

Mother Cats and Their Kittens



Have you ever watched a mother cat with her babies? Mother cats are very protective of their kittens, even before they are born. Mother cats have to protect their babies so that they can grow up to be big cats.

First, a mother cat chooses a safe place to give birth to her kittens. Unlike a human, the mother cat can't go to a hospital to have her babies, so she must look for someplace near home that is right for her babies. A safe place for kittens can't be too loud, too busy, or too bright. If she lives inside a house with humans, the mother cat might go underneath a bed or staircase, inside a closet, or into a basement area that is nice and quiet. There, she will make a soft nest for her kittens.

Next, the mother cat will give birth to her babies and nurse them right away with her milk. When a kitten is born, it doesn't have very much fur and is "blind" for a few days. (Kittens' eyes usually open up after about eight days.) Like human infants and other mammal babies, the kittens need a lot of help from their mother when they are first born, since they are very weak and small. Their mother spends a lot of time feeding them and giving them baths by licking them.

After a few days, the mother cat might choose to move her kittens to another safe place so that predators, like owls or coyotes, cannot find them by their smell. When she finds the right place, she will carry her kittens to their new home in her mouth, very gently. If a kitten gets lost along the way, it can help its mother find her way back by calling her ("*mew mew!*"). Soon, all of the kittens will be safe and sound in their new nest.

There are usually many kittens in a cat family. A group of kittens in a cat family is called a litter. When the kittens are big enough to open their eyes and move around, they will begin to play and fight with one another, just like human brothers and sisters. Though these games are fun, they also have a serious purpose. When kittens play, they are practicing many skills they will need later on, like jumping, pouncing, and biting. This will help them catch prey for food and fight against predators.

As the kittens grow bigger, the mother will continue to protect them from enemies and even her human friends! Mother cats do not like it when adult humans or children play with their kittens, and they may attack. Kittens may also bite and scratch to protect themselves against harm. So even though they can be very cute, you must always be careful around mother cats and their litters of kittens, and you must respect their safe spaces. Remember that these cat families are only doing what they need to do to survive.