

Single Cat Syndrome

If you've ever raised a litter of kittens or adopted a pair of them, you know how much they play together. Some of this play is painful, as confirmed by the yowling and complaining that occurs. The kittens bite and scratch each other, sometimes quite hard. All the while they're learning from one another that this behavior is not the best way to make friends! If they're lucky enough to have a mom cat around and she hears the ruckus, she will often give a warning "that's enough of that" to the kittens and they settle down.

In order to become well-socialized cats, kittens need to learn appropriate behavior from one another. A human is not a substitute for a feline companion. You can provide attention and love but there is simply no way to you can replicate the play behavior of the species. If they don't learn limits in their play as youngsters, they often develop inappropriate playful aggression. In other words, it may be cute when a kitten attacks your ankles when you walk by or playfully nips at your fingers while you're playing. It will be much less cute, not to mention annoying and painful, when your cat is full grown.

Cat behaviorists now believe that kittens raised without kitty companionship transfer the playful biting behavior, which is so important in developing proper manners, to their humans. Kittens are sometimes returned because of this aggressive play biting. To prevent these problems and to encourage the general well-being of the kitten, Adopt A Stray has implemented a policy of not placing any single kitten under the age of five months into a home without another kitten or young cat. This is not a strategy for placing more kittens and cats. It's about the future of the individual kittens, their habits and their happiness. Many people have been skeptical about adopting two kittens rather than one only to thank us later for sticking to our policy. The rewards are great.

Two kittens playing together is one of the most entertaining activities in the world, both for you and for the kittens. Having two cats will also ensure that they are not lonely when you are away from home. A single cat can become lonely and stressed.

If you feel you are not ready for two kittens, we strongly encourage you to consider one of the wonderful teenage or adult cats needing a home. They're still very playful and entertaining and have learned good kitty manners from being around other cats. Remember the difference between a cat and a kitten is only about six months. A happy cat can bring you joy and companionship for twenty years or more. It's well worth laying a good foundation in the early years. The payback is tremendous.

If you have a single cat/kitten below are some things you can do to help your kitten.

- **Two is better than one!** Adopt a kitten playmate. Your best chance for a good match is to choose another cat as close in age/size/energy-level as possible. This is often the easiest instant fix, especially for younger cats!
- **Become the playmate** your kitten needs and desires. Flood the kitten with interactive toys – ones they can interact with, and ones you can use to interact with them. Give them kitten-size stuffed animals that you animate for them to wrestle with or to chase while you drag them across the floor on a string. Another great option is paper bags and cardboard boxes with paw-size holes cut out for them to play hide-and-seek games. At least three times a day, play with the kitten until he or she is so tired she pants and doesn't want to play anymore. That's what a kitten friend would do! Remember **your** hands/feet are NEVER appropriate play toys.
- Give them a **warm secure cuddling place to sleep** – a covered cat-bed on your bed if possible, or on a chair right next to your bed, with their surrogate kitten or mom cat size stuffed animal toy for company.
- As your kitten grows up, **provide plenty of environmental enrichment**. Give kitten a secure "room with a view" with access to a window. Buy new tall climbing things. Bring home new places to hide like big cardboard boxes or even new smelling paper shopping bags (handles safely cut off).

