

Cats and children



CATS PROTECTION
ESSENTIAL GUIDES



Growing up with a pet can be an extremely rewarding experience for any youngster. We all remember our first pet and teaching your children to respect, love and help care for a cat will help them to become responsible and caring adults.

Learning by experience

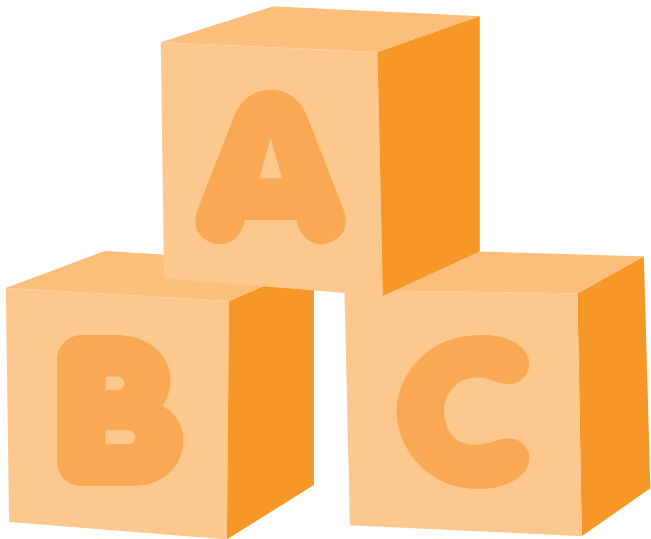
From their earliest days, children can be taught to be gentle with cats. As soon as your children can understand, explain that cats like to be left alone when sleeping or eating and that they can become frightened when people shout, make sudden movements or try to grab them. Children learn best by example, so if you treat your cat gently with love and respect, it is more likely your children will grow up to do the same. They will love to get involved with taking care of your cat too, so let them help with feeding, grooming and playing and you will have happy children and a happy cat!

To help your cat feel safer in a busy household, provide him with a high window sill or cupboard top. This will mean he can still be involved in family life but out of the hectic hullabaloo going on below!

Cats and babies

Most cats will get on famously with a new arrival in the household but a baby does bring a whole change of routine and lifestyle for everyone. The personality of your cat, whether shy or confident, will have some effect on how he reacts to this new arrival. Strict attention to hygiene, keeping your cat in good health and following the few tips as outlined in this leaflet, should ensure everyone in the household is happy and contented.

It is important to remember that, even though you have a new baby and all the sleepless nights to contend with, you still have a responsibility to keep your cat healthy and happy.

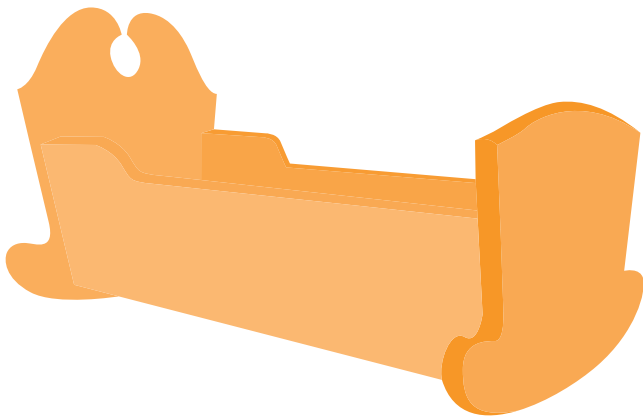


Toxoplasmosis

Sadly, many mums-to-be feel the need to give up their cats over fears of toxoplasmosis, a micro-organism that can affect the foetus if a pregnant woman is infected.

Despite a popular belief that contact with cats can be a major part of toxoplasmosis infection, a study in the *British Medical Journal* concluded that contact with cats was not a risk factor. Although cats are a link in the transmission of toxoplasmosis, the risk comes from young cats or kittens after their first hunting venture when they may catch and eat an infected bird or rodent. Even then, the toxoplasma cysts in a cat's faeces only pose a threat for a couple of weeks.

During your pregnancy, you should wear gloves and an apron when dealing with your cat's litter tray. If you are worried about owning a cat while pregnant, seek advice from your doctor.



A growing family

It is always best to be prepared, so once you know you are pregnant:

- make sure your cat is in good health by taking him for a check-up at the vet
- if your cat is not neutered, get this done without delay
- introduce your cat to any baby stuff you buy, such as nursery furniture or prams – let your cat investigate but do not let him climb on them. It is important he knows these things are strictly off limits
- get all the information you can from your doctor and health visitor about any risks which may occur from owning a cat and take any steps they advise

New routines

Introducing a new routine for your cat before the baby arrives will help ease the situation when the big day comes. Begin by:

- putting the nursery room strictly out of bounds. This is particularly important if your cat has previously had free reign of the house
- reducing the amount of 'lap time' your cat gets. You will not have time to give your cat as much attention once the baby arrives
- make sure you clear away any leftover cat food as it attracts flies. If you need to move your cat's feeding place, do it gradually so it will not upset his routine too much



Once baby arrives

It is never too early for children to learn to respect, love and understand animals and it is important they feel confident around them. It is the basis of true companionship. Your baby will be around three months old before he or she first notices that there is something not human in the house. Your cat will have noticed the baby from day one and may well be curious about the new arrival. Do not panic if your cat sniffs the baby's feet or hangs around the pram like a guard-cat. Not all cats are baby lovers; many will just ignore the new arrival.

You should:

- use a cot or pram net to keep the cat at bay – pull it taut to deter your cat from using it as a bed
- keep the nursery inaccessible to your cat whilst the baby is asleep and make sure any open windows are cat proof
- keep all of the baby's feeding utensils out of your cat's reach
- keep the baby food and cat food separately
- try to set aside a part of the day to make a fuss of your cat – it will give you a chance to grab a quiet moment and relax
- remember to regularly treat your cat for fleas and worms and empty his litter tray

And you should not:

- leave a baby and a cat together unsupervised, even if you trust your cat 100 per cent



This leaflet is one of a range provided by Cats Protection on issues surrounding cat care.

Cats Protection is the UK's leading feline welfare charity and helps more than 193,000 cats and kittens each year. We rely entirely on public generosity to finance this vital welfare work.

For more information on **adopting a cat**, **volunteering for us** or **making a donation**, visit **www.cats.org.uk**



Cats Protection, National Cat Centre,
Chelwood Gate, Nr Haywards Heath RH17 7TT

Helpline: 03000 12 12 12 Email: cp@cats.org.uk
Web: www.cats.org.uk EG07-2009 **CODE: 4067**

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