

## Playtime for Kittens and Kids

**Follow these expert tips for developing playtime routines with children and kittens.**

*Pam Johnson-Bennett*

**Q:** What techniques can I use to help kids learn how best to interact with kittens, especially at playtime? How old should a child be before conducting play sessions unsupervised? Are there interactive-play modifications, or particular toys, that could be used by children who might not have the dexterity (or patience) for typical fishing-pole sessions?

Feline behaviorist Pam Johnson-Bennett, author of *Think Like a Cat*, says: One of the best ways for children and kittens to begin the bonding process is through interactive playtime. It helps the kitten develop trust and it teaches children the appropriate way to play. Interactive playtime involves the use of a fishing pole-type toy. This is ideal because it puts a safe distance between the kitten's sharp little teeth and a child's delicate hands. Sometimes kittens can be a little afraid of children because of the higher-pitched voices and the fast little movements they make. By teaching a child the correct way to conduct a playtime, it sets the two up to start developing a wonderful relationship. When you are shopping for an interactive toy to use for a child/kitten play session, keep in mind that you want to avoid anything that can be accidentally poked in the eye (either the child's or the kitten's). Stick with toys that have thicker poles or use something like the Cat Dancer or Dragonfly toy. They both are made from wire and are fun for children to use. Another great toy for children to use is a peacock feather. You can also find toys that are flexible plastic tubes with a wire inside that has a toy on the end. By pushing or pulling on the little handle at the top, you can make the target at the end of toy peek in and out. Another toy that children and kittens can enjoy together is a kitten busy box. This is a box with lots of holes in it and the children can place several balls inside. The kitten sticks his paw in the holes to try to get the ball. Begin by showing your child the way you conduct a play session with the cat. This means moving the toy like prey and not waving the toy in the cat's face or poking him in the body. Show your child that when you move the toy away from the cat or wiggle it a couple of feet in front of him, he is more likely to become enticed and get excited about the game. If you wave the toy at the kitten or poke at him, he'll become scared, frustrated and chances are, he may soon decide you aren't much fun to play with.