



WAIT UNTIL 8 PROTOCOL AND FAQ

Every year shelters are inundated with millions of neonatal (less than four-week-old) kittens who need help but don't always get the care they need. This is particularly true during kitten season, from early spring through late summer, when the most litters are born and people are more likely to find kittens and bring them to shelters. Animal shelters and communities can come together to save these kittens' lives through the innovative Wait Until 8 program. Hillsborough County's Pet Resource Center in Florida launched its Wait Until 8 program with support from Alley Cat Allies, but any community can implement this program. It empowers members of the public to provide hands-on care for kittens, saving young kittens' lives through shelter and community collaboration.



Wait Until 8 is simple. When someone finds kittens outside and brings them to the shelter, staff can give that person the materials and information to care for kittens at home. That way, kittens stay out of animal shelters that lack the capacity to care for them. When the kittens are 8 weeks old, they are neutered, vaccinated, and ready to be adopted, and the animal shelter helps find homes for the kittens. This program also contributes to a reduced shelter population, which helps keep adoptable cats healthy and allows staff to spend more time caring for the other adoptable animals.

Our protocol and frequently asked questions will help you implement this lifesaving program in no time!

PROTOCOL

When neonatal kittens are brought to the shelter, evaluate them and have a frank discussion about the possible outcomes for the kittens. First things first: Evaluate the kittens to **determine how old they are** and if they require medical care. Have a frank discussion with the person who found the kittens about the possible outcomes for them. If the kittens are younger than 8 weeks old, but otherwise healthy, they may qualify for the Wait Until 8 program. If the kittens are older than 8 weeks old, they may enter the shelter's adoption program. If the kittens are sick, discuss veterinary care with the person who found them, to determine if they are interested in covering medical costs (some shelters are able to provide basic medication for kittens in similar programs).

Encourage the person who brought the kittens in to participate in the Wait Until 8 program. If the kittens are younger than 8 weeks old, tell the person who found them about the Wait Until 8 program.

Be frank: Let them know that the shelter does not have a kitten nursery or the staff to provide care for neonatal kittens. Let them know that if they do not participate in the Wait Until 8 program, the kittens will likely be euthanized. Explain that through the program, the shelter provides them with supplies and instructions to care for the kittens until they are 8 weeks old. After that time, they can bring the kittens back to enter the shelter's adoption program.

When the person agrees to participate in the Wait Until 8 program, exchange information. Record-keeping is an important way to track the success of your program and to stay in touch with your new kitten caregiver as needed. Take down their first and last name, address, phone number, email address, and the number of kittens they're caring for. Be sure they have the shelter's contact information as well. Note the date when the kittens will be approximately 8 weeks old. You may have the person sign an agreement that outlines the responsibilities of the kitten caregiver and shelter.

Provide the new kitten caregiver with a Kitten Care Kit. Be sure to make several Kitten Care Kits in advance so you aren't scrambling for materials when you urgently need them. You never know when people will come in with kittens! See what should be included in these kits and how to make them at alleycat.org/KittenCareKit.

Provide the new kitten caregiver with verbal and written instructions on how to provide care. Verbally go over basic kitten care such as making sure the kittens are kept warm, how much and how often to feed (with a demonstration of how to do so), manually stimulating kittens to eliminate, and what to look for that may indicate a kitten needs medical attention. You might consider having a stuffed toy kitten on hand to easily demonstrate kitten care basics to avoid handling and stressing the real kittens. Be sure to send the new kitten caregiver home with written instructions and resources as well. Alley Cat Allies has information you can share on caring for neonatal kittens:

- Kitten Care Webinars: alleycat.org/resources/kitten-care-webinars
Presented by National Kitten Coalition co-founders, our webinar series includes: "Help! I found a kitten", "Advanced Feline Bottle Baby Care," "Basic Kitten Medical Issues," and "Neonatal Kittens and the Veterinary Clinic."
- Community Cat Care–Kittens: alleycat.org/Kittens
Articles covering a broad array of topics including how to trap feral kittens, neonatal kitten care, kitten socialization, and more.
- Alley Cat Allies' Feral Friends Network: alleycat.org/FindFeralFriends
Our Feral Friends Network is a great resource for finding local assistance for community cats. Feral Friends include Trap-Neuter-Return experts, feral-friendly veterinarians, kitten care pros, fosters, and others

You may have your own resources, training, and access to local experts. Be sure to have this information available and on hand with your Kitten Care Kits.

When the kittens are 8 weeks old, or when they weigh 2 pounds, have the caregiver bring them back to the shelter. At this time, the kittens should be seen by a veterinarian, spayed or neutered, dewormed, vaccinated, and promoted for adoption.

Get those kittens adopted! After the kittens are weaned, spayed or neutered, and vaccinated, it's time for them to find their forever homes. Be sure to discuss the adoption process with the kitten caregiver ahead of time and have a process in place. Encourage the kitten caregiver to look for homes for the kittens: oftentimes friends, family members, coworkers, neighbors, or the kitten caregiver themselves are eager to adopt. Otherwise, the kittens should be placed in and promoted through the shelter's adoption program.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Is this program successful?

A: Yes. Take it from Scott Trebatoski, director of Hillsborough County Pet Resource Center in Florida: “Five years ago, before our Wait Until 8 program, we performed over 3,200 kitten euthanasia procedures. Last year, after we increased focus on sterilization and the Wait Until 8 program was in full swing, we cut that number by nearly 80 percent. Best yet, only a small fraction of those kitten euthanasia procedures were for neonatal kittens that we could not find rescue or foster help for. The main reason is that our citizens are helping to care for kittens they find, which allows our foster care volunteers to care for those we find in the field.”

Q: How do I get buy-in for this program?

A: To get buy-in from shelter staff and stakeholders, let them know that this program is innovative, lifesaving, cost-efficient, and proven. By embracing this program, you’ll show the public you’re actively looking for new ways to save more animals and helping the shelter focus money and resources on pet adoption. Provide training to staff on how to talk with the public about the program. Track the number of kittens staff members succeed in keeping out of the shelter and reward them for their successes.

To get buy-in from the public, announce the new program and emphasize the partnerships between the shelter and the community, and the lifesaving role they can play as a hero to kittens. People want to help and feel involved, and this program will help accomplish that. If the community feels supported with initial resources, information, and support, they will be sure to step up to save kittens’ lives.

Q: What goes in to a Kitten Care Kit and where can we get the supplies?

A: Find all the details for what goes into a Kitten Care Kit at alleycat.org/KittenCareKit. All of the materials are easily found at pet supply stores or online. To fund your kits, consider asking volunteers and supporters to donate to a special fund, try crowdfunding online, throw a “kitten shower,” seek grants, and partner with pet supply companies for discounted products.

Q: What if the person with the kittens cannot care for them?

A: First, be sure you have a discussion about why the person thinks they are unable to care for the kittens themselves. Some hurdles may be easily overcome. If they are truly unable to care for the kittens, contact a local rescue group or foster network to step in and take them instead.

Q: What if the person with the kittens is under 18?

A: Ask if they have a parent or guardian who is willing to support their participation in the Wait Until 8 program. Be sure to collect the contact information for the person with the kittens and their parent or guardian for record-keeping purposes.

Q: What if the person has no experience caring for kittens?

A: Everyone starts somewhere. Many of us got started caring for kittens because we were in the right place at the right time and stepped up to help. With proper instruction and resources anyone can learn to care for kittens. Remember that the likely alternative is death for the kittens. Allowing someone the opportunity to care for the kittens not only has the potential to save the kittens’ lives, but also cultivates greater engagement in helping animals (perhaps this person will become a foster caregiver in the future or a supporter of your shelter). Be sure that the person knows that help is only a phone call away if they have questions. It is important that they know they have support and their care is appreciated.

Q: What about kittens found in the field?

A: If you are responding to a call, ask the person who made the call step up to care for the kittens. Be sure that field officers carry Kitten Care Kits, Wait Until 8 program information, and care instructions in their vehicles.

Q: Who pays for the kittens' care and medical needs?

A: If your shelter has the resources to pay for or subsidize some or all of the kitten care, including medical expenses (as is typically the case in foster programs) you can inform the kitten caregiver. If your shelter does not have those resources, let the kitten caregiver know that you are unable to help in this way and that they will be responsible for any needed veterinary care, except for the Kitten Care Kit and the care kittens receive once they enter the adoption program.

Q: What if the kitten caregiver has found potential adopters for the kittens themselves?

A: It's immensely helpful when kitten caregivers or fosters are able to find adoptive homes for the cats they care for. The shelter may opt to put the kittens through their own adoption program or allow the caregiver to place them. If the shelter is going to handle the adoption, rather than returning them to the caregiver after spay/neuter, the shelter must have a process to be sure that the right kittens are adopted to the person the caregiver has lined up. This isn't hard to do, but it does require careful documentation for each kitten and assigning individual staff member(s) to carefully follow up and be sure each kitten is placed into the adoptive home.

Q: What if the kitten caregiver wants to adopt one or more of the kittens after 8 weeks?

A: That's great! Consider allowing the kitten caregiver to adopt the kitten(s) for free.