



What to do when you find Kittens

Between the months of March and September, animal shelters are overrun with kittens. Sometimes the kittens are orphaned, but more often than not they have a mother that is caring for them. Whether or not they have a mother who is caring for them properly will determine the next steps you should take when coming across a litter of kittens.

First, watch and wait for the Mother Cat to return:

- Resist scooping up the kittens right away. The Mother Cat may have just left to find food, or is looking for a new location to move her kittens to. If mom has not returned to her kittens within a few hours, it is safe to assume the kittens have been abandoned.
- A neonatal kitten's best chance of survival is with their mother. Kittens receive important antibodies from their mother's milk that they cannot get from formula.
- It is best to leave the kittens with their mother until they are weaned. Kittens typically start to eat on their own around 4 weeks of age. A 4 week old kitten's ears are now perked up, their incisors and canine teeth are visible, and they have begun to pounce and leap.
- Once the kittens are weaned, please utilize our FREE Trap Neuter and Return program to get the Mother Cat spayed. For more details about our TNR program, please visit www.austinhumanesociety.org/ferals.

After monitoring the kittens for several hours and you have concluded they are without a mother, here is how you can help:

- Keep them warm! Kittens under 3 weeks of age cannot regulate their own body temperature. Keeping the kittens warm is the first step you should take when finding neonatal kittens. You can do this by putting a heating pad on low under a blanket or towel and placing it under the kittens. Keep them close to your body if you can until you are able to get them another heating source.
- Bottle feed them kitten formula. Never give a kitten cow's milk. Instead, feed them "Kitten Milk Replacer" such as KMR or 21st Century. Bottle kits and kitten milk replacer can be purchased at most pet supply stores. Unweaned kittens need care every 2-3 hours, even through the night. Ask your local veterinarian or contact our Foster Care Department at fostercare@austinhumanesociety.org for more tips on how to bottle feed a kitten.
- After feeding, the kittens must be stimulated in order to urinate and defecate. Neonatal kittens can't potty on their own so you have to help them out by rubbing their bottoms with a wet, warm cotton ball or tissue.

Once the kittens are in your care, you can make an appointment to surrender them to the Austin Humane Society, your local city shelter, or you can foster them! For more information about fostering through the Austin Humane Society, please visit www.austinhumanesociety.org/volunteer/foster-care or contact Jamie Hunt at fostercare@austinhumanesociety.org.