**Top Tips for Foster Parents**

* Check in regularly with your coordinator- send update photos and descriptions of their personality.
* Alert your coordinator early if you see any concerning health or behavioral symptoms.
* If your cat seems sick, check immediately for hydration – they should be drinking water, using the litter box, have elastic skin tone and a moist mouth.
* Use disposable paper litter pellets for kittens under 1.5 months of age.
* Spend adequate time socializing and playing with your fosters so that they are well-adjusted as adults.
* Never let your cat run loose outside; guard against any escapes.
* If you have pets, keep you foster isolated for at least a week before introducing them (to adjust and also to ensure there is no spread of potential disease). Be patient with the introduction process.

**Health & Wellness**

**URIs**

Upper respiratory infections (URIs) are very similar to human colds. It is contagious to other cats or kittens so if you notice a particular cat is symptomatic, isolate them from the other to prevent the spread. The cat is often congested and cannot fully smell the food, causing them to eat less and lose hydration.

You may have to coax her to eat by adding in a more liquid cat food “soup” to both the food and a small amount in the water. If your foster cat has not eaten for more than two days, let your coordinator know – feeding her with a syringe may be necessary. If you don’t know how to do this, we can describe this or show you how.

Steam from a vaporizer or hot shower often helps clear the nasal passages. Keep the nose and eyes clear of discharge with warm, damp cotton balls. A cat who doesn’t feel well appreciates some extra petting and quiet time in your lap. If you can coax your foster cat to eat, and she’s drinking water, the infection will usually run its course and no additional treatment is necessary. Treat the cat as you would when you have a cold – patience, plenty of rest and treat symptomatically.

**Dehydration**

Watch carefully to see if your foster cat is drinking water. You may have to monitor the level of the water bowl and keep track of litter box activity. You can check for dehydration by pulling the skin up just a little lower than the back of the neck. It should be taut and snap back down. If it stands up or takes some time to go back down, the cat may be dehydrated.

Please contact us right away if you think your cat is dehydrated. We may provide advise or direct you to a veterinarian who can treat more severe cases with IV fluids.

If your foster cat is extremely lethargic, appears to have a fever, let your coordinator know immediately.

If nasal discharge is thick and yellowish-green (vs. clear and watery), this may be an indication that a bacterial infection has set in, and antibiotics may be necessary.

**Other Common Issues**

Let your coordinator know if you notice any of these:

* Diarrhea, sometimes caused by a change in environment/food or parasites. An excellent natural solution is to add pure pumpkin puree to the food to add fiber. If the diarrhea is extremely liquidly like water, please alert us immediately.
* Continual vomiting or occasional vomiting that lasts more than a day or two.
* Extreme lethargy for more than 2-3 days.
* Eyes that are red and inflamed or have an extreme amount of discharge and swelling, vs. small amounts of discharge, usually in both eyes (common with a URI). This can often be treated with eye ointment, but may need a vet visit if the infection doesn’t respond within a couple of days.
* Any crumbly wax-like substance in the ears (possible ear mites).
* Fleas or flea dirt (black pepper-like substance in the fur).

**Veterinary Visits**

All vet visits must be pre-authorized unless you are willing to pay for the visit yourself. Check with your coordinator first. Veterinary visits are scheduled for major health issues that cannot be addressed at home and there are no out-of-pocket vet costs to a foster parent when coordinated through our organization. Veterinary funding is strictly via donations. For this reason please understand that we must be very cautious when deciding whether or not a foster animal needs to go to the vet as office visits add up very quickly. Each case will be evaluated individually by what is best for the animal as well as economically feasible for the shelter.

It is highly appreciated if the foster can transport the animal to the vet appointment as we will try and find an available vet that is within reasonable distance to the foster.

**Medical Supplies**

Often times we have medication on hand from prior vet visits and can provide it to you free of charge as compared to the vet. If the animal is at the vet and they recommend any of the following, please check with us beforehand:

* Flea Medicine
* Droncit (for tapeworm)
* FVRCP vaccination or boosters
* Nutracal
* Otomite or Acarexx (for ear mites)
* Pet Tinic
* Strongid-T (routine wormer, mainly for roundworms)
* Teramycin antibiotic eye ointment
* Triple antibiotic eye ointment ("BNP")

Betadine/normal saline in a 1:20 solution can be used as an eye drop and nose drop in cats/kittens with URI and/or eye inflammation. This home remedy may reduce the severity of URI symptoms and the need for veterinary care, as well as other medications.

All oral or injected antibiotics require a vet visit and prescription, as well as other eye ointments or drops other than the two mentioned above.

**Allergies**

Cats, like people, can have allergic reactions to medication. Most medications are not given first at the vet office. If some sudden, adverse reaction happens after giving a new medication, such as wheezing or eyes being more inflamed, do not give any more medication and call the veterinarian.

**Spay/Neuter**

Spay and neuter surgeries are generally done at a pre-designated clinic before adoption. You may need to provide care for the cat after their surgery in which case written discharge instructions will be provided. Many kittens return to “normal” after just 1 day- though there are occasionally complications at which time you should alert the coordinator immediately.

**Vaccination & Worming**

Kitten will be given their first vaccination of FVRCP on the same day as their spay/neuter and microchip appointment.

"FVR" stands for feline viral rhinotracheitis, a disease that causes sneezing and discharge from eyes and nose (the URI symptoms often seen).

"C" stands for calici virus, which causes oral ulcers and symptoms similar to, but less profuse, than FVR. Calici virus sometimes progresses to a type of pneumonia.

"P" stands for panleukopenia (aka "feline distemper"); this usually deadly disease attacks rapidly dividing cells and causes loss of appetite, bloody diarrhea and/or vomiting, extreme lethargy and collapse.

The required rabies vaccination is given at 4 months of age and is usually the responsibility of the adopter if the kitten is adopted before that age.

**Socialization**

The ideal time for socializing kittens is from two to seven weeks of age. As soon as their eyes and ears are opening, socialization opportunities begin. Socialization after this age range is still possible, but becomes more difficult. Attempting socialization after 12 to 14 weeks of age will take longer and require more effort.

Cats and kittens are individuals and each will respond differently to socializing techniques. Some cats can be genetically friendly but feral by experience. We encourage fosters to take on at least 2 kittens as we not only want them to socialize them to humans, but also they learn how to be a cat, gain a social identity and are likely to tolerate feline companions later if raised with a sibling or littermates. Even if kept as an only cat in adulthood, a solo-raised kitten is more likely to display undesirable behaviors to his human companions.

Keep the kitten in a room with no inaccessible hiding spots. Making frequent visits to the room and just sitting gets kitty used to your presence.

Next, using a stick or dowel with feathers attached to one end, provide visual stimulation and distraction. As kitty gets comfortable with your presence, try moving closer each time.

Do this when kitty eats, perhaps just laying your hand nearby, progressing to being able to hand feed and later to touching kitty. At this point, when you are able to touch, use a finger to make small 1¼-inch clockwise circles all around kitty’s shoulders, head and upper back. Make the circles small and quick and leave the body after each time.

* **Food is your best socialization tool, so become familiar with these simple techniques:**

**https://www.aspcapro.org/resource/how-use-food-socialize-kittens**

**Showcasing Your Foster**

**Web Presence**

If her picture is already on our website, you should write a new story about the cat’s personality. A good story makes a big difference in the number of calls the cat gets, so be descriptive! Try to include things like:

* Whether the cat likes to be petted or held
* Is a lap cat
* Purrs easily
* Is vocal or quiet
* Is active and playful or calm
* Has good litter box manners
* Uses a scratching post
* Has experience with other animals and children, etc.

Of course, any cute things that she does or anything you want to point out about her fur or appearance is good as well. It can be as long as you want, but the typical description is a paragraph or two.

If the cat has some bad habits, this can be discussed during the first phone conversation. The web story should generate interest, not turn people away. We don’t want to mislead people; however we really try to focus on the positive. Please e-mail the story to the coordinator.

Check the Web site a day or two after you have sent your info. You know the cat best and will catch any errors on the site. If you don’t see the cat listed or if there are mistakes, just send an e-mail with any corrections, we are constantly busy so feel free to keep contacting us as a reminder if needed.

**Photos**

Photos are the absolute best method for catching the attention of future adopters. It is the very first impression they have of the cat and so we want to make sure they are clear, well-lit and at a low angel to catch all the cuteness. Fosters play an important role in this regard as we rely on them to provide a variety of quality photos to advertise the foster kitty. Kittens especially can be very active and it may take many many pictures to get just the right one – be patient and try to setup a cute background for them. Videos are also accepted and give adopters a great idea of the behavior of the kitty. If they are playful – show that! If they are a cuddlebug- amazing, show that!

* **For photos and descriptions that entice adopters, check out these techniques:**

**https://www.aspcapro.org/resource/hot-shots-getting-great-photos-your-animals**

**Getting to Adoption**

Once pictures and stories are posted, emails and applications are funneled through our system where a pre-screening of potential adopters is done. We may ask that you meet with the adopter directly, or in some cases we will pick up the cat and conduct the meet and greet ourselves. We ask that you be understanding of the immense logistics that we handle everyday and be as open and flexible as possible.

**Screening Potential Adopters**

Friends, co-workers and relatives may want to adopt your foster cat. If they are qualified adopters, we are more than happy for that to happen. Please follow the guidelines in the adoption procedures document for these cases. Our organization always do a final screening and have the final authority to approve all adoptions. You are also welcome to adopt your foster cat, following the same procedures as everyone else. In fact, a benefit of fostering is that we give you the “first choice” as a foster to adopt if you happen to fall in love. If you would like to adopt them, please let us know as soon as possible as we can reserve the cat specifically for you and cease advertising.

Please remember that cats can live for 15-20 years, and that this is a lifetime commitment both emotionally and financially!

Statistics show that the lifespan of an indoor cat is doubled. There are many dangers of being outside, including cars, wildlife, poisonous substances, troubled people, etc. For this reason we absolutely do not allow adopters to keep their cat outdoors. (In fact, a large portion of our rescue is devoted to taking in strays from the outdoors for this very reason). Some instances will be accepted such as “catio” enclosures or secure balconies but they must be discussed beforehand.

**The Adoption Process**

Our adoption fee and any other information related to the process can be found on our website. In most instances the coordinator will be the one to provide adoption information to the adopter as well as answer any questions pertaining to the process.

**Thank You!**

We encourage our fosters to enjoy the experience as much as possible- have fun, be safe, and keep in mind that you are quite literally saving their lives. Without fosters we are unable to take in more cats and kittens and therefore they are euthanized in the shelters. This is a sobering reality but we hope that one day there will be a larger systemic change that eliminates the need for “rescue” efforts. Until then, we try our absolute best and hope to make a world of difference for the animals we are able to save. We truly cannot do this work without you and fosters are the backbone to our organization – a massive thank you from the bottom of our hearts.