



If You Find An Abandoned Kitten

Every spring and summer animal shelters are filled with hundreds of unwanted kittens, some with their moms and others orphaned. Rescue groups receive calls asking for advice and help. HARP offers the following information to those who may hear kittens meowing in their back yard.

Neonatal kittens found alone are not always abandoned by their mom. She may be away temporarily eating or may have been frightened off and is watching until she deems it safe to return to her offspring. It is important to stay some distance away to allow her to return to gather her kittens. Kittens are much better off with their mom and have a greater chance to survive with her milk and warmth, provided they are in a safe place. If possible, the mom should be spayed as soon as the kittens are weaned.

If you believe the mom is not going to return, do as follows:

1. It is important to provide warmth. A young kitten is unable to regulate his or her body heat and hydration. You can make a warm nursery by placing a box on top of a heating pad. Leave half of the box unheated so the kitten can crawl away if it is too hot. Cover the nesting area with a towel or light blanket. Hypothermia sets in quickly and kittens cannot digest food if their body temperature is too cold.

2. Very young kittens should be fed every four hours using a kitten formula that is a close match to the mother's milk. Use a commercially-available formula made just for kittens. Formula and pet nursers are available at most pet stores and vet clinics. An eyedropper can be used if he/she is unable to suck the nipple. Never use milk intended for humans, as it can cause diarrhea.

To feed a kitten, have it rest on its stomach and gently insert the nipple or dropper tip with warmed formula into its mouth. Slowly pull up and forward on the bottle so the kitten will be nursing with its head extended and slightly elevated to prevent aspiration.

3. The mother cat stimulates her kitten to eliminate (pee and poop) by grooming and licking. You can accomplish this by using a cotton ball and warm water to gently massage the kitten's anal and genital area.

HARP thanks its foster families who specialize in "bottle feeding." The task is very time-consuming and requires patience, but is extremely rewarding when the little furry ball thrives and finds a loving home.