



Spring Newborns

Spring is here and so are all the newborn kittens, puppies and other critters of the neighborhood. Every year thousands of good-hearted people try to save orphaned babies with tragic results. There are several things you need to be aware of when adopting any kitten or puppy. Having grown up on a farm my wife and I have bottle fed hundreds of calves, pigs, sheep, raccoons, puppies and more. Some also with fatal results, but we at least have a leg up on people who did not grow up around animals. Last week we inherited 7 one-week-old kittens, with no mommy. This has prompted me to get some information out to others. I have compiled several important points to give you the best chance of success in your rescue mission. These are not just cute and cuddly balls of fur, they are real babies and just like their human counter parts; they require attention, feeding, bathing, toilet training and continuous care.

FORMULA – Never give un-weaned kittens or puppies cow's milk, especially kittens. This will immediately give them diarrhea. Once a baby has diarrhea they can dehydrate and die in as little as 24 hours. It is also very difficult to cure diarrhea in a new baby. I feel this is the biggest mistake you can make, almost everyone thinks all milk is created equal – it definitely is not. Many of the pet stores now carry newborn milk. Two of the more popular brands are "New Born" and "KMR". You will also find the bottles next to the milk. Note that most of the bottle nipples do not come with holes in them. You need to slit the top to allow milk flow, see package instructions. Your baby will not naturally take the bottle you will have to hold their head and get the milk flow started. They will require a bottle about every 4 hours during the day. And like human babies they will probably want one feeding in the middle of the night.

TOILETRY – Animals will not by nature potty in their nest unless forced or trained to do so. This is why dogs especially from puppy mills and pet stores are difficult to house train. They have been forced to urinate in their kennel until they no longer care about the condition. A mother will lick the baby to stimulate both urination and bowl movements; mom then cleans up the mess and the baby. When the babies are old enough to walk she will start taking them away from the nest to do their business. Good breeders will let their dogs out when the puppies wake up and again about 15 minutes after they nurse.

This is why many of those dogs come pre-potty trained. Babies have to go as soon as they wake up and again about 15 to 20 minutes after they eat. If you have an orphan you are going to have to “change diapers”, unless you want a bigger mess in the future. It really is not bad if done properly, and beats the hell out of changing a real baby. I use Charmin because it is so soft. Tear off 3 or 4 strips about 18 inches long and fold them into a little rectangle. Place the baby on a towel and hold their front quarter with one hand. Rub the TP gently on their genitals like a mother cat would lick them. They will usually immediately start to urinate. Continue with the other TP strips until they are finished. If they have to go #2 this will also stimulate them. Baby wipes are also handy to have around for clean up.

BATHING – Adult cats and dogs are clean because their mothers taught them grooming. Puppy mill animals that are left dirty will grow into adult hood thinking that un-groomed is normal. If you want a clean adult, you must teach it. I use my wife’s makeup removal pads; they make a perfect cat tongue. Dab them in a little warm water and wash their face after eating. Dried milk can also spoil and needs to be removed to prevent infections. It doesn’t hurt to get the fur a little wet, just make sure it is warm in the room. They will never stop squirming, but you just have to press on, being a mom is tough work.

PLAYING – After eating babies must explore to stimulate muscle growth and play to create paw-eye coordination. They need toys; the best toy ever created is a ball of yarn. I have to say there is nothing cuter in the world than a litter of kittens attacking a ball of yarn. A common mistake is letting them attack your hand. It is very cute when they are too small to bite, but as they get older it is a very difficult habit to correct, and can be more painful for you. Try to direct their aggression to a stuffed toy. Remember they are still wild animals and have the need to hunt, pounce, explore and chew. Caution that the kittens do not eat the yarn; linen foreign bodies can be deadly.

SLEEPING – I have had the best luck with a microwavable heating pad or a hot water bottle covered by a towel. I put them in a large box and drape with a sheet to keep it dark and warm.

EYESIGHT – You may not realize that your human baby can only see about 3 feet, pets are the same. Newborns with their eyes open start out only seeing 6 to 12 inches. The vision gradually increases over the first 5 weeks. All babies, including humans, identify everything by taste and smell long before they use their eyesight. Even in adulthood your dog identifies you by smelling you when you walk into the room or licking your hand, not by sight. A dog can identify the distinct sound of your family car as much as two blocks away to know you are on the way home. We have tested our Pomeranian and amazingly she can hear my wife coming blocks away.

INSTINCT - Many animals die because of the misconception they instinctively know everything. “Survival of the fittest” is dependent upon having a good mother to teach you everything. They are babies and have to be treated as such. A three-month-old kitten or puppy is the equivalent to about a 2-year-old human, be careful about what you expect from them.

WEANING – Most people wean babies entirely too soon. The educational and behavioral aspects of adulthood are taught in the final few weeks before a wild animal would be weaned. Removing a baby from the litter too soon can cause behavioral problems such as barking, anti-social behavior, inappropriate urinating and/or defecating and grooming issues. A good quality breeder will never let you

have a puppy or kitten until about the 8 or 9 weeks of age. I know they are so cute you just want to take them home, but mother knows best.

LITTER BOX – A kitten or even a puppy will instinctively use a litter box. A big problem with accidents is they forget the location of the box. Remember they are only the equivalent of a pre-schooler. In a large house they actually have to go before they can find their way back to the box. Once they start going somewhere it is a difficult habit to correct. Always keep kittens controlled in a small area. One room is best when you are not present to monitor them. Keep the food and litter box separated by a few feet. If you put the litter box in the basement do not place it directly on the concrete floor. This will cause the litter to condense moisture in the basement and make the box smell. Cats won't use a smelly litter box.

VET – Orphans have a very high probability of contracting worms, fleas and ear mites from their mothers. For this reason you should make a vet appointment as soon as possible. If you have other pets you definitely do not want to infect them.

If you need more help the internet contains far more information than could be included in this article. Best of luck to you and your orphan, may they bring you as many years of love and entertainment as mine have given me.