

# Guide for Cat Foster Homes

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## Top Tips for Foster Parents

- ♥ Always notify the foster coordinator whenever you pick up a new foster cat or adopt one out.
- ♥ Check in regularly with your coordinator.
- ♥ Ask for advice if your cat/kitten has stopped eating.
- ♥ Kittens crash fast, so alert your coordinator early if you see behavior changes.
- ♥ If your cat seems sick, check immediately for hydration – she should be drinking water, using the litter box, have elastic skin tone and a moist mouth.
- ♥ Never use clumping litter for kittens under six months of age.
- ♥ Wash your hands and change your shirt after handling sick animals to prevent spread of illness.
- ♥ Never let your cat run loose outside; guard against escapes.

## Health & Wellness

### URIs

Upper respiratory infections (URIs) are very similar to human colds. The cat is often congested and cannot smell her food. Tempting your foster cat with smelly canned cat food, Hills A/D food (purchased at a veterinarian's office), baby food (no onions in ingredients), chicken broth or even tuna in water (last resort as too much can cause diarrhea) will often get her eating again.

You may have to coax her to eat by using your fingers, and even smearing it on her lips or nose. 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. Nutracal is a calorie- and nutrient-dense supplement that even sick cats will often accept when not otherwise eating. This can be picked up at the shelter.

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.

Ask your coordinator about using the home remedy of betadine/normal saline solution as eye/nose drops to help decrease the severity of a URI. We often have pre-mixed solution available for foster parents to pick up.

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## 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.

A lethargic cat is often dehydrated. If your cat is dehydrated, subcutaneous fluids may be necessary. This is a good skill to learn and you can be buddied up with an experienced foster parent who can teach you. Please contact us right away if you think your cat is dehydrated. We may arrange a home visit, direct you to the shelter for fluids or to one of the local veterinarians who bill the shelter directly.

If your foster cat is extremely lethargic, has a fever (over 103 degrees F, rectally, constitutes a fever), and/or a bacterial infection, 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. In this case, we will direct you to take your foster cat to the vet.

## Other Common Issues

Let your coordinator know if you notice any of these:

- Loose stool or diarrhea, usually caused by parasites that may or may not be visible in feces; these can sometimes be treated with wormer picked up at the shelter or a vet visit.
- 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 picked up at the shelter, 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). Ear mite medicine can be picked up at the shelter.

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- Fleas or flea dirt (black pepper-like substance in the fur). Advantage is usually applied if fleas are noticed at the shelter. If you see flea dirt, we will find out if Advantage was already applied.
- ♥ **Share this resource on infection control in the home with your fosters:**  
[ASPCapro.org/infection-control-foster-homes](https://ASPCapro.org/infection-control-foster-homes)

## Veterinary Visits

All vet visits must be pre-authorized unless you are willing to pay for the visit yourself. Check with your coordinator first.

All authorized vet visits are paid by the Help the Animals Fund. We work with a number of vets in and around the Seattle area. They bill the shelter directly so there are no out-of-pocket vet costs to a foster parent. While the fund is strictly via donations, due to great fundraising efforts by volunteers and some large donations and bequests we have been able to pay for some extraordinary care.

However, 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.

### **Authorization to foster parents for vet visits can be given for any of the following:**

Fever (103.5 or above, rectally), respiratory distress (choking, wheezing, open-mouth breathing, shortness of breath); green secretions and/or bad odor from nasal area; not eating or drinking for more than a few days; extreme lethargy for more than a day or two; obvious distress, pain or pronounced behavior changes.

For kittens less than 2-3 weeks, open mouth breathing, not nursing or taking the bottle, and crawling away from the litter/mother are bad, often hopeless signs. Call your coordinator immediately.

If kittens are eating and active, there is likely no urgency in seeking a vet visit. Seek only in cases when symptoms are lingering, diarrhea is lingering, or secretions are green. It can also be considered when the lingering symptoms seems to be the only thing delaying a kitten otherwise ready for adoption.

## Medical Supplies

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To help save money, please do not accept these items from veterinary clinics as they can be obtained at the shelter:

- Advantage (for fleas)
- Droncit (for tapeworm)
- FVRCP vaccination or boosters
- Nutracal
- Otomite or Acaress (for ear mites)
- Pet Tinic
- Strongid-T (routine wormer, mainly for roundworms)
- Teramycin antibiotic eye ointment<sup>2</sup>
- Triple antibiotic eye ointment ("BNP")<sup>2</sup>

These items are also available at the shelter, but you may accept from a vet clinic if you don't know how to give subcutaneous fluids:

- Fluid bags (Lactated Ringers or Normosol)
- Tubing and needles for fluid administration

Please ask if your cat needs subcutaneous fluids for dehydration and lethargy. There are several people in the foster parent group willing to make home visits to administer fluids. This will often get help to a sick cat faster and also save money.

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.

Pet Tinic ("lixotinic") is now available from the shelter. Please ask if you need this vitamin and iron supplement for a debilitated and/or flea-bitten kitten/cat. Please save the bottles that this is dispensed in for later refilling to save on expenses.

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

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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 our clinic at the time of adoption, but any time a cat has to undergo anesthesia for a procedure he should be altered at the same time.

Female kittens with umbilical hernias will have this repaired at the time of their spay surgery. Male kittens should have their umbilical hernias repaired at a vet clinic, as it involves an abdominal incision.

## Vaccination & Worming

"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.

Kittens should be started on vaccines at six weeks of age. By this age the maternal antibodies (from the mother's first milk) are beginning to fade. Boosters need to be given every three weeks until 16 weeks of age. The vaccine will not trigger the desired response until the maternal antibodies have worn off – and it is impossible to tell when exactly that happens.

Vaccinations should be given even if kittens have URI symptoms.

Strongid is the wormer given to cats and kittens. The dose is 0.1cc per lb. An adult of 10 lbs. would receive 1 cc, a kitten weighing 1 lb. would get 0.1 cc). Worming should start at 1 lb., usually around five weeks of age. Strongid treats roundworms or Ascarids, also hookworms and whipworms, which are very common in kittens. Different worms/parasites require different medications.

A second dose of wormer must be given 10 days to two weeks after the first dose.

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Since Strongid does not kill worms in the larval stage, the lifecycle will start over again if the second dose is not timed correctly or missed. If you miss the two-week mark, you must start over with a first dose.

Get complete instructions from your coordinator or attending veterinarian.

## 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 have more limited success.

Cats and kittens are individuals and each will respond differently to socializing techniques. Some cats can be genetically friendly but feral by experience.

Try to avoid raising solo kittens. Not only do we 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.

Eye contact should be quickly broken. Staring at a kitten is threatening. When fearful or stimulated, a cat's eye will dilate. Be aware of the eyes, since you may see them dilate as a first (fear) reaction, but as the kittens get familiar with you, the pupils will quickly return to a normal size.

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. A second stick or dowel with a soft fabric on it can be used to touch. 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:**  
[ASPCapro.org/resource/saving-lives-behavior-enrichment/using-food-successful-kitten-socialization](https://www.aspcapro.org/resource/saving-lives-behavior-enrichment/using-food-successful-kitten-socialization)

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## Showcasing Your Foster

### Web Presence

If her picture is already on our Web site, 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 or website posting team.

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.

### Photos

If your cat's picture is not yet on the Web site, then there are several options for getting pictures taken and posted. If you have access to a digital camera and would like to take the pictures yourself, you are welcome to do so. Please e-mail them in .jpg format to the web site posting team with your story.

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You are welcome to take your cat to the shelter during one of the regularly scheduled digital photography sessions.

Another option is to have a traveling photographer come to your home to photograph your foster cat. This is a nice option for shy cats and those who don't travel well, or for foster parents with schedule and transportation difficulties. Please contact your coordinator to arrange this option.

♥ For photos and descriptions that entice adopters, check out these techniques from ASPCApro: [resource/saving-lives-adoption-marketing/hot-shots-getting-great-photos-your-animals](https://www.aspcapro.org/resource/saving-lives-adoption-marketing/hot-shots-getting-great-photos-your-animals)  
[resource/saving-lives-adoption-marketing-foster-care/tips-presenting-your-adoptable-animals-well](https://www.aspcapro.org/resource/saving-lives-adoption-marketing-foster-care/tips-presenting-your-adoptable-animals-well)  
[aspcapro.org/blog/2014/06/12/tip-week-all-your-selfie](https://www.aspcapro.org/blog/2014/06/12/tip-week-all-your-selfie)

## Getting to Adoption

Once pictures and stories are posted, calls are funneled through the foster care voice mail where a pre-screening of potential adopters is done. You will be provided the names and numbers of potential adopters. Call and discuss the cat and further screen them as you like. If they sound like suitable adopters, you will arrange a meeting with them, usually at your home. The process for adoption should then be followed if things work out.

If you wish, your own contact information (phone/e-mail address) can be posted with the web story. Since the public will be contacting you directly without having been pre-screened, this option requires you to be able to pre-screen potential adopters yourself. This is not suggested for newer foster parents or those not comfortable interviewing and perhaps turning down unsuitable adopters. Please contact your coordinator for more information.

## In-House and Other Promotions

Sitting with your foster cat at the shelter is a great way to meet potential adopters and exchange information so you can remain in contact. This is done by appointment only and a foster ID badge needs to be worn.

Please remember that you are only there to promote your own foster cats.

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Only one cat is to be out of a cage at a time and potential adopters must fill out an application and check with an officer at the front desk before handling any cat. Please do not try and answer questions about other cats unless you are a trained Matchmaker.

More detailed adoption room guidelines are available and you should familiarize yourself with them; ask your coordinator or a team leader about obtaining these guidelines. The shelter opens at 9 a.m. and staff are usually busy cleaning right up until they open, so please be respectful if you've entered the building ahead of time.

Monthly adoption events are held to promote adoptions and give the shelter and foster program publicity. Feel free to ask if any events are coming up. All felines attending monthly adoption events must be already altered and have their surgery done at least one week prior to the event.

## Showing in the Shelter

Foster cats may be shown in the SAS adoption room by appointment only. To find out more about adoption room policies or to schedule a time slot, contact the adoption room scheduler.

Shelter staff and other volunteers ask that we observe the following guidelines:

**Matchmaker volunteers will be working in the adoption room helping people meet shelter cats – foster parents should not interfere with their jobs.**

Please cooperate with their requests or reminders about shelter rules. They are specially trained to assist the public and know the shelter cats and shelter rules usually better than we home-based. However, you are the authority when speaking about your foster cat.

**Don't "push" your cat or kittens onto people when they first walk into the room.**

We are not there to compete with shelter cats or Matchmakers – and we will not be welcome if we do this. Let people browse the room and be approached by the Matchmaker first, if one is present. However, after a potential adopter has looked over the shelter cats and before they leave the room, it is acceptable to say something to the effect of, "This cat is also available for adoption. I'm the foster parent and can tell you about her." As people walking into the adoption room have not been pre-screened, it is best to not push.

**The rule of one cat out of a cage at a time applies to foster cats.**

Please do not monopolize this advantage by holding your foster on your lap or in your arms. Please leave your cat in her cage unless someone wants to see her. If you want more flexibility and the room is busy with other cats out, consider

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making arrangements for the potential adopter to meet at your home where you will have all the freedom you need to have kitty out and about.

It is a shelter rule that all potential adopters must fill out an application and talk to an officer before they handle any cat, including foster cats.

Please avoid bringing extra family members during your shift as our small adoption room gets crowded very easily. Also, please don't bring children and leave them to roam about the shelter.

If a potential adopter seems to need space to visit another cat, please be flexible about moving your carrier and yourself from the bench. Having volunteers and foster parents occupying the limited seating area makes it difficult for a serious adopter to visit the cats.

## 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. Shelter officers 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.

Foster parents are encouraged to screen potential adopters regardless of prior pre-screening by voicemail volunteers, at adoption events or elsewhere. Ask open-ended questions about plans for adding a new feline to the household. If there is already a cat in the potential adopter's home, the shelter has an excellent handout on introducing a second cat.

Please remind them that cats can live over 20 years, and that this is a lifetime commitment! What will they do if they move? Travel? If the cat gets sick?

Statistics show that the lifespan of an indoor cat is doubled. If adopters plan on letting their cat outdoors please remind them of the many dangers of being outside, including cars, wildlife, poisonous substances, troubled people, etc. Also, no adopter should plan on letting a small kitten outdoors for quite some time, unless it's on a leash and harness.

These are just a few suggestions. If you are not comfortable interviewing potential adopters, feel free to refer them to the foster care voicemail at 206.615.0737. The volunteers are experienced with pre-screening people who call regarding Web site pictures. Team leaders, your coordinator and shelter staff can also help you evaluate a potential adopter.

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## The Adoption Process

Please let your coordinator or team leader know when your animal has been adopted. This way her picture can be removed from our website and we will know she's no longer available in case there were any other calls about her.

Kittens must weigh two pounds to be adopted, with no exceptions. They must weigh that much to be spayed/neutered, which must be done prior to going to their new home. There are no exceptions to this either.

If you have people wanting to adopt your foster and you approve of them, please give them a note indicating:

- Your approval
- Your full name
- The cat's case number and name
- Addendum if assigned
- A phone number where you can be reached

Adopters can then go to the shelter to complete their paperwork, have a final screening by a shelter officer and pay the fees. They must have the correct case number and addendum number in order to complete the adoption. If you are unsure of the correct addendum numbers for kittens, bring them in for identification first.

Adopters should arrive at least one hour before closing time to allow enough time for the process and not keep staff after closing time. Please ask adopters to avoid starting the adoption right at opening time as well since it's a very busy time for the officers.

The fee is approximately \$82 to \$87, depending upon the gender of the animal, where the adopter lives, and what licensing requirements/fees are in their area. This amount covers the adoption fee, leukemia test, first vaccination, worming, licensing, microchip, spay/neuter and a free office visit at any vet within King County.

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