ALTAI BLANCHE / FAMILY GUIDE

Reading Your Kitten’s Stress Signals

Notice the early signs of discomfort so handling, play, and grooming stay gentle.

Look at the whole kitten

One gesture cannot tell the whole story. Watch posture, ears, eyes, tail, movement, and what is happening around your kitten. Compare with their usual behavior. A kitten can be curious one moment and overwhelmed the next.

Often comfortable

- Loose body posture and a normal breathing pattern.
- Ears soft and generally forward; eyes soft or partly closed.
- Voluntary approach, play, exploration, or settling nearby.

An early request for space

- Turning away, leaning back, moving off, or pausing play.
- A tense or crouched body, ears turned sideways or back, or a quickly twitching tail tip.
- Wide pupils can be part of stress, but also reflect lighting and excitement; read them in context.

Stop and give space

Hiding, flattened ears, hissing, growling, swatting, or repeated attempts to escape mean the interaction is too much. Stop the handling, lower the stimulation, and let your kitten move to a safe place. Do not punish warning signals; they are useful communication.

Try again at a smaller step

- Wait until your kitten chooses to re-engage.
- Shorten the session and begin with a part of handling they already accept.
- Offer a reward for calm participation, then stop before signs of discomfort return.
- Let children know that a kitten who walks away is asking for a break.

When to ask for help

A sudden behavior change, pain on touch, loss of appetite, repeated hiding, or stress that does not improve deserves veterinary advice. A veterinary behavior professional can help if fear around routine care persists.

Further reading

Cats Protection: Stress in cats

Cats Protection: Cats and children

FelineVMA/ISFM: Cat Friendly Interaction Guidelines