

How To Put An Orphan Kitten On A Surrogate Mum



NOTE: If you are a current AWL NSW foster carer and someone asks you to take in a kitten, please do NOT take it in straight away. First speak to the Foster Care Officer (Kemps Creek carers) or Welfare Officer (AWL NSW branch carers) to see if we can assist. Our top priority is the health and welfare of the animals currently in care and where possible and within our means, we assist thousands of animals each year. This may mean us agreeing to take in orphan kittens but placing them with another foster carer based on the circumstance.

Introduction

Use this guide to help successfully place an unweaned orphan kitten (0-4 weeks old generally) on a lactating mum cat. The survival rate can be much higher for kittens when placed on a lactating queen compared to bottle-feeding and raising the kittens without one.

Before placing an orphan kitten on a lactating queen, consider:

- Health risks: The lactating queen and her kittens may be healthy and by adding the new kitten to the litter could potentially introduce diseases to the entire litter and mum cat. Likewise, they could introduce a disease to the orphan kitten.
- Milk supply: If mum cat already has about 7 kittens, she may not have enough milk to properly feed all her kittens and the new one.
- Age of kittens: If a kitten is introduced onto a surrogate mum, it is ideal for the kittens to be as close as possible in terms of age and size.
- Neonatal kitten experience: Sometimes no matter what you try, mum cat just won't accept the orphan kitten. If this happens, are you able and willing to hand-raise the kitten yourself? This can include feeding EVERY 2 hours even throughout the night. Read our Neonatal Kitten Guide to see what's involved.
- Other foster carers: There may be another foster carer with a more suitable lactating queen (or experience to bottle-feed if mum cat rejects the kitten).

How to introduce orphan kitten to lactating queen

There are a number of different tips and tricks to increase the success of a lactating queen accepting the new kitten. We have outlined some steps below which can be followed:

1. Ensure mum cat is in a quiet, relaxing spot, away from other animals & loud noises.
2. Whilst mum cat is feeding her kittens, take away some of her existing kittens and rub them against the orphan kitten so the kittens 'swap scents'. Also rub the mum cats chin and then rub the new kitten (these steps are important to increase the probability of mum cat accepting the orphan).
3. One-by-one, show mum cat a few of her own kittens then place them on mum cats nipple for a feed. Then do the same with the orphan kitten and make sure the kitten feeds off the mum cat. If mum cat is friendly with you, talk to her softly and rub her head/chin at the same time. Watch to ensure that the new kitten feeds enough from mum cat and isn't 'bullied' by the rest of the litter. If mum cat is scared and doesn't like human touch, do not attempt to touch her or talk to her during this process.
 - a. If mum cat hisses, tries to swipe or tries to attack the orphan kitten, immediately take it away and try this process again several hours later (whilst

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ensuring the kitten gets the appropriate care, warmth and food intake in the meantime as per our Neonatal Kitten Guide advises).

- b. If mum cat doesn't accept the orphan kitten after 2-3 attempts OR is aggressive to the orphan kitten OR if she becomes distressed, do not continue to try to put the orphan kitten on the mum cat. Contact the Foster Care Officer (Kemps Creek carers) or Welfare Officer (branch carers) ASAP.