



BEDFORD-DIANELLA
VET CENTRE

Because we care

The Kitten Checklist

Thinking of getting a kitten?

Use this checklist to help you find a healthy, friendly kitten and to avoid some of the pitfalls which can occur.

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INTRODUCTION

When you take on a kitten you are taking responsibility for a pet who may be with you for at least 14 – 20 years. Most people want a cat who is confident and happy to be around people. How you choose a kitten can have a significant effect on both the welfare of the cat throughout its life, and your enjoyment of having it as a pet.

The Kitten Checklist discusses what you can find out even before you visit the kitten, what to research and what to look for when you visit a kitten.

No matter where you get your kitten from, The Kitten Checklist will help you to assess the health and personality of the kitten before taking it home. These questions are a guide and prompt you to find out important things. Answers suggesting caution may not be a reason to refuse to take a kitten, but it can inform you about what to expect or what you may need to do if you take the kitten home (e.g., vaccination, neutering, worming.) A brief explanation tells you why finding these things is important.

Rescue centers often have many older cats who need homes. They might even suit your lifestyle better than a young kitten.



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BEFORE YOU VISIT THE KITTEN

Things to find out before you visit the kitten.

Often the first contact with the person, or organisation from whom you get a kitten, is by phone or online. Here is some basic information to gather. Remember that once you see the kitten it may be hard to resist it, so it is important to find out as much as you can before visiting.

1. WHEN WAS THE KITTEN BORN?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

A kitten must not be rehomed until it is at least 8 weeks old.

2. WILL YOU BE ABLE TO SEE THE KITTEN WITH ITS MOTHER?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

You want to see the kitten with its mother at least once before you decide to bring it home. Seeing the kitten with its mother helps to avoid kittens who may have been 'farmed' or bred illegally (and are without their mother). These scenarios can result in serious health or behavioural problems. Scenarios may vary slightly depending on where you are getting a kitten from and what age it is:

Family home.

A kitten born into a family home should be with its mother until 8 weeks of age and will usually stay with its mother until it finds a new home, so seeing them together should not be a problem.

Breeder.

A pedigree kitten born to a reputable breeder will usually stay with its mother until it is 12 or 13 weeks old or until it has found a new home, so seeing them together should not be a problem.

Rehoming centres.

Occasionally rehoming centres may have kittens presented without a mother because of the difficult circumstances from which they come.

3. WAS THE KITTEN RAISED WITH ITS MOTHER?

ANSWER:



Why is this important?

Kittens learn about their approach to life from their mother (see 'Visiting the kitten' pp 9-13) so it's important to know whether they have been raised with her.

4. WHERE WAS THE KITTEN BORN, AND WHERE DID THE KITTEN SPEND MOST OF ITS TIME WHEN IT WAS BETWEEN 2 AND 9 WEEKS OLD?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

The ideal scenario for a kitten who is going to become a pet, is to be born and raised among people and experience all the normal activities that happen in a home. This way, when the kitten is rehomed, it is more familiar with a home environment and is less stressed.

A kitten born outside a home and raised in a shed or outdoor pen, or in an indoor cattery or pen, may not experience normal human homelife when it is between the ages of 2 and 9 weeks old. This is an important time when kittens learn about their surroundings and develop their personalities. If a kitten misses this opportunity, it may never be fully comfortable living as a pet cat. It is important to ask about what efforts have been made to give the kitten these experiences, especially if it has not been raised in a traditional home.

5. DOES THE KITTEN HAVE ANY BROTHERS OR SISTERS WITH WHOM IT INTERACTS?

ANSWER:



Why is this important?

A kitten who has been raised alongside other kittens is more likely to have learned appropriate cat behaviour. Kittens who have had the opportunity to play and interact with other kittens whilst growing up are more likely to interact with people appropriately. It also may help it to live with other cats in the future.

6. IS ANYTHING KNOWN ABOUT THE FATHER OF THE KITTEN?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Friendly fathers are more likely to produce friendly kittens, so this extra information may be helpful. However, the father's identity is often unknown for non-pedigree cats.

7. IS THE KITTEN FRIENDLY?

ANSWER:



Why is this important?

Even if you cannot see the kitten, an answer which says the kitten is nervous may make you decide not to see it, or at least be aware there may be a problem when you visit. Keep in mind that kittens are fearful if they have not been introduced to new things from an early age. It does not mean they will not be nice cats; they may just require a bit of extra work.

8. HAS THE KITTEN INTERACTED POSITIVELY WITH DIFFERENT PEOPLE AND EXPERIENCED DIFFERENT SOUNDS, SMELLS, SIGHTS AND SENSATIONS COMMON IN A HOUSEHOLD?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Short and frequent interactions with different people help kittens become more confident and outgoing. This may help them to acclimatise to their new home faster and with less issues.

9. IS THE KITTEN ON SOLID FOOD?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

All kittens should be completely weaned prior to being rehomed.

10. WAS THE KITTEN PARTIALLY OR FULL HAND-REARED? (BOTTLE FED)

ANSWER:



Why is this important?

Hand reared kittens, despite their 'human mums' best intentions, do receive different care than if they were reared by a cat. This will affect the way they behave; some become very needy, and some can be more boisterous and less self-controlled if frustrated.

11. IS THE KITTEN HEALTHY?

ANSWER:



Why is this important?

Even if you cannot see the kitten yet, it is a question worth asking. If the person mentions any health issues or concerns, it gives you the opportunity to do some research and find out if they may be life-long problems. This is especially important if you have other cats at home and the kitten may have an infectious disease such as cat flu. It is also worth asking for a copy of any veterinary records from vet visits the kitten has had.

12. IS THE KITTEN LIKELY TO BE LONG HAISED?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Taking on a long-haired cat means you will be responsible for regular grooming as the coat may easily become matted, causing distress and discomfort for the cat.

13. IS THE KITTEN A SPECIFIC BREED?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Some breeds of cat require a different level of specific care. For example: sphynx cats require regular bathing and the use of creams on their dry skin. Some may be more attention seeking or noisy than others. There may also be inherited defects which are associated with certain breeds. Knowing this will allow you to research and ask the breeder appropriate questions.

14. HAS THE KITTEN INTERACTED POSITIVELY WITH A DOG OR DOGS?

ANSWER:



Why is this important?

If you have a dog or plan to get one in the future, you may want a kitten that has been exposed to canine friends in the first few months of its life. Cats and dogs can become great friends if the introduction is done slowly and correctly.

REMEMBER THAT ONCE YOU SEE THE KITTEN, IT MAY BE REALLY HARD TO RESIST IT SO IT IS IMPORTANT TO FIND OUT AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE BEFORE VISITING.



BEFORE YOU VISIT A PEDIGREE KITTEN

Extra questions to ask if you are purchasing a pedigree kitten from a breeder.

1. IS THE KITTEN REGISTERED WITH GCCF, CATSWA, ANCATS OR ACF?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

If the kitten is registered with any of these bodies, then there are rules that the breeder must observe. All bodies should be able to confirm that the kitten is in fact the breed it is being sold as. The kitten should also come with specific paperwork about its pedigree and have a pedigree certificate.

2. IF YOU ARE BUYING FROM A BREEDER ONLINE, CAN YOU SEE A PHOTO OF THE KITTEN?

ANSWER:



Why is this important?

If the breeder claims that the kitten is a certain breed, you should be able to confirm that the picture of the kitten matches what that breed should look like. It might not bother you whether you were getting a pedigree looking cat or not, however if you are paying pedigree prices you should receive a pedigree cat.



3. DOES THE BREED HAVE ANY INHERITED PROBLEMS AND IS THERE A TEST FOR THAT PARTICULAR DISORDER? HAS THE MOTHER OR FATHER BEEN TESTED FOR ANY OF THESE, AND WHAT WERE THE RESULTS? HAS THE KITTEN BEEN TESTED IF POSSIBLE?

Why is this important?

Once you have chosen a breed that you would like to purchase, it is important to do your research as some breeds have inheritable problems or diseases that are common within that breed.

4. HAS THE MOTHER OR FATHER HAD ANY SURGICAL PROCEDURES TO CORRECT ANY BREED FAULTS THAT THE KITTEN MAY HAVE?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

This is a more common concern with dogs than cats, but it does still happen. Some pedigree cats have had surgical procedures to fix physical deformities which may have been inherited. These problems can sometimes cause pain and discomfort and may need to be surgically corrected.

5. DO YOU INTEND TO BREED FROM THE KITTEN?

ANSWER:



Why is this important?

If you are planning to breed from a pedigree kitten, you should check that it is registered as 'active' with the appropriate body. The breeder may have put limitations on what you are able to do with the kitten (i.e., breed from it)

USEFUL LINKS:

<https://icatcare.org/advice/cat-breeds>

dlgsc.wa.gov.au/local-government/community/cats-and-dogs

VISITING THE KITTEN

Things to look out for and ask when you visit the kitten.

1. CAN YOU SEE THE KITTEN WITH ITS MOTHER? (SEE QUESTION 2)

ANSWER:



Why is this important?

It is VITAL to see the kitten with its mother to ensure that it was born there and not previously purchased. An exception may be a rehoming centre where you are aware the kitten is a rescue or where the mother may have been rehomed after weaning.

2. IS THE MOTHER CAT HEALTHY?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

An unhealthy mother cat may not be able to care for her kittens well or may pass on a disease or health problems to her kittens. Checking if the mother cat is well cared for, will show you what the breeders are like as carers and how you can expect your kitten to have been cared for. Always ask if the mother is up to date with vaccinations, flea treatments and worming.

3. IS THE MOTHER CAT CONFIDENT AND HAPPY TO INTERACT WITH YOU AND HER KITTENS?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

A confident mother cat who is happy to socialise and interact with people is likely to bring up kittens who are friendly and confident too.

4. ARE THERE MANY OTHER CATS OR LITTERS OF KITTENS IN THE HOME?

ANSWER:



Why is this important?

Large numbers of cats and kittens in a home can increase the risk of the spread of disease. It can also be a sign of an irresponsible breeder who may not have the cat's welfare as a priority.

5. IS THE KITTEN'S ENVIRONMENT CLEAN? THIS INCLUDES WATER AND FOOD BOWLS, LITTER, BED AND GENERAL ENVIRONMENT?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Keeping the kitten's environment clean lessens the risk of development and spread of disease and shows that the breeder is helping to maintain the health and welfare of the cat and kittens.

6. DOES THE KITTEN LOOK HEALTHY?

Are the ears clean?

There should be no dirt or debris in the ears.

YES / NO

Is the coat clean and free from parasites?

The coat should be clean with no evidence of fleas. The kitten should not be scratching excessively.

YES / NO

Are the kitten's eyes clean and bright?

They should be clean and bright with no discharge. **YES/ NO**



Is the kitten's nose clean?

The nose should be clean with no discharge. It should not be sneezing.

YES / NO

Does the kitten have any problems with movement?

The kittens should be agile and move freely once it is 8 weeks old.

YES / NO

Is the area under the tail clean?

There should be no signs of diarrhoea, poo on bottom or redness.

YES / NO

Is the kitten bright and lively?

A kitten which seems depressed or lethargic may not be well. **YES / NO**

These are general pointers about the kitten's health and give a good indication as to how well it has been cared for. This way you can discuss with the breeder things that you notice that may concern you and that you would like checked by a vet before you purchase the kitten- such as diarrhoea or weepy eyes.

7. HAS THE KITTEN:

Been treated for worms?

YES / NO

Been treated for fleas?

YES / NO

OTHER INFORMATION:



Why is this important?

The kitten may or may not have been treated for fleas and worms. It is best to know prior to you purchasing the kitten so that you can treat it appropriately.

8. WILL THE KITTEN BE VACCINATED WHEN YOU TAKE IT HOME?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

If you buy a pedigree kitten from a reputable breeder, they are usually a little older, and will come partially or fully vaccinated. Its always good to work out when they would be due for their next vaccinations, so none are missed or late.

9. WILL THE KITTEN BE NEUTERED WHEN YOU TAKE IT HOME?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

If you obtain the kitten from a registered breeder or rehoming organisation, they often come already sterilised. In WA it is a legal requirement to have all cats desexed, microchipped and registered by 6 months of age. It is illegal to rehome a cat without either sterilising it or providing a pre-paid voucher for it to be sterilised by a veterinarian.

10. WILL THE KITTEN BE MICROCHIPPED WHEN YOU TAKE IT HOME?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Microchipping is the best form of identification and proof of ownership.



If your cat becomes lost and is found and brought into a vet clinic, a cat shelter or the pound, they will be checked for a microchip, and you will be contacted.

Not all cats will be microchipped prior to them going to new homes, however as stated above it is a legal requirement for all cats in WA to be microchipped before 6 months of age.

11. IS THE KITTEN INSURED?

ANSWER:



Why is this important?

Many breeders and some rehoming organisations provide temporary insurance which covers the kitten for the first few weeks of you owning them. If this is the case, or if they do not have insurance, you will need to take this over yourself. Having insurance will help cover the cost of veterinary care. There are various levels of cover with multiple insurance companies, so it is important to find one that best suits you.

12. WHAT FOOD IS THE KITTEN EATING?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

When a kitten goes to a new home it is a major change to its life and can be stressful. Kittens are very prone to upset tummies and any stress or sudden change can cause a flare up. It is recommended to keep the kitten on the same food as the breeder was feeding for the first couple of weeks in its new home. After this you can choose to keep it on the same food or swap to a diet of your choice. Remember to make a gradual transition onto the new diet over one week.

13. WHAT LITTER IS BEING USED?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

A kitten will often be litter trained when it comes to you. Kittens can be quite fussy with the litter they become used to and will often have accidents when a litter type is changed suddenly, especially when they are young. It is recommended that you use the same or very similar litter for the first few weeks, then gradually switch if you would like to try something else.



14. BY THE END OF YOUR VISIT WAS THE KITTEN:

Happy to approach you/to be approached by you?

YES / NO

Happy to be handled and stroked?

YES / NO

Happy to play with toys with you?

YES / NO

OTHER OBSERVATIONS:

Why is this important?

At first kittens may be cautious/wary of you and that is normal. However, if the kitten relaxes and is happy and relaxed with you, then it is likely to continue to be so in your home.

15. BY THE END OF YOUR VISIT WAS THE KITTEN NERVOUS OF YOU?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

If the kitten does not relax and is still nervous around you by the end of your visit, then there is a higher chance it may be nervous when you take it home also. This doesn't mean that the kitten will be fearful forever, it may just take a longer time for the kitten to feel safe and will take a bit more effort on the owner's part to take it nice and slow with the kitten.

16. BY THE END OF YOUR VISIT WAS THE KITTEN VERY FEARFUL OF YOU, HIDING, AND/OR HISSING/SPITTING/GROWLING IF APPROACHED?

ANSWER:

Why is this important?

Think very carefully about taking on this kitten.

There is a real likelihood that it may never become a friendly, confident pet. It may never enjoy being a pet and live a poor quality of life.

