



# **KITTEN POLICIES**

Effective 11/2022

## **BACKGROUND:**

During kitten season, the time of the year when most kittens are born, shelters are busiest with incoming cats and kittens. Reports of people finding orphaned kittens increase. Many well-meaning members of the public swoop in to “save” litters of kittens they find and then bring them to overcrowded shelters that do not have the capacity to provide 24-hour care because they think it is the right thing to do. The mother could be out looking for food or finding a more suitable home for her kittens. It is generally in a kitten’s best interest to remain with its mother. Separating kittens from their mothers is detrimental to their health and development and may result in behavioral issues, medical complications, and even death. Kittens are more likely to contract illness if taken to a shelter, which has limited resources to care for neonates, and risk humane euthanasia as an outcome. Because bottle feeding is not innate but rather learned behavior, many kittens do not take to bottle-feeding well, resulting in a higher mortality rate. Overall, the mortality rate for young kittens separated from their mothers and brought to animal shelters is much higher than if they had been kept together.

The Montgomery County Office of Animal Services (OAS) does not indiscriminately remove outdoor kittens from the areas they are found in but instead utilizes an age-based system as well as considering the conditions the kittens are found in. If the kittens are clean, plump, and sleeping quietly in a heap, chances are that they’ve got an attentive mom and should be left alone. Abandoned kittens will often be dirty and the nest will be soiled, and they will cry continuously because they’re hungry. OAS advises that the finder of kittens should observe the nest to see that the mother returns soon and observe quietly from a safe distance if dealing with a shy or feral mother. If no mother has been seen hours later, the kittens may be collected by the person who found them and brought to MCASAC.

See the attached guide on kitten age progression, or visit: <https://www.alleycat.org/resources/kitten-progression/>

## **POLICIES:**

1. OAS encourages residents to bring found outdoor and verified unattended kittens 4 weeks of age or older to the Montgomery County Animal Services and Adoption Center (MCASAC) shelter for socialization and adoption. In the case of owned pets, kittens should not be separated from their mother prior to a minimum of 8 weeks of age, preferably 12 weeks.
2. Based on state law, kittens under the age of 8 weeks, will not be available for adoption.
3. Through the OAS transfer program, OAS may transfer an impounded kitten of any age to a shelter, rescue, sanctuary, or other animal care and welfare operation approved by the Executive Director.
4. Outdoor kittens younger than 4 weeks will be left with their mothers when possible. In most cases, residents who find litters of kittens 0-4 weeks old that may have a mother will be encouraged to return the kittens to the location they were found and watch for the mother’s return (see “BACKGROUND” section).

5. Neonatal nursing kittens who are truly without their mother and older kittens who are young enough to be socialized will be accepted into the care of OAS when they are brought to the shelter by a resident.
6. Outdoor kittens that are 0-4 weeks old will be left with their mothers when possible.
7. OAS will loan traps to residents to trap kittens and/or their mother, upon request. This includes transporting the trap to the resident and transporting the animals to MCASAC.
8. OAS does not have a kitten nursery for orphaned nursing "bottle babies" who need feeding and care around the clock. OAS will make efforts for up to 48 hours to find foster or rescue placement for orphaned nursing "bottle babies." Bottle babies that cannot be placed in foster care or transferred may be humanely euthanized due to a lack of available resources needed to care for them.
9. In most cases, due to a limit of time and resources, Animal Services Officers (ASOs) will not trap and/or pick up and transport healthy kittens to the shelter. They will remove kittens or guide residents on the use of traps to capture mothers and kittens when a public nuisance is being caused. ASOs will pick up sick and injured stray cats/kittens.
10. OAS will not enter private property or remove private property without the express written consent of the owner/resident of the property, unless there are exigent circumstances that can be articulated and confirmed by an ASO or other authorized enforcement authority.
11. Cats are adept at living outside in all weather conditions. Unless their mother is not available to care for them, outdoor kittens typically do not require human intervention to survive. During declared emergency weather conditions, OAS may impound kittens in the field on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the responding ASO and/or OAS management.
12. OAS does not trap and permanently remove outdoor kittens for the sole purpose of cat population control. In accordance with the evolving perspective in the animal welfare field and public opinion regarding the management of community cats, OAS is committed to supporting Trap Neuter Return (TNR) efforts in the county. See also the OAS policy document entitled "Community Cat Policies."

# HOW OLD IS THAT KITTEN?

Kittens are adorable at any age, but did you know that figuring out how old a kitten is can help determine what sort of care they need? It can be tricky to tell, but our at-a-glance kitten progression chart, featuring Darling the kitten, is here to help you out!



so fragile!

NEWBORN

When kittens are first born they are completely helpless—their **eyes are closed**, their **ears are folded**, and they can't stand, keep themselves warm, eliminate waste, or eat on their own. They rely on mom for everything!



ONE WEEK

Darling is starting to become **more aware of his surroundings!** At about seven days old, a kitten's ears will unfold and their eyes may start to open.



TWO WEEKS

Look at those blue peepers! Darling's **eyes are fully open**, and he is taking his **first wobbly steps**. Kittens this age start interacting more with each other, but still need mom.



a little wobbly!

THREE WEEKS

Darling's now playing with his siblings and getting more mobile. You should be able to **tell if kittens are boys or girls**. You can start providing a **litter box** and **wet food**.



FOUR WEEKS

Look how much Darling has grown! At four weeks kittens are **sturdy on their feet** and playing with each other, toys, and people.



let's play!

FIVE WEEKS

Get ready for a lot of fun! Darling is now full of energy and **plays exuberantly**. **Interacting with people** is important for kittens at this age. Darling is developing lots of personality!



SIX WEEKS

Every day Darling is getting more sure of himself through socialization and play. He's **using the litter box** and **eating cat food**—though he still visits mom for snacks and comfort.



SEVEN WEEKS

Darling is **almost fully weaned**, and continues to play and learn. Being **introduced to new people, places** in the home, and **other pets** is an important part of socialization.



so grown up!

EIGHT WEEKS

Two pounds! Darling now **weighs enough to be neutered**. He's also getting more skilled and adventurous. Darling is learning so much from his mom, siblings, and human caregiver.



NINE WEEKS

Looking pretty grown-up, Darling! At this age kittens are behaving and using their body language like adult cats. Darling is **eating all solid food**, and his eyes have gone from blue to yellow.



ready to take on the world!

TEN WEEKS

Darling is fully weaned, neutered, and—because he was socialized to people—**ready for his loving adoptive home**. They grow up so fast!

Get even more details (and cute pics!) with our week-by-week kitten progression resource at [alleycat.org/KittenProgression](https://alleycat.org/KittenProgression)