

Find kittens?

Observe before you rescue



Assess whether kittens are healthy, or sick and in need of care

With kitten season coming and cat intake restrictions due to COVID-19, Forsyth County Animal Shelter (FCAS) has created this guide to help Forsyth County residents understand what to do if they find litters of kittens, and how they can help.

Continue reading to find out how to tell if the kittens you found are truly in need of help.

Forsyth County Animal Shelter will soon be entering what many in the Animal Welfare Industry refer to as "Kitten Season" and this year presents new and interesting challenges. Unlike previous years, we must consider the safety and well-being of the community as a whole due to COVID-19 — and as a result have had to make the decision to limit our intake for healthy, unweaned kittens.

Per national recommendations in response to the COVID-19 crisis FCAS will not be accepting healthy, unweaned litters of kittens (with or without mom).

We want to reassure the community that we are still here to protect all animals, including kittens, that are sick, injured or in immediate danger. However, unweaned healthy kittens with or without a mom present are considered healthy- with a food source- and do not need human intervention. FCAS has created this guide to help the residents of Forsyth County understand what to do when they do find a litter of kittens, and how to help.



Healthy thriving kitten
No intervention needed



Sick Kitten
Needs intervention and veterinary care

Guide Contents

Find kittens? Observe before you rescue.

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- Remove the kittens only if they are in immediate danger OR if they appear very sickly and ill.
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- Removing kittens from a location.
- What to do if the mother cat does not return.

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- Caring for mom cats with litters.
- Caring for unsocial mom cats with litters indoors.
- Feeding and caring for kittens 8+ weeks.
- How to socialize ("tame") feral/scared kittens.

Mom may be hiding just around the corner!

You hear meowing in your garden and find a litter of kittens.

During this time of year, unaltered, outdoor cats (both owned and “community” cats) reproduce prolifically. It’s not uncommon to find a litter of kittens - or single kitten - under a hedge, porch or perhaps out in the garden with mom cat nowhere in sight. What do you do? Your first instinct may be to scoop them up and take them inside, or perhaps to your local shelter. But wait, the best thing for the kittens is most likely to leave them where they are.

Wait and observe

A mother cat will periodically leave her nest to search for food.

If you see young kittens without their mother, it is likely she will return. She may be in the process of moving them. This is often the case when people find small, single kittens outside. Mom may even be watching you from a safe distance, waiting to return to her litter until she no longer detects your presence, especially if she is scared or not socialized to human contact. The mother should return to the nest within a few hours if you watch quietly from a distance (at least 35 feet). An easy way to see if mom is still around is to sprinkle flour or baby powder around the nest of kitten and check back throughout the day to see if there are paw prints or disturbances indicating that mom has returned.

It is important that you do not take pre-weaned kittens away from their mother. Pre-weaned kittens (under 4 weeks) without a mother are very difficult to care for and have a high mortality rate.

If the kittens appear healthy and comfortable, you can wait 4-6 hours for a mom to return if the kittens are 4-weeks and under. If kittens appear to be over 4-weeks, they can be left alone for 8-10 hours.

Important:

Neonatal kittens are much more at risk of hypothermia than of starvation.

Assess the kittens’ apparent health:

While you are observing from a safe distance, pay attention to the kittens’ appearance and their surroundings. If the kittens appear healthy, and in a relatively safe location, they can survive without mom longer than if they are sickly.

- Does their fur look healthy, full and fluffy? OR Are they dirty? Sickly? Eyes crusty?
- Are they sleeping quietly? In a heap? OR Are they crying? Squalling?
- Are they dry? OR Are they wet/soaked?

Assess the environment:

Are the kittens in IMMEDIATE danger from:

- Heavy rain? Standing water/flooding?
- Wild animals? Dogs?
- Traffic – pedestrian foot traffic? Bicycles or cars?



If the kittens appear healthy, but are not in a safe location, try placing them in a box or similar shelter in a safe spot as close to where you found them as possible, and continue to observe for mom.

Remove kittens only if they are in immediate danger OR if they appear sickly and ill.

If the mother cat returns...

If mom cat returns, but is not comfortable around people, and the area is relatively safe, leave the kittens alone with mom until they are weaned (5-6 weeks). Cats that are uncomfortable around people often become very stressed in an indoor environment and can even be exacerbated in shelter environments where they have less control of their environment. Stress can cause illness, aggression and negatively affect mom's ability to care for her kittens. Stress can even cause her to reject the kittens. Please do not remove kittens from outdoor/unsocial mothers.

Important:

Per national recommendations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, FCAS will not be accepting healthy, unweaned litters of kittens (with or without mom).

You can monitor the environment and offer shelter and regular food to mom in safe, protected areas. However, keep the food and shelter at a distance from each other. Mom will find the food but will not accept your shelter if the food is nearby. This is because she will not want to attract other cats, or other predators, to food located near her nest.

Kittens not only obtain important nutrients and antibodies from mom, but critical socialization skills also. If the mom cat returns and is comfortable around

humans, first make sure she is not someone's indoor/outdoor cat. Moms that are comfortable around people can either be monitored outside, or if you have a quiet, spare room to isolate her in, you can bring her and her kittens inside your home.

Important:

If at all possible, kittens should be left with the mom cat for at least 6 weeks.



If the mother cat does not return...

Here is a [kitten aging chart](#) documenting development for newborns kittens to those 8-weeks and older as well as comprehensive guides to feeding and care of kittens at various stages. Please read guides carefully before removing kittens from their environment, and ensure you have the supplies and information you need to raise them without their mother.

****If you find a sick or injured cat and/or kitten, please call Animal Services at 770-781-2138 prior to bringing the animal(s) to the shelter.**

Additional Resources and Information for Kittens

- [The University of Wisconsin Shelter Medicine Program - Guide to Raising Kittens](#)
Covers birth to 8 weeks old for kittens, as well as information on pregnant moms, giving birth, and weaning.
- [The University of Wisconsin Shelter Medicine Program - Guide to Raising Orphan Under Age Kittens](#)
This is a more in depth how to guide on raising orphaned kittens . Covers birth to 8 weeks old.
- [Maddie's Institute video](#) on how to feed and care for orphaned kittens
- [Video from Maddie's Institute](#) on how to stimulate kittens to urinate and defecate
- [Video from Maddie's Institute](#) on orphan kitten care - Includes information on bottle feeding, bathing, stimulating to urinate/defecate, etc.
- [Maddie's Institute on orphan kitten care](#) - Includes information on how much you can feed a kitten at one time, warming, etc.
- [The Kitten Lady Guide to Kitten Care](#) - Includes information on bottle feeding, assessing health, general care, weaning, etc.

Feeding and Caring for Orphan Kittens 6-7 weeks

(Contact FCAS at 678-965-7185 to request assistance)

- [Video from Maddie's Institute](#) on weaning kittens
- [The University of Wisconsin Shelter Medicine Program - General Care of Kittens](#)
Includes information on general socialization, development, maintaining good health, etc.
- [The Kitten Lady Guide to Kitten Care](#) - Includes information assessing health, general care, litterbox training, weaning, etc.

Caring for Mom Cats with Litters

- [The University of Wisconsin Shelter Medicine Program - Guide to Raising Kittens](#)
Covers birth to 8 weeks old for kittens, as well as information on pregnant moms, giving birth, and weaning.
- [Animal Humane Society's Guide to Caring for Young Kittens and their Moms](#)

Caring for Unsocial Mom Cats with Litters Indoors

- [Tiny Kittens Rescue \(small room confinement\) - Compassionate Foster Care for Feral Moms.](#)
- [Feral Cat Focus \(cage confinement\) - Feral Cat Set-up for Long-term Fosters.](#)

How to Socialize ("tame") Feral/Scared Kittens

- [Urban Cat League](#) has comprehensive information on taming feral/scared kittens up to 6-months of age (these techniques can also work with some adult cats)
- [2-page Summary](#) of the UCL's taming process