



Mom and kittens-What now?

Discovering a mom and her kittens during Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) can be an adorable yet challenging experience (mostly adorable). To properly handle a mom and her kittens, there are a lot of factors to consider. Should you leave mom with her kittens? Are the kittens old enough to separate from mom? What if you find kittens without mom? How can you safely trap a family?

It's important to first [determine how old a kitten is](#) so you can decide what's best for them. For kittens younger than 8 weeks, the best place for them is with their mother, if possible. Kittens older than 4 months should be returned as part of TNR. The ideal range for socializing kittens for adoption is about 6 to 12 weeks old.

Here are some tips on how to handle common kitten and mom scenarios that you might encounter:

- **Kittens without mom.** First, determine if the kittens are truly without a mother or if she is just off looking for food. Mother cats may need to take a rest break away from the kittens as well! The only way to know if the kittens are truly without a mother is by waiting around to see if the mother returns, which can take a few hours. Observe the kittens from a distance or a hidden spot to see if mom returns before you move the kittens. Remember, it's best for kittens younger than 8 weeks to stay with their mother.
- **If mom doesn't return after several hours, or if the kittens are in immediate danger,** you can choose to care for them yourself. Of course, this isn't a decision to take lightly since, depending on their age, they may need intensive newborn kitten care (1 to 4 weeks old). Again, if you have the time and dedication, young kittens can be [socialized, fostered, or adopted](#) (6 to 16 weeks old). But if you don't have the time or resources to foster kittens for adoption, you should just include them as part of TNR).
- **If mom returns, and kittens are too young to separate from her,** remember that mom is the best caregiver for the kittens. If they're too young to separate, leave them with their mom. Provide food, water, and [shelter](#), and monitor the family daily, making the environment as safe as possible. Once the kittens are older, you can decide to foster them for adoption or to include them with their mom in the TNR process.
- **If you think it's safer for the whole family to come indoors,** for instance if you find mom and her kittens in an area too dangerous for them to live like a busy highway, bring the whole family inside to a quiet, small room (like a bathroom) where they can live until the kittens are weaned and it's safe to get them all spayed or neutered. Consider providing the mother cat and kittens with a medium-large sized dog crate to use as a hiding place until they get used to their new surroundings. Then decide to [foster the kittens for adoption](#) or return them to a safe location outdoors with their mom.
- **If the kittens are old enough to be separated from their mother,** you must make the best decision for the kittens based on your time and resources. You can [socialize and foster the kittens for adoption](#), or you can get them all spayed or neutered with their mom and return them to the outdoors.
- **If you trap a cat and find out she's a nursing mom,** it's best to get her spayed and returned to the area you found her as soon as possible. You usually won't discover a cat is a nursing mom until you bring her to be spayed, but this may be the only opportunity you have to spay her, so move forward with the procedure. Don't worry, mother cats continue to produce milk even after being spayed. It could also be helpful to speak with the clinic you choose to let them know of your plans to return nursing mothers as soon as possible so they can adjust their schedule or procedures.
- **If a cat is pregnant.** This can be a very difficult decision because spaying a pregnant cat would mean terminating her pregnancy. The choice is yours to make, but remember, this might be the only opportunity you have to catch this cat, get her spayed, and protect her from future health risks and ongoing stresses of mating and pregnancy. Otherwise, you can return the pregnant cat back outdoors and monitor her until she has her kittens and they are properly weaned and old enough to be spayed and neutered with the mother cat. Alternately, if you have the time and resources, you could bring the pregnant cat inside to a small, quiet room for the remainder of her pregnancy to allow her to have her kittens. The mother cat would care for the kittens, and you could foster and socialize the kittens to prepare them for adoption.