



March 2017

# Kitten Mom's Corner

## Holy Meow! I've Found a Teeny, Tiny Kitten!

Spring is here! We know this is a time of renewal – trees budding, flowers peeking through the earth, warmer temperatures... and kittens. As you enjoy the season, be on the lookout for kittens. If you happen to find a kitten, don't immediately remove him from the situation unless in immediate danger. Wait to see if mama cat comes back.

Just because mom isn't present doesn't mean she has deserted her kittens; she may be hunting for food or your approach may have frightened her away. If the kittens are clean, healthy, quiet and in a safe situation, consider leaving them and watching to see if mom returns. Do not arbitrarily leave food by the kittens as this may attract predators. The amount of time observing is dependent on several factors including the kittens' age, weather and safety considerations. For example if the kittens are less than a week old (eyes still closed) and the weather is or will be freezing, you may need to act more quickly. Consider all factors, then use educated, informed good judgement. Remember that a mom cat is always the best choice to raise them and, if your decision is to take them in, you need a plan to care for them long term.

If mama cat doesn't return...

1. Warmth is the first priority, particularly if the environment is cold. Kittens cannot regulate their body temperature until about 4 weeks of age, and their internal systems will begin to shut down as their core temperature declines. Do not try to feed hypothermic (cold) kittens as they cannot metabolize food and this can lead to death.
2. Hydration! A kitten's body mass is very small, and they can dehydrate quickly. If the kittens are warm and active, you can give them warm water very slowly orally with a syringe or eyedropper if they are swallowing on their own. Do not force feed orally if the kittens are lethargic or not swallowing on their own. The liquid can drain into their lungs causing aspiration pneumonia. Lethargic kittens should be taken immediately to a veterinarian as they may need subcutaneous (SQ) or intravenous (IV) fluids to help them rehydrate.
3. If the kittens are stable (i.e. warm and hydrated), you can begin offering food. If they are young enough for the bottle, use a quality kitten formula diluted more than normal for the first few feedings to allow them to adjust slowly to the diet change. If they are older, offer a quality wet food, but take it slowly, again allowing their body to adjust. (NOTE: Do not judge a kitten's age by size/weight alone, particularly if they have been underfed and compromised. If a very small kitten does not take to the bottle and/or is chewing the nipple, offer some wet food.)

*Note: It is a myth that mom will reject her kittens just because you have handled them. However, there is the risk that she will return and move them to what she might consider a safer location.*

*Susan Spaulding is known as the 'Kitten Mom' in the shelter and rescue community. She has 25+ years' experience caring for kittens and is widely celebrated for her expertise with neonatal orphans and special-needs kittens who others have given up on. She is also a co-founder of the National Kitten Coalition. For more information on Susan, visit [www.kittencoalition.org/about-us/leadership](http://www.kittencoalition.org/about-us/leadership).*