

The Kitten Checklist launched to help owners avoid heartache

Twenty animal and veterinary organisations* have come together to create The Kitten Checklist aimed at equipping prospective owners with guidelines on adopting or buying a kitten.

The Kitten Checklist, which was launched by The Cat Group on 24th September, has been developed to help potential new owners find a happy, healthy kitten, and to avoid the heartache and potential costs involved with taking on a sick kitten or one which is frightened of people. The Kitten Checklist covers how to identify signs of ill health, how to understand the kitten's behaviour and how to determine how comfortable it is around people. Whether the kitten comes from a neighbour, a pedigree cat breeder or a homing organisation, be it free or paid for, the same advice applies to all.

According to the PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report 2018, over a third of people who take on a non-pedigree kitten do no research before getting their cat (for pedigree cats this comes down to 15%), with men less likely to do research (35% do no research compared to 29% of women). Unfortunately, there can be serious pitfalls of poor health or fearfulness when choosing a kitten without knowing what to look for, as the case reports below illustrate.

Most people looking to get a kitten, want a kitten that will develop into a healthy, confident cat that will fit into family life. It is important to see kittens with their mother in the place where the kittens were bred and to find out about the kitten's history and health – The Kitten Checklist explains why all these things are so important.

Cat behaviourist and author Vicky Halls says: "Many people don't understand that in order to become a good pet cat, kittens need positive interactions with people and need to get used to the human environment and lifestyle before they are about 8 weeks old. This responsibility lies with the person who has bred the cat (either accidentally or purposefully) because these important things happen before the new owner even gets the kitten. Being happy around people is something which has to be developed in a kitten and will not happen naturally if that positive interaction between people and the kitten has not occurred at the right time. If this opportunity is missed, kittens may be fearful or nervous and never become confident interactive pets."

Steve Reed, vice chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Cats advised: "Understanding what you want from a cat and what can be expected of that cat, can help to avoid the stress (for you and the kitten), heartache and potential expenses caused by illness or inherited problems in some pedigree kittens. Every kitten looks cute and people often take on kittens because they feel sorry for them, or just don't want to say no to the seller. Under new legislation, a kitten must not be homed until it is 8 weeks old."

The Kitten Checklist will help prospective owners choose the right kitten for them. As with most things, doing some research and being prepared can help to alleviate many of the potential problems. The Kitten Checklist can be found at <http://www.thecatgroup.org.uk/pdfs/The-Kitten-Checklist.pdf>.

**The Kitten Checklist was developed by The Cat Group and has been endorsed by: Animal Behaviour and Training Council, Animal Health Trust, All-Parliamentary Group on Cats, Battersea, Blue Cross, British Small Animal Veterinary Association, British Veterinary Association, Canine and Feline Sector Group, Cats Protection, Governing Council of the Cat Fancy, International Cat Care, International Society of Feline Medicine, Mayhew, National Office of Animal Health, PDSA, PFMA, Pet Industry Foundation, RSPCA, Wood Green*

The Cat Group is a collection of professional organisations dedicated to feline welfare through the development and promotion of policies and recommendations on the care and keeping of all cats.

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Case Reports

Kitten case report from the RSPCA: Daisy

Lucie Boucher from Sheffield bought her cat from a seller on Facebook and soon realised the risks of buying online. When she arrived at the property to collect the kitten, she was told to wait on the doorstep and wasn't allowed to see the mum. Lucie realised almost immediately that the kitten seemed to be very young, her nose and ears were full of dirt, and you could see fleas crawling on her fur. Lucie said: "We took her straight to the vet and were told that she had developed anaemia due to the fleas." With advice and treatment at a significant cost, Lucie cared for Daisy, needing to feed her every couple of hours as she was too young to be away from her mum. The family cared for Daisy round-the-clock until she was back to full health.

Kitten case report from the RSPCA: Muezza

Aisha from Middlesbrough bought her kitten Muezza from a Gumtree seller in Sunderland after falling in love with the picture of the grey British Shorthair kitten, said to be 8 weeks old, online. Sadly, within days Muezza was showing signs of Giardia, an infectious parasite which causes intestinal problems, and became very ill.

Aisha said: "When I asked to see the mum, the seller said she was outside and couldn't be found. She told me the kitten was seven and a half weeks old but the vet later suggested he was only about five weeks old. After the first day he deteriorated really quickly, becoming lethargic and suffering from diarrhoea. We couldn't even pick him up without him leaking. It took about four vet visits and lots of different medication to help him. I had to take annual leave from work to care for him. We kept him in one room as he could have passed the parasite on to our other cat. I was constantly cleaning and washing him as he couldn't control his bowels – I really thought I was going to lose him."

After a week of Muezza being poorly, Aisha decided to contact the RSPCA and report her concerns. Aisha added: "It's not about the money, I spent hundreds on him as well as the vet fees but it's the principle that he wasn't ready to leave his mum in the first place and he was really poorly".

A Gumtree spokesperson said: "We are sad to hear of these cases, including that of Aisha who found her kitten on Gumtree. We take the welfare of animals very seriously, and work hard to ensure our site is a safe place to find pets in need of rehoming. We do not allow 'wanted' ads in our Pets category, as there are plenty of pets to choose from on the site and in sanctuaries across the country. We will also delete any ads we believe are encouraging or indicate signs of animal cruelty. We continue to focus on educating our users on how to buy pets safely and responsibly, and would encourage all our users to follow this Checklist, as well as our existing guidelines around listings for pets that can be found on our website."

Cats Protection case report: Simba and Deify

Hannah saw an advert on a major online classified site selling kittens which suggested that the kittens were the offspring of the family pet. At the seller's house Hannah saw up to 15 kittens, all in the same room and huddled together in groups. Hannah chose two kittens, Simba and Deify, and asked where the mum cat was. She was told that the mother cat belonged to a family member who lived at a different address. The seller said that Simba was part Bengal and Deify was part Ragdoll, that they were both eight weeks old and weaned. Hannah paid £360 for the two kittens. When Hannah got home Deify was very poorly, kept vomiting and had diarrhoea. Hannah took both kittens to the vet immediately. The vet said that the kittens were likely to be younger than eight weeks, not weaned and were in poor condition. Deify was admitted to the vet's hospital and received critical care costing £2,000. It was touch and go but Deify did eventually recover.

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Pictures:

Lucie-Boucher-with-Daisy.jpg

Lucie Boucher with her kitten Daisy who required round-the-clock care to nurse her back to health

Muezza.jpg

Muezza, purchased from a Gumtree seller, became seriously ill immediately after new owner Aisha had taken her home

Hannah-with-Deify.jpg

Hannah with Deify, one of two kittens she purchased online which required critical care costing £2,000

The-Kitten-Checklist.jpg

Cover of the Kitten Checklist

Notes to editors:About the Cat Group

The Cat Group is a collection of professional organisations dedicated to feline welfare through the development and promotion of policies and recommendations on the care and keeping of all cats.

The Cat Group brings together a range of organisations working on cat welfare from slightly different perspectives. Members are: Battersea, Blue Cross, British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA), British Veterinary Association, Cats Protection, the Governing Council of the Cat Fancy (GCCF), International Cat Care (iCatCare), the International Society of Feline Medicine (ISFM), Mayhew, People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA), Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), and Woodgreen.

The diversity of the Group allows problems to be identified and provides a wealth of information and experience to find practical solutions to help those working with cats. The Group meets to consider current issues relating to cats with the aim of providing high quality information and recommendations gleaned from these scientific and welfare sources.