



## Kitten Tutor™: Is NOW the Right Time to Foster a Bottle Baby?

Your Facebook feed is overloaded with pictures of ever-so-cute bottle babies. You watch the videos of them nursing on a bottle, their little ears twitching. You see a pile of them asleep and just want to scoop them up and bury your face into them. You want in: you want a kitten. And not just any kitten: you want a bottle baby!

But if you've never cared for one before, you have to be asking yourself: just what would I be getting myself into? Is this something I can really do? First: kudos for asking yourself these important preliminary questions. We offer a few things to consider before you even approach your local animal shelter to apply for their kitten foster program.

**Step 1:** Take a hard look at your life. How busy are you? Are you away from home all or most of the day? Do you have family or housemates who are home (and "up" for this challenge as well) when you are not there? How much do you like/need to sleep? Are you willing and able to get up as often as every two-three-four hours through the night to feed kittens? Possibly for many nights? Bottle babies need to be fed at regular intervals over 24-hour periods. You or your back up team will need to be available for that, day and night.

**Step 2:** Inventory your resources. If you got past Step 1 (congratulations!), next you should consider the resources you have available for caring for bottle babies. You don't need a lot of space in your home, but you do need some. Ideally, a confined place like a bathroom is good for being able to keep the kittens away from other animals or small children in your home. The space should be warm and draft-free, and you should be able to clean it thoroughly (kittens can be messy!), so ideally no carpeting or carpeting you can cover with plastic sheets. Do you have a way to get to and from veterinary appointments, or to and from the shelter where you got the kittens for the regular check ups they will require? If they get sick, do you have a way to transport them quickly for medical care?

You will also need supplies. Sometimes the shelter will provide you with some or all of them; in many cases, however, you will be required to provide these items, so you need to be ready to purchase them and have space to store them. You will need a small, digital scale to weigh the kittens every day. Kittens should gain weight every day, and only a digital scale that weighs in tenths of ounces and/or grams will be able to accurately determine that. You'll also need a carrier, clean bedding (fleece or fabric with no pile or little loops are best); food (e.g. kitten milk replacer), bottles and nipples; toilet paper or other soft, absorbent material for stimulating the kittens to urinate and defecate; a heat source like a SnugglySafe or pet-safe heating pad to keep them warm; and last, but not least, cleaning supplies for their area, their laundry and them.

**Step 3:** Ideally, you should foster your bottle babies for a local shelter or rescue group. The group will provide you with important support that you will need at *some* point during this adventure. Before taking in a bottle baby, you should look into local shelters and rescues, and find out how each of them works with their kitten fosters. They do vary, often considerably, in their foster program practices. You should pick one that provides the best match for your expectations and personal situations.

If you get through each of these three initial steps and are still ready and willing to foster bottle-baby kittens, wonderful! You will be saving a life - or several! You can go to our events page: <http://bit.ly/NKCwebinars> and join us at one of our workshops, or, if you prefer online learning, our webinars.