



### **Kitten Kindergarten:**

How Kittens Learn and How You Can Train Them Using Positive Training Techniques!

By Amy Martin (Conscious Companion) November 28, 2014

Most people have limited knowledge of how to train their kitten. The great news is that it doesn't take a lot of time or resources! This post will help you to better understand how kittens learn and how to safely and humanely train them!

#### **What Is Training?**

Before we address *how* to train your kitten, we need understand what training entails. When it comes to animals, training is teaching. The way in which we influence (train) our kitten's behavior is through our actions, and through elements in their environment.

Training is about associations. You must seek to understand what your kitten is associating with the things that you do, the things that you ask of your cat (or force your cat to do), and the things that happen in your cat's environment.

When kittens observe, react, and interact with their environment, they are learning by association. They learn *what works for them* and what does not. They don't need to experience something more than once to know that it's a good thing or a bad thing.

#### **How Kittens Learn**

Kittens learn from their mother, siblings, or other young cats. That's why it's essential for kittens to undergo extensive socialization with other young cats, adult cats, and humans. It's also important for kittens to be positively and gradually exposed to different stimuli while they are young. This could be anything from the vacuum cleaner, dogs, and people of all ages. Kittens also need to learn that it's safe to be gradually, safely, and positively exposed to various noises, smells, people, and other pets in the house. This type of learning is essential for a well-rounded and well-adjusted kitten. This learning (socialization) window is 2 to 7 weeks of age.

## **Training is communicating, listening, and observing.**

As kitten guardians, we need to become aware of that fact that we are *always* training. Whether you are consciously aware of it or not, you influence what your kitten learns. As their caretaker you are teaching your kitten all the time! Recognizing this, and knowing how to adapt is the key to training success! We train our cats daily. We might not be aware of when we are teaching them.

## **Not all training is the same.**

Unfortunately, most people believe that all training is equal. Nothing could be further from the truth. Some training methods are very damaging and dangerous. Modern behavioral science has proven that:

- Force-based training (physical and mental punishment) is psychologically damaging.
- Punishment-based training damages the bond between a cat and person.
- Fear-based training uses punishment and suppression.
- Suppressing a cat's behavior doesn't allow her to make choices.
- This results in fear, frustration, and aggression.

Allowing our kittens to *choose* to do something (or not do something) is a positive training method.

## **Cats are Quick Learners.**

Contrary to what most cat guardians believe, kittens can be trained, and quite easily! Their intelligence and ability to learn quickly far exceeded what I believed they were capable of. I share this with you because it's important to realize that as their guardians, we often limit what we can accomplish when we hold onto preconceived notions of what our kitten is capable of learning. We limit what's possible. Instead of thinking, "There's no way my cat could do that," let's give our kittens – and ourselves- the ability to exceed our expectations! Believe that they are capable of learning, and that we are capable of being great teachers!

## **Felines Prefer Positivity**

Have you ever been praised by your teacher or boss when you did a great job on a project? Did you receive a reward? Did that reward make you want to try again, or work harder to succeed again? If so, you have experienced positive reinforcement!

Kittens are not unlike you in these scenarios. They love positive feedback! Of course kittens don't care about money or certificates. They care about praise and food. These are the tools we use to train them! We set ourselves up for failure by thinking that our cat "should just do it because I asked him to!"

## How Positive Reinforcement Training Works

Positive reinforcement training uses rewards to “pay” an animal for doing something we want them to do. When your kitten receives a reward (food, play, or praise – something they find absolutely irresistible) for a behavior, the reward makes it more likely for your kitten to repeat the behavior. This helps your kitten to make better decisions. Problem behaviors begin to diminish, and are replaced by more appropriate behaviors. This makes positive reinforcement your most powerful training tool! Modern, science-based training has proven that reinforcing good behavior with rewards, such as food, is a more successful and long lasting form of training.

## The Positives of Positive Reinforcement!

- Teaches you how to observe and listen to your cat
- Establishes and maintains a connection that increases trust
- Creates a safe environment
- See results faster that last longer.

## Kitten Training Tips!

- Keep the cat carrier out in a safe place. Make it a comfy place to sleep, and have yummy treats! This teaches your kitten that her carrier is a Good Thing!
- Teach your kitten to play gently by using the “Teeth on skin ... playtime ends” rule. Once your kitten calms down, playtime can begin again. If you are consistent with this technique, you can successfully teach your kitten that biting - even if it’s gentle - is never allowed.
- Use interactive toys that are similar to a fishing pole. These set you both up for success by teaching your cat that human hands and feet are not toys. These safe toys create distance between your hands and your cat’s claws and teeth.

## Reward-Based Training Allows Your Kitten to:

- Be *asked* to participate in every step.
- Never be forced to participate.
- Be given choices.
- Decide what h/she feels comfortable with.
- Have control over his/her environment.

**In return, these results will:**

- Establish and maintain a connection that increases trust
- Helps your kitten to feel more secure
- Create a stronger bond between you and your kitten
- Strong bonds create harmony.
- Harmony increases happiness and wellbeing in your home

**Training is not a luxury.**

I have learned that training is not a luxury to be appreciated and practiced by the few. Training my kittens was a vital component to their well-being, health, and happiness. Starting while they were young was key! Reward-based training is at the heart of making positive experiences out of everything from trips to the vet to getting groomed. Start while your cat is young! There's no limit to how far you can go together!

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**Amy Martin**  
**Conscious Companion**  
[Amy@ConsciousCompanion.com](mailto:Amy@ConsciousCompanion.com)  
**504-214-9119**

