is:

Pet home. A kitten born into a pet home should be with its mother until 8 weeks old and will usually stay with its mother until it finds a new home, so seeing them together should not be problem.

Breeder. A pedigree kitten born to a reputable breeder will probably stay with its mother until it is 12 or 13 weeks old or until it has found a new home, so seeing them together should not be a problem.

Homing charity. Occasionally a homing charity may have kittens present without a mother because of difficult circumstances from which they have come. Also, kittens over 8/9 weeks old may be independent of their mothers in a homing charity as the mother may have been homed herself once they have been weaned. Homing charities also use foster carers to look after cats with kittens so that kittens can grow up in a home environment.



3. WAS THE KITTEN RAISED WITH ITS MOTHER?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Kittens learn much about their approach to life from their mother (see 'Visiting the kitten' pp. 9–13) so it is important to know whether they have been raised with her.

4. WHERE WAS THE KITTEN BORN, AND WHERE DID THE KITTEN SPEND MOST OF ITS TIME WHEN IT WAS BETWEEN 2 AND 9 WEEKS OLD?



ANSWER:

Why is this important?

The ideal scenario for a kitten which is going to become a pet, is to be born into a home among people and to experience all of the normal activities that happen there. In that way, it becomes used to the home environment and is not stressed by it (of course it will need quiet time out when it is small and appropriate experiences and handling as well). It will not view a new home as something to be feared if it is familiar with most of the things which normally happen within it. A kitten born outside a home and raised in a shed or outdoor pen, or in an indoor cattery or indoor pen (or a homing centre which does not make sure its kittens have the right kinds of experiences) or kept in a single room, may not experience normal human home life when it is between 2 and 9 weeks old, the time when kittens are most sensitive to learning about the world. If a kitten misses this opportunity it may never be fully comfortable living as a pet cat. Therefore, there is a large responsibility on the person breeding the cat (on purpose or accidentally) because it is vital that the kitten has the right experiences early on, before it goes to a new home. Responsible breeders and good homing centres will have procedures in place to do this, so it is important to ask about what efforts have been made to give the kitten these experiences, especially if has not been raised in a traditional home.



5. DOES THE KITTEN HAVE BROTHERS OR SISTERS WITH WHICH IT INTERACTS?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

A kitten which has been raised alongside other kittens is more likely to have learned appropriate cat behaviour. This may help it to live with other cats in the future, and kittens that have had the opportunity to play and interact with other kittens are more likely to interact with people appropriately and not bite or scratch during play.

6. IS ANYTHING KNOWN ABOUT THE FATHER OF THE KITTEN?



ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Friendly fathers are more likely to produce friendly kittens, so this is extra information which might be useful. However, the identity of the father is often unknown for non-pedigree cats.



7. IS THE KITTEN FRIENDLY?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Even if you cannot see the kitten, an answer which says the kitten is nervous may make you decide not to go and see it, or at least to be aware there may be a problem when you visit.

8. HAS THE KITTEN INTERACTED POSITIVELY WITH DIFFERENT PEOPLE AND EXPERIENCED SOUNDS, SIGHTS, SMELLS AND SENSATIONS COMMON IN HOUSEHOLDS? (eg. vacuuming, TV/radio, people coming and going)



ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Short and frequent interaction with a variety of people (eg, men, women and children of different ages) comprising gentle stroking, lifting and play, is most likely to produce a kitten confident with people. A home is a very complex sensory world full of different sights, smells, sounds and sensations which kittens need to be able to experience as normal and be confident with them.



9. IS THE KITTEN ON SOLID FOOD?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

The kitten should be fully weaned (ie, able to survive without its mother's milk) before you take it home.

10. WAS THE KITTEN TOTALLY OR PARTIALLY HAND-REARED (FED BY A HUMAN USING A BOTTLE)?



ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Hand-reared kittens, despite the best intentions of their human 'mothers', have different care from kittens reared by a cat. This can affect how they behave, eg, some are very needy, and can be more boisterous and less self-controlled if frustrated.



11. IS THE KITTEN HEALTHY?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Even if you cannot see the kitten as yet, it is worth asking this question. If the person says the kitten has some problems this can give you a warning and you may decide not to not see the kitten, or at least you will be aware of possible problems when you visit (see the section on visiting further on). Has it had any veterinary treatment and, if so, will a copy of the records be available? This may also affect future insurance cover.

12. IS THE KITTEN LIKELY TO BE LONG-HAIRED?



ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Taking on a long-haired cat brings with it responsibility for grooming as the coat may become easily matted, causing distress and discomfort for the cat, and can result in an ongoing battle if grooming is not approached properly early on in life, and made enjoyable. If either parent (if the father is known) is long-haired, or it is a long-haired breed, then the kitten may also be long-haired and this means that much more time (daily grooming) needs to be spent on caring for the cat than if it has a short coat.



13. IS THE KITTEN A SPECIFIC BREED?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

If the kitten is from two pedigree parents of the same breed, from two pedigree parents of different breeds, or one pedigree parent and one non-pedigree (moggie) parent, then there may be implications for the level of care required. Some breeds have a very dense coat requiring care, some have very little coat (and may need bathing regularly) and some may be more attention-seeking or noisy (such as Siamese). There may also be inherited defects which are associated with that particular breed. Finding out this information will enable you to research these things and ask specific questions of the breeder (see pedigree section).

14. HAS THE KITTEN BEEN INTERACTING POSITIVELY WITH A DOG OR DOGS?



ANSWER:

Why is this important?

If you have a dog or plan to get one in the future, you may want a kitten which has been used to canine friends in the first two months of life, as it will be more likely to be confident around dogs in the future.



Remember that once you see the kitten it may be hard to resist it, so it is important to find out as much as you can before visiting. A 'pre-visit' with no expectation of purchase will also help to take the pressure off all the parties involved and may allow you to go away and think about your purchase if you have concerns.

BEFORE YOU VISIT A PEDIGREE KITTEN

Extra questions to ask if you are purchasing a pedigree kitten from a breeder

1. IS THE KITTEN REGISTERED WITH GCCF, FELIS BRITANNICA (FB) OR TICA?



ANSWER:

Why is this important?

If the kitten is registered with any of these bodies there are rules with which the breeder should comply. Some, such as the Governing Council of the Cat Fancy (GCCF), have rules about ethical breeding and health, and which breeds they will recognise and register. All should be able to guarantee that the cat is the breed that the breeder says it is. You can check on their websites to see what it should look like and do your research about the breed. The kitten should come with specific paperwork about its pedigree, should be fully vaccinated and may be insured. It will have a registration certificate with a unique registration number and registered name.



2. IF YOU ARE BUYING FROM A BREEDER ADVERTISING ONLINE, CAN YOU SEE A PICTURE OF THE KITTEN?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

If the advertiser claims the kitten is of a particular breed, you can check whether the picture of the kitten corresponds with pictures of that breed – sometimes adverts claim a kitten is a particular breed, but it is not. It might not be important to you whether the kitten is a particular breed or a mixture of specific breeds, but you may pay a pedigree rate for a non-pedigree animal, so make sure that you are getting what is being claimed.

3. DOES THE BREED HAVE ANY INHERITED PROBLEMS AND IS THERE A TEST FOR THAT PARTICULAR DISORDER? DOES THE MOTHER OR FATHER HAVE ANY INHERITED DISEASES/PROBLEMS OR HAVE THEY BEEN TESTED FOR CERTAIN PROBLEMS? IF SO, WHAT WERE THE RESULTS? HAS THE KITTEN BEEN TESTED IF POSSIBLE?



ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Once you have chosen a particular breed, do your research because it may have inherited health problems associated with that breed. Go to **https://icatcare.org/advice/cat-breeds** to find out more about each breed and to find appropriate questions to ask.

4. HAS THE MOTHER OR FATHER HAD ANY SURGICAL PROCEDURES TO CORRECT FEATURES THAT COULD BE INHERITED BY THE KITTEN?



ANSWER:

Why is this important?

This is more a common problem in dogs, but very occasionally some pedigree cats with physical issues may have to be operated on because of physical problems which may be inherited. These problems can cause pain and discomfort and may have to be surgically corrected.



5. DO YOU INTEND TO BREED FROM THE KITTEN?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

If you are planning to breed from a pedigree kitten, you should check that it is registered as 'active' with the appropriate body (GCCF, Felis Britannica, TICA) and that pedigree papers will be available. The breeder may have put limitations on what you can do with the kitten (eg, breeding from it). If you are buying a pedigree kitten to use as a breeding cat, then there are many more questions you need to ask, as you will be responsible for the health and welfare of the offspring, including problems which may be inherited, and will be responsible for ensuring the kittens find caring loving homes. (See **https://icatcare.org/advice/pedigree-cats/things-consider**).



USEFUL LINKS

International Cat Care
https://icatcare.org/advice/cat-breeds

Governing Council of the Cat Fancy
https://www.gccfcats.org/

VISITING THE KITTEN

Things to look out for and ask when you visit the kitten

1. CAN YOU SEE THE KITTEN WITH ITS MOTHER? (SEE QUESTION 2)



ANSWER:

Why is this important?

It is **VITAL** to see the kitten with its mother to be sure that the kitten has actually been bred there and not imported or brought from a kitten farm. (An exception may be in a homing centre which has taken on motherless kittens or if the mother has been homed once the kittens are weaned.)



2. IS THE MOTHER CAT HEALTHY?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

An unhealthy mother may not care for her kittens as well as possible or may pass on disease or health problems to her kittens. An unhealthy mother is also cause for concern regarding the care provided by the owner/breeder. Also ask whether the mother has been vaccinated/wormed/treated for fleas.

3. IS THE MOTHER CAT CONFIDENT AND HAPPY TO INTERACT WITH YOU AND HER KITTENS?



ANSWER:

Why is this important?

A confident mother cat, happy to interact with people, is likely to bring up kittens which are friendly and confident too.



4. ARE THERE MANY OTHER CATS OR LITTERS OF KITTENS IN THE HOME?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Large numbers of cats and kittens can increase the risk of the spread of disease and lessen the ability of the owner/breeder to keep everything as clean as necessary to minimise this risk and to give each kitten the attention it needs. It can also increase stress among the cats which reduces their ability to fight disease.

5. IS THE KITTEN'S ENVIRONMENT CLEAN? THIS INCLUDES WATER AND FOOD BOWLS, LITTER TRAYS, BED AND GENERAL ENVIRONMENT?



ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Keeping the kittens and environment clean lessens the risk of development and spread of disease and shows that the owner/breeder is helping to maintain the health and welfare of the cat and kittens.

6. DOES THE KITTEN LOOK HEALTHY?

Are the ears clean?
There should be no dirt or debris in the ears.

YES / NO

Is the coat clean and free from parasites?
The coat should be clean and free from parasites (fleas or mites may be seen or faeces from these parasites may show up as small black specks). The skin should not look sore and the kitten should not be scratching excessively.

YES / NO

Does the kitten have any problems with movement?
The kittens should be agile and move freely once it is eight weeks old.

YES / NO



Are the kitten's eyes clean and bright?
They should be clean and bright with no watery or coloured discharge.

YES / NO

Is the kitten's nose clean?
The nose should be clean with no discharge.

YES / NO

Is the area under the tail clean?
The area under the tail should look clean. An upset stomach (diarrhoea) may cause this area to look sore or red.

YES / NO

Is the kitten bright and lively?
A kitten which seems depressed or lethargic may not be well.

YES / NO

These are general pointers about the kitten's health and give an indication as to how well it has been cared for. While a few fleas may not prevent a purchase, it is worth knowing they are there. Other things, such as an upset stomach, weepy eyes, or problems with movement may be more serious and may prompt you to decline to buy, or to take more advice. Look at the health of the other kittens for signs of problems too.

7. HAS THE KITTEN:



Been treated for worms? YES / NO

Been treated for fleas? YES / NO

OTHER INFORMATION:

Why is this important?

The kitten may or may not have been treated for worms and may or may not have fleas. Find out and take advice from your vet if you take on the kitten. If the kitten has been treated, write down when and with what products so you can let your vet know.



8. WILL THE KITTEN BE VACCINATED WHEN YOU TAKE IT HOME?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

If you buy a pedigree kitten from a reputable breeder, it is likely to be at least 12/13 weeks old and will come fully or partially vaccinated. If you are buying a non-pedigree kitten it is likely to be about 8/9 weeks old and may not be vaccinated. Some homing charities will also give a first vaccination. This is not a problem – it just means that you will be responsible for ensuring the kitten has its full course of vaccinations to protect it from disease. If the kitten is vaccinated make sure you also receive the vaccination certificate.

9. WILL THE KITTEN BE NEUTERED WHEN YOU TAKE IT HOME?



ANSWER:

Why is this important?

If you obtain the kitten from a breeder or from a charity homing centre it may already be neutered. If not, then it is your responsibility to do this when the kitten is about 4 months old. Kittens usually reach puberty at around 5 to 6 months and will still look like kittens themselves – it is very important to have them neutered to prevent unwanted litters.



10. WILL THE KITTEN BE MICROCHIPPED WHEN YOU TAKE IT HOME?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Microchipping is the best form of identification for your cat and every owner is urged to microchip their cat. If your cat becomes lost and then found elsewhere this can considerably increase the chances of you being reunited with it. Most kittens (except those chipped by some pedigree breeders and some homing charities) will not be microchipped when you purchase them, but should be microchipped while the kitten is being neutered or having its vaccinations. If the kitten is microchipped, make sure you get the information, keep it safe, register the kitten to your address and make sure you update the information if you move.

11. IS THE KITTEN INSURED?



ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Many breeders and some homing charities now home a kitten with a temporary insurance certificate which covers its first weeks with you, so you are covered for certain veterinary fees should it become ill. If this temporary cover is not provided, you can buy pet insurance independently as soon as you have the kitten. Having insurance will help to cover the cost of veterinary care and will not hinder treatment because of costs.



12. WHAT FOOD IS THE KITTEN EATING?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

When a kitten goes to a new home it is a major change to its life and can be stressful. If there are some things which can be kept constant, such as the food it is eating, this will lessen the stress and help to prevent stomach upsets. Ask for information about the kitten's normal food and ask the breeder or homing organisation if it is possible to let you have some to bridge you over until you can buy some.

13. WHAT LITTER IS BEING USED?



ANSWER:

Why is this important?

A kitten will be litter trained when it comes to you and is likely to prefer the type of litter and litter tray it has learned to use. Keeping the same type of litter and tray will be reassuring and help it to recognise its new toilet area, and minimise stress. Ask for some litter to use until you can buy similar. If you want to change it you can do so gradually.



14. BY THE END OF YOUR VISIT WAS THE KITTEN:

Happy to approach you/to be approached by you? YES / NO

Happy to be handled and stroked? YES / NO

Happy to play with toys with you? YES / NO

OTHER OBSERVATIONS:

Why is this important?

At first kittens may be cautious/wary of you and that is normal. However, if the kitten relaxes and is happy as described, then it is likely to continue to be so in your home.

15. BY THE END OF YOUR VISIT WAS THE KITTEN NERVOUS OF YOU?



ANSWER:

Why is this important?

If the kitten does not relax and is still nervous at the end of your visit (presuming you have acted gently and quietly and given it a chance to investigate you), it may be an indication that the kitten is more likely to remain nervous. This may indicate that the kitten needs the right environment to make it feel secure – this may not be a home with lots of children and other animals.



16. BY THE END OF YOUR VISIT WAS THE KITTEN VERY FEARFUL OF YOU, HIDING, AND/OR HISSING/SPITTING/GROWLING IF APPROACHED?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Think very carefully about taking on this kitten. There is a real likelihood that it may never become a friendly, confident pet cat. It may never enjoy being a pet and so will have a poor quality of life if it is expected to do so. It may be difficult to walk away, but think carefully what you want out of having a pet cat and about the cat's future welfare too.

Details of who you are obtaining the kitten from

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

.....

Tel: .....

Email: .....

Tip

If you decide to take the kitten, ask for some of its bedding as the familiar smell with be reassuring when everything else is changing, and will help the kitten with travel and to settle into its new home. Take it home in a secure carrier (preferably one which has front and top opening (or it divides in half allowing the top to be taken off) as this will help with future trips to the vet.

Additional information on kittens and all aspects of buying and keeping one can be found on the various websites below.

Battersea
www.battersea.org.uk

Blue Cross
www.bluecross.org.uk

British Small Animal Veterinary Association
www.bsava.com

British Veterinary Association
www.bva.co.uk

Cats Protection
www.cats.org.uk

Governing Council of the Cat Fancy
www.gccfcats.org

International Cat Care
www.icatcare.org

Mayhew
www.themayhew.org

PDSA
www.pdsa.org.uk

RSPCA
www.rspca.org.uk

Wood Green
www.woodgreen.org.uk