Development
Neonatal Period (0-9 days) – kittens are born blind and deaf and are guided by tactile, thermal and olfactory stimuli. Hearing starts around day five and anogenital stimulation is required for elimination

Transitional Period (9-14 days) – the eyes open around day 7-10 and they begin to orient to sounds. This is the period when grooming emerges and they start to stand and to walk.

Socialisation Period (2-7 weeks) - Social relationships with people and animals are formed and object and social play begins. The queen begins to wean the kittens around 4 weeks. Fear responses begin and persist. Kittens now have the ability to learn from bad experiences.

Juvenile Period (7 weeks - 5 months) – Weaning is now complete, although some may suckle intermittently beyond 1 year. Social play peaks and declines while independence increases. It is important for social interactions and handling to continue. Sexual maturity is typically reached between 5 and 9 months.

Development of Play
Social play with mother and siblings begins around 3 weeks and includes pawing, wrestling, and rolling. Most kittens go through four bouts of play per day. These bouts add up to an average of one hour per day at the age of 9 weeks. Play takes on more of a predatory form as the socialization period progresses and includes behaviours such as stalking, staring, pouncing, biting, and chasing. Object play is high at 8 weeks, and males and females with male littermates show more object contact. Early weaned cats and kittens of undernourished mothers show earlier object play as a form of predatory practice.

The Litter Box
Most cats have an innate preference to eliminate in fine, sandy substrates, such as fine clay or sand. This means potted plants and sand boxes may be prime toileting targets in the early phases. Most kittens do not need training to use the box, but some may need to be confined initially until they are reliably using the box. The box should be large, preferably uncovered, with litter that is fine and clumps well when wet. The location should be easily accessible and in a quiet area of the home. Excrement should be removed daily and the entire contents of the box dumped and the box cleaned with warm, soapy water every 1-3 weeks. Liners should be avoided as cats may get their claws stuck in them and then avoid the box altogether. Owners should offer multiple litter boxes, especially in a multi-cat household. There should be the same number of boxes as the number of cats, plus an additional one.

Carrier Training

Herron, M. Starting off on the right claw - the basics of kitten behavior
Proceedings of the 4th AVA/NZVA Pan Pacific Conference, Brisbane 2015
Free Access Crate Training (FACT), by Murna Milani, should be offered from the start. This establishes a safe retreat for the cat throughout his life and prevents carrier aversion and fear. The owner needs to create a positive association with the carrier over time. It may help to start with just the bottom of the carrier, soft bedding, food and water. One may add a small litter box if long periods of travel are anticipated later in life. It should be placed in a quiet area, preferably up off of the floor. Once the bottom portion is being used regularly, the top of the carrier can be added. In a few days the owner can add the door and close it periodically while cat is relaxed and has a food item.

Offering a highly palatable food item daily will help retain a positive association. This may include squeeze cheese on the inside walls, baby food, tuna or chicken bits, or soft treats. Pheromone spray (Feliway®) can be used to make the carrier more appealing. Owners can then take the cat in the carrier for short trips in the car once fully comfortable being in the carrier with the door closed, and can work up to longer trips with time. The more positive travel experience a cat has at a young age the more likely he will travel well as an adult.

**Environment of Plenty**

Resting areas should be offered in several locations throughout the house. Elevated platforms are preferable and soft bedding will make resting areas more appealing. Access to places to hide is also important, especially in multi-animal households. The ability to be concealed can be stress-relieving for many cats.

Appropriate scratching options are also essential as scratching is a NORMAL, expected behaviour. Cats scratch as part of normal nail maintenance and for marking purposes. Initially the owners should offer both vertical and horizontal options until a preference has been established. Rough and textured material is most appealing, such as corrugated cardboard or sisal. Posts should be placed close to resting areas as cats often scratch upon waking. For areas that are being scratched in an undesirable manner, the owners can cover or “booby trap” furniture that they do not want damaged. They can also line the area with double-sided tape panels (“Sticky Paws”) or use a motion-sensing spray deterrent (Ssscat®).

Kitty entertainment in the form of toys and other enrichment will help promote a healthy indoor quality of life. Cats tend to prefer toys that are interactive and involve the owners. One can also offer hidden hunting options around the house for when the cat is home alone. Toys should be rotated weekly to avoid habituation. The sense of novelty is appealing to most cats. There are TV entertainment options, such as “Video Catnip”. Window perched with bird feeders set just outside the window can also provide a sense of live entertainment.

Destructive chewing is another normal, natural behaviour in cats and if appropriate outlets are not provided, cats will find their own. As such, toxic plants should be removed from the household and safe, appealing options made readily available. Options may include cat grass, fresh catnip, or chicken jerky strips. Household plants can be made aversive/unappealing by coating the bottom of the leaves with spicy pastes, sauces or heavy perfumes.

Cat owners should also create a separate area that can serve as a quiet refuge from household stressors. Each cat should have his or her own area with access to separate food, water, scratching posts and litter boxes. Electronic cat door access is an option if owners want to only allow access to one or a few cats.

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Punishment
Punishment in kittens for play, chewing, scratching, and eliminating should be avoided, as these are all normal behaviours. Instead, if the behaviours are excessive or inappropriately directed, then can be redirected to appropriate chew, scratch, play or elimination outlets. Cats DO NOT learn by force, and punishment may create fear of the owner and lead to aggression or urine marking. Cats may also learn to show undesirable behaviours when the owner is not present. Remote, non-painful punishment may be used as a last resort, as long as appropriate outlets are also provided. These may include “booby traps” with double-sided tape, the motion-detecting spray devices (Ssscat®), and foul or spicy tastes or scents.

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