

# HUMANE SOCIETY OF INDIANAPOLIS

## Cats and Kids

Cats and kids can get along great if introduced correctly. Kids can learn about responsibility, love, and acquire a great respect for life by helping to raise a cat. However, kids can also innocently pull tails, poke cats, or give too firm a hug that will make a cat unhappy and may result in a bite or a scratch from an otherwise perfectly happy cat. Following certain guidelines can help to ensure that the cat and child are both happy, healthy, members of the family.

Cats will often try to snuggle up to babies because they are warm and soft. They are not trying to “suck the breath” out of the baby, or trying to smother it. They have simply found a warm place to cuddle. Supervised, this can be a positive experience for your cat, allowing him or her to explore the new baby which may help prevent any jealousy you may perceive. Allow your cat to snuggle with you while you are nursing or holding the baby to expose the cat to the sights, sounds, and smells associated with the baby.

When the baby begins to crawl they will often reach for the cat to grab it. As long as the cat is not cornered, he or she can simply avoid the grasp. The cat will likely come back to investigate the baby once the baby stops grabbing at him or her.

As a toddler, the cat will need to be protected from the child because the child may be able to inadvertently harm the cat at this stage. The child will not understand that they can hurt the cat, so supervision is critical. The child needs to understand that he or she can not hold the cat if the cat does not want to be held. Cats will only scratch as a last resort, so as long as the cat can get away when it doesn't desire attention, your cat should be okay with the child under adult supervision. Close supervision should happen until at least the age of six or when the child fully understands the rules of interaction with the cat.

If you have a young child it is better to bring an adult cat into the household than a kitten because the kitten will have a greater chance of being injured by a well-meaning toddler due to its size.

Declawed cats can sometimes resort to biting since they can not defend themselves with their claws. Cats with all four claws are often better companions for children as they feel more confident in their ability to escape if needed, but will not use their claws to scratch if the child is interacting appropriately.

Get your child involved in caring for the cat, by helping to feed, water, and clean up its litterbox. This can not be the child's sole responsibility, but they can be actively involved in the cat's care.