

 **Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Israel**
Since 1927

Guide to Adopting a Cat



Forward

We congratulate you upon your decision to take a cat into your life and your home. There are many advantages to raising a cat, and extensive research has proven that pet-owners tend to be more relaxed, healthier, and have a longer life expectancy. Together with the many advantages we have, however, to consider some less convenient aspects, such as, for example, the responsibility towards and the obligation to care for your animal, cleaning of the litter tray, brushing its fur, the possibility that the cat might sharpen its claws on your furniture, the expenses for food and veterinary care; and then, of course, the time you need to devote to all of that!

It is important to understand that adopting a pet should not be done on a whim, nor is it a hobby that you can give up when you are bored with it. This is a long-term obligation you take upon yourself, demanding the investment of time, money and lots of attention and love. Before you begin the process of adoption you need to think for a moment: are you really ready for this? Is your family ready? Can you provide the cat with all its physical and emotional needs? If the answer is yes, read our guide.

This guide is intended to prepare you, in the best way possible, for the significant change that you and your adopted cat are about to undergo, and it will help you to get appropriately prepared. It is important to remember that most of the cats at the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Israel experienced abandonment at least once. Both you and the cat are about to face a period of adjustment that may not be easy, and the cat's behavior in this period may not live up to your expectations. It will take some time until it understands what you want from it and what the boundaries are, so be patient until it has fully adjusted. It will be worthwhile - at the end of the process you will have gained a new friend who will add unconditional love, friendship and joy to your life.



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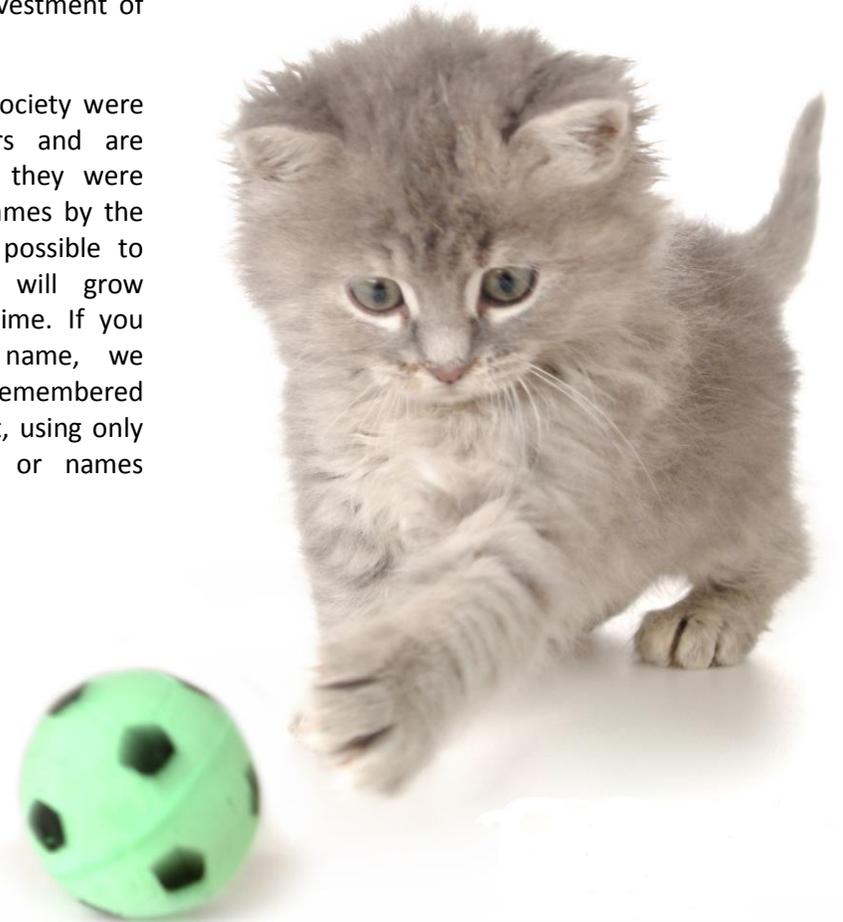
Choosing the cat

Since the significance of adoption is the addition of a new friend to the family, it is worthwhile for all members of the family to participate in every stage of the process. It is possible that you will have to visit the Society a number of times until you find the cat most suitable for you - it may be young or more mature, calm or energetic, quiet or talkative, and at any rate its behavior is likely to change as it adapts to its new home. Don't compromise; consult with our experienced adoption counselors, who will help you find the cat most suitable to your lifestyle and home.

Breed: In the SPCA you will find mixed-breed and purebred cats. The purebreds are, of course, very impressive, and it is easy to determine what they will look like when they are adults and what characteristics they will have. On the other hand, they tend to suffer from genetic illnesses according to their breeds. Mixed-breeds are often healthier and are of all sizes, shapes, colors and temperaments. Should you decide to adopt a purebred, we recommend reading up about the breed to learn about its characteristics and appropriate care.

Age: An older cat is already set in its habits, for better or worse, it is calmer and will be grateful for the new home that you have provided. On the other hand, a kitten is curious, mischievous, full of energy and liable to get hurt or cause damage while playing, so we are talking about a greater investment of time and attention.

Name: Many of the cats in the Society were brought to us by their owners and are accustomed to the names that they were given, while others were given names by the Society staff. In any case, it is possible to change a cat's name and it will grow accustomed to it after a short time. If you decide to change the cat's name, we recommend choosing an easily remembered name of two syllables and, at first, using only one name and not nicknames or names derived from the original name.



Preparing the home

Once you have finished the process of adoption at the Society, which includes a meeting with an adoption counselor, choosing your cat and it getting appropriate veterinary treatment, and after it has been castrated or spayed, you will take your new friend home. The preparation for bringing home a cat is similar to the preparations for a new baby: you need special accessories for its sleeping, eating, hygiene and play and must ensure that the house is safe for your cat.

Carrier: A necessary item that will serve you for years, each time you need to take your cat out of the house (to the vet, for example). We recommend lining the carrier with a towel or other soft fabric, ideally with an odor familiar to the cat. To make it easier on the cat, that is liable to be nervous when leaving its familiar environment, it is advisable to get a blanket or sheet with which to cover the carrier. In order to avoid the cat associating the carrier with tension, and to make it easier to get the cat to go in, you can leave the carrier in a place accessible to the cat in the home.

Feeding: Prepare bowls for water and food appropriate to the size of the cat. They should be stable, preferably made of stainless steel, easily accessible and kept full at all times. Buy treats and pampering foods for the first days.

Scratchers and scratching posts: It is advisable to provide a scratcher for your cat and to place it at a suitable height so that the cat can stand and sharpen its claws on it instead of on your furniture or rugs.

Toys: It is important to devote time each day to play with your cat to reinforce the connection between it and its owners and to encourage physical activity to prevent weight gain. The variety of cat toys is enormous, from balls of varying types and materials, to toy mice, pillows, and fishing lines and including larger devices. Some cats like catnip, found in some toys, and other are indifferent to it. At any rate, it is important to provide your cat with various stimuli with which it can play independently and to refresh the toy collection from time to time. This environmental enrichment through a variety of toys is important to the cat's health and can reduce the chances of behavioral problems arising. Be sure that the toys are safe and get rid of toys that are beginning to fall apart or crumble.

Sleep: The cat will find itself comfortable places where it prefers to sleep around the house, but one can definitely provide a designated bed that is soft and suitable for its size. It is important to clean the bed from hair and dirt on a regular basis.

Comb/hairbrush: To maintain hygiene and to prevent swallowing of hair, which can be dangerous, it is important to brush the cat's hair on a regular basis (daily for long-haired cats and at least once a week for short-haired breeds).



Litter box, litter and cleaning scoop: There is a wide range of litter boxes of various sizes; open, closed with a door and those with automatic cleaning mechanisms. Also in the arena of litter, there is a wide variety (clay, pellets, clumping litter, crystal and scented) and with time and experience you will discover what suits you and your cat the best. The litter box should be placed far from the eating and sleeping areas, and to keep it hygienic, it should be cleaned out once every day or two, and the litter should be changed every 5-7 days.

Safety: Behind the saying "Curiosity killed the cat" are its curiosity, mischievousness, and the tendency cats have to explore their surroundings, which can lead to life-endangering situations. Just as we take care to make our homes safe for our babies and small children, it is important to ensure that it will constitute a safe environment for our cats, especially for kittens. To prevent the kitten from running away, one must check that the windows are closed and that there are no possible avenues of escape. Remove sharp objects, poisonous plants and dangerous materials (such as cleaning agents), hide cables and electric wires (that the cat might catch in play) and prevent access to dangerous places (such as open toilets and various electric appliances). It is very important to allow the cat to look out of the window and to see what is going on outside, while ensuring that it cannot get out.

The first days

The first day: This is a significant day. It is advisable to hold it on a weekend or vacation so that all the family will be together, and the cat will not be alone during its first days at home.

Picking up your cat: Before you take your cat home you will be requested to take care of the bureaucratic details in the reception office and the clinic. In the clinic you will receive a vaccination card and guidance about veterinary care, when necessary. Be sure to keep all these documents. It is advisable not to feed the cat before the trip home so that it will not vomit during the trip.

The trip home: It is advisable to come with another person who will accompany the driver and sit with the cat that is in the carrier. Cover the upholstery to prevent it getting soiled and try to ensure that the trip is as calm as possible, without sudden braking and honking. Covering the carrier with a blanket or sheet can help to calm the cat.

Coming home: On arrival, open the door of the carrier and let the cat become familiar with its new environment. Some cats will demonstrate confidence and will start wandering around the home. All that remains is to show them where they will eat, sleep and relieve themselves. Others will take more time to get accustomed to their new homes and may find a hiding place from which they will refuse to come out. In such cases, let the cat take its time, let it get used to the unfamiliar territory and gain confidence. It won't take long till it feels at home.

Meeting the other animals in the family: If you already have a cat in the house, introducing another cat means invasion of territory and a threat to its existence. Therefore, exhaling, arching its back, and its hair standing on end are reactions that should be anticipated. It is advisable to provide both cats, at least at first, with a few water and food dishes and two litter boxes. During the first few days the new cat could be kept in a closed room that is equipped with all the necessary accessories, and allow the senior cat to grow accustomed gradually to the presence of the new cat (for example, to pet them both and let the senior cat get used to the smell of the new one, show them one another from a distance while petting them both and keeping them calm, etc.)

In most cases the cats will get along after a few days or weeks, understanding the boundaries and balance of power. They will clean one another, play together and if one of them is a kitten, it will be helped by the older cat in the socialization process and will acquire behavioral and social skills. If there is a dog at home, the cats dishes should be placed out of reach of the dog, and the cat should have access to a high place to which it can escape in case the dog wants to attack it. It is advisable to leave a leash on the dog at all times, for greater control when necessary, and not to allow the dog to chase the cat, even in play. The cat and dog both have to learn the boundaries and to respect one another and you should keep on top of the situation. There are cases where both cats or the cat and dog will get along after a period of adjustment and there are other cases where they will ignore each other forever.



Feline health

Nutrition: The cat's diet has a direct effect on its health, therefore it is advisable to buy high quality cat food which will spare your cat health problems and save you expenses on future veterinary treatment. Dry cat food contains all the components that a cat needs, therefore you shouldn't give it food from the kitchen. In addition to the health risks in giving regular food, you are also risking that your cat will refuse to eat its dry food. That will complicate your care in the long run and may lead to accumulation of plaque causing tooth decay, bad breath and serious gum disease.

The food should be suited to the cat's age according to the directions on the package and not on the recommendations of the salesperson at the pet store, since he or she is not a veterinarian. Up to the age of one year it is advisable to give food specially adapted for kittens. From one age you should feed it dry, adult cat food and from seven years of age, special food for older cats (geriatrics) should be given. Food and water should be accessible to the cat at all times.

For those wishing to "pamper" their cat, a spoonful of high quality moist food can be given once a day, preferably at a set time. If you decide to give your cat "real food" - please note: **Recommended food** is: meat, vegetables, fruit, rice and tuna.

Food that is not recommended is: spicy food (causes indigestion), dairy products (causes diarrhea), sugar-rich foods, pickles, fatty foods, bones of any kind (may cause tearing or blocking of the intestines and esophagus).

Foods that are ABSOLUTELY FORBIDDEN are onions, garlic, chocolate, avocado, olives, tomatoes, grapes, root vegetables.

Housetraining: Cats are clean animals that naturally relieve themselves in a litter box, which should not be placed near the water and food utensils. Clearing the litter box daily or every second day and changing the litter every 5-7 days will help to maintain hygiene and lessen the risk level of infection.

Washing and grooming: Cats are known for their grooming and hygiene habits. They clean their fur by licking and therefore there is no need to wash them. In order to keep their fur clean, and to lessen shedding and to prevent development of fur balls, which the cat might swallow, it is advisable to brush short-haired cats at least once a week. Long-haired cats require daily brushing and, in special cases of extreme dirt and complicated tangles, you should consult with a vet regarding a haircut that is sometimes carried out under light anesthetics.



Feline health

Vaccinations: Vaccinations are of utmost importance to your cat's health, and keeping to the recommended schedule is vital for creating antibodies and developing the immune system.

FVRCP - vaccine against four diseases:

- Panleukopenia virus (feline Parvo) - a viral disease that causes severe intestinal problems and can be fatal.
- Calici and Rhinotrachitis (Herpes) - two prevalent viruses that cause flu symptoms and mouth ulcers.
- Chlamydia - bacteria that causes severe eye infections and sometimes even lung infections, digestive system problems and reproductive system problems.

The first vaccine should be given at 8 weeks, and another two weeks later. Cats over one year should be vaccinated once a year.

Parasites and worms:

Fleas and ticks are not only a bothersome aesthetic problem. It is important to remember that in addition to the danger of their being blood suckers, they spread many dangerous diseases to your cats, some of which are contagious to humans. Regular treatment of all pets and treatment of the yard is the only way to get completely rid of them.

Preventive treatment for fleas: ampoules/spray for cats once a month. The contents of the ampoules should be sprinkled

on the skin at the nape of the cat's neck or between the shoulder blades (where the animal cannot reach with its tongue). The liquid is absorbed by way of the skin into the blood and provides protection against fleas for a month. To prevent poisoning, it is important to adjust the dosage according to the cat's age and weight.

Treatment for worms: Treatment for worms is administered by pills or injections to kittens at the age of six weeks. From then on treatment should be administered every six months or when worms are evident.

Spaying/castration: Spaying and castration are serious operations, performed under general anesthetic, with relatively fast recovery rates. These surgical procedures prevent disease, extend life expectation, increase quality of life, lower the level of aggression, lessen territorial and mating battles and the chances of running away from the home. The operations minimize uncontrolled proliferation of the cat population, thus preventing births of unwanted kittens that are often thrown out onto the streets and sentenced to a life of suffering, danger and torment. In addition, spayed female cats do not attract males and males do not mark their territory in the house with urine.



Children and cats

When a baby joins a family with a cat: When a new baby is about to join the family, it is important to accustom the cat (that must, of course, be vaccinated) to the new situation and to the new baby equipment in the house, before the birth of the baby. In addition, you can invite guests with babies over and accustom the cat to the smell and sounds usual to babies. Should the cat have behavioral problems, this is the time to deal with them. Following the birth, bring home a blanket that the baby had been wrapped in and use baby products. Let the cat sniff them and give it a treat so that the new scents will be identified with a positive experience.

Pay the cat attention, try to maintain the routine that it is accustomed to, and always watch over the cat and the baby, together and separately.

When a cat joins a family with children: For many children, the family pet is their best friend - a companion that gives unconditional love and which helps children develop responsibility, self-confidence, sensitivity to others and the ability to receive and give emotionally. Also cats, rabbits, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, little birds and even fish can be successful pets when they are appropriately cared for.

The correct way to turn an animal into a loving pet is to relate to it as a member of the family that is dependent on the rest of the members for its existence and happiness. It is not enough to bring one home "for the children", and it is important that everyone understands that this is not some passing phase.

Most experts recommend introducing an animal to the home only after the child is at least six years old, but the appropriate timing is dependent on the level of maturity of the child, and you, the parents, are the best judges of that. A primary condition of readiness in a child is his ability to control himself and to obey the word "no". If you are in doubt, let the child meet the pets of friends, and pay attention to his behavior.

Children and kittens: Many families with small children choose to adopt a kitten, being under the impression that it will be easier to raise and care for, and more suitable for the children. This is not always correct - kittens are more fragile, demand a great deal of attention and caution, and they tend to scratch and bite while playing. Sometimes the most appropriate choice is a mature, calm, patient cat that is used to children. Consult with an expert (a veterinarian, behavioral or adoption counselor) before you decide which cat is the most appropriate for your family.

To attain maximum protection for your children and your pet, it is very important that there is adult supervision when they are together. It is just as important to help your children understand how the world looks from the animal's point of view, so that they will relate to them with appropriate caution and respect.



Kittens

Kittens are, of course, amazingly cute, but they require an investment of much time, patience and attention. If you cannot provide this, do not be enticed to adopt a kitten, even if it is really adorable and the children are begging you. If you have decided that you are willing to provide the kitten with all that it needs, here are some tips that will help you.

At the SPCA kittens can be adopted from the age of three months, once they have been castrated or spayed. These kittens are already independent, eat dry food, and do not need help in relieving themselves. During the adoption process all the necessary information is given regarding the cat's needs. If you adopted a cat from another place, take it to a vet, who will instruct you regarding hygiene, nutrition, vaccinations and parasites.

Sleep: The recommended age for adopting a kitten is at least 8 weeks. When it comes into your home it will of course be frightened and will miss its mother and siblings, especially during the first nights. To make it easier on the pup, especially during winter, it is possible to use a warm blanket, a pillow or a hot water bottle wrapped in a cloth or towel.

Nutrition: A kitten needs richer food than does a mature cat. Choose high quality food designed for kittens, and ensure that the water and dry food bowls are always full.

Bathing: Cats keep themselves clean by licking so there is no need to bathe them. Brushing the fur (or using damp cotton wool in the case of tiny kittens) is definitely enough to keep the kitten's hair clean.

Toys: Kittens are beginning to learn about their world and it is up to us to provide suitable stimuli. Provide a variety of toys with which to play independently and devote time to joint games with your kitten. Keep it away from valuables and objects that are likely to constitute danger, such as cleaning products, electric wires, bags and small toys that it could choke on, and sharp objects

Kittens and children: Set a number of rules for the interaction between the kitten and the children, so that they will not accidentally hurt each other. Explain to the children that the kitten is not a toy and that we have to be careful and gentle with it, to pet it and be sure not to shout near it. Soon they will become the best of friends.



Kittens

Adopting a kitten from the street: According to estimates, there are over two million homeless cats in Israel. Due to inadequate castration and spaying policies, every year tens of thousands of wretched kittens, mostly doomed to a life of suffering or a cruel death, are born in Israel.

Should you come across or hear a mewling kitten, it is important to take into account that its mother may have just gone in search of food, and you should keep track of it for a few hours to be sure that she isn't coming back. The moment you touch or move it, the mother will smell a foreign odor and will no longer care for it. In addition, the chances of survival for a cat that is taken to a home and is then returned to the streets, are slight. Therefore it is clear that touching a kitten and making the decision to adopt it, demand a long-term commitment on our part, to rear and take care of it for the rest of its life.

As stated, the kitten must be taken to a vet for a check-up and to get instructions for its care. Amongst other things, one must take into account that very young kittens need to be bottle fed with a milk substitute specially for cats, gradually learn to eat moist food and later on, dry food (in a small bowl suitable to its size).

In order to relieve itself, kittens need to have their anus stimulated by means of gentle massage with damp cotton wool a few times a day (this mimics the way their mothers lick their sexual organs) and later on a litter box should be prepared in accordance with the kitten's size (for example, the lid of a shoe box). If the cat has fleas, one must be sure to use products designated for kittens.



Behavioral problems

In order for the cat to learn and understand the boundaries we are trying to establish, we must be consistent regarding the way we respond. When the cat does anything unwelcome (such as climbing on the kitchen counter), it is advisable to repeat the same word expressing displeasure a few times ("no" "forbidden"). Additional possible responses are to spray it with water, use an air-pressure spray or to make a noise. If you are patient and consistent, the cat will connect his undesired action with your unpleasant response.

It is important to remember that most of the cat's behavioral problems can be resolved with the help of a cat behavior counselor, and by a small investment of time and money it is possible to prevent the distress caused both to the cat and to its owners. If a behavioral problem arises it is advisable not to ignore it, but to try to resolve it either yourself or with professional help. Do this before your patience has to face a tough trial. Try to understand your cat – it is a hunter that naturally must sharpen its claws, chase after prey, and overlook the territory from a high vantage point, and we must provide it with the appropriate environment. In most cases, the undesirable behavior derives from distress and we must help it and certainly never get angry or hit it.

In general, when a behavioral problem arises the first thing that should be done is to rule out a medical problem. Take the cat to the vet to ensure that it isn't sick or in pain.

The second stage is to examine the cat's environment and to check if something has changed that might influence its behavior. For example, changes in its food, new furniture, new smells or loud noises from renovations or other sources.

At the same time one must ensure that all the cat's physical and emotional needs are being met: access to food and water at all times, a clean litter box, toys and games and quality time of petting and love from its owners.

Following is some advice with regard to common behavioral problems amongst cats.

Sharpening claws on the furniture: Sharpening claws is a natural need and to prevent your cat doing this on the furniture, it is advisable to provide a scratch pad that can be placed near its favorite furniture. There are many types of scratch pads on the market and the cat may prefer one type to another. In addition you can spray the furniture with a special spray that is available in pet stores.

Yowling at night: Yowling is the cats' way of communicating and when we respond they learn that this is the way to get attention. Therefore, if the cat yowls at night and you get up to it, silence it or pet it, it will continue with this behavior. You should be consistent, ignore the yowling and try to tire the cat out before it goes to sleep.

Aggression: Cats may become aggressive when they feel threatened or under stress, when they are disturbed while eating, when they are touched in sensitive places on their bodies or when they are fed up with your touch while you are petting them. Eventually the owner of a cat learns to recognize the signs leading up to attack (flattening of ears, moving the tail from side to side, baring the teeth). If a veterinary examination and thorough examination of any changes that might have occurred in the environment do not lead to a solution, it is advisable to contact a cat behavioral counselor.

