

Addendum 3: Foster Guidelines

The below information provides more detailed instructions on how to safely foster cats and kittens in a home environment. Guidelines for establishing a foster care program have also been included, as well as an example foster parent agreement form, which can be found in the back of this handbook. We recommend supplying any potential foster parents with a sheet of guidelines, similar to the one below, prior to having them sign an agreement form, so they are fully informed.

Foster Care Program Guidelines

A foster care program can allow staff and volunteers a chance to provide care in their homes for cats/kittens who are currently not in an adoptable condition or cats/kittens who need special care. For cats who would have difficulty surviving in a shelter environment or need special care, such as very young kittens or sick or injured cats, it is the only alternative to euthanasia. Foster homes are able to provide an environment where cats/kittens can thrive until they are ready to be adopted.

The decision to foster a cat/kitten should be considered carefully and foster agreements should be taken seriously. Fostering should be a positive experience for the cat/kitten. The decision to place a cat/kitten in foster care should be made carefully and only after considering the following questions:

1. Will this cat/kitten be able to be placed up for adoption, after he/she has been fostered?
2. Does the foster applicant have proper housing and adequate time available to foster the cat/kitten(s)?
3. Does the foster applicant meet all of the requirements and agree to all terms in the foster agreement? (Please see foster agreement.)

Additional Considerations

Foster parents who have other animals under their care need to understand the risks of bringing a new foster animal into their home and the risks of animal-to-animal disease transmissions. Foster parents who have cats living in their household should make certain their cat(s) has tested negative for feline leukemia (FeLV) and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV), and the foster cat/kitten going into their care has been tested as well. Foster parents who have other dogs and cats under their care should have these animals current on all vaccinations and all animals within the household should be spayed/neutered.

New foster cats/kittens should be kept separate from other animals living in the household for at least a week, even if each animal appears to be healthy. Foster parents should also practice good hygiene when caring for foster animals, such as washing hands between contact with each animal.

Foster parents should understand that many animal-to-animal disease transmissions can occur from animal to animal via direct contact or via indirect contact with hands, clothing, bedding, food dishes, and other items that may have been contaminated with disease.

Zoonotic diseases are diseases that are transmitted from animals to humans. Common zoonotic diseases include ringworm, mites, and fleas. Less commonly transmitted zoonotic diseases are tapeworm, coccidian, toxoplasmosis, or giardia. Foster caretakers should be educated about possible zoonotic diseases and what precautions to take to help prevent transmission.

Caring for Foster Cats and Kittens

Sanitary living conditions are very important for cats/kittens under foster care. Carriers should be wiped out with a diluted bleach solution (four ounces of bleach mixed with one gallon of water) before each use. This diluted bleach solution should also be used to clean litter boxes, food and water bowls, and other items as needed, and before use with a new animal.

The food that is chosen for the foster cat/kitten should be appropriate for the species, age, and size of the individual cat/kitten. Do not feed cats/kittens food meant for dogs, and only feed food that is age appropriate (i.e. only feed kittens with food specified for kittens). Also, make sure all special-needs cats, who require a particular diet, are fed with

food suitable to their needs (i.e. cats with UTI issues should be fed special urinary food).

Any diet changes should be made gradually over the course of several days, mixing the new food with the old food. The amount of new food added to the mixture should be increased each day, until the diet consists only of the new food. By making dietary changes slowly and in stages, this will lessen any digestive discomfort that can often occur when changes are made abruptly.

It is very important to keep areas where kittens are being fostered extremely clean, because their immune systems have not fully developed during their first few weeks of life. Take care to change bedding material if soiled, using a mild detergent.

Boxes in which the kittens will be staying should be lined with several layers of clean towels and old clothes. Please take care to put fleece, flannel, or cotton material on the top layer that will be in contact with the kittens. For the first few weeks of their lives they cannot retract their claws and they may get stuck in the loops of towel material.

Kittens cannot maintain their own body temperature for at least the first two weeks of their life, so it is very important they are kept away from drafts and additional warming may be necessary. To keep kittens warm, a large bottle of water can be warmed in a large container of hot water, then wrapped with a towel or cloth to help provide warmth. Simi-

larly, uncooked rice can be put into a large sock and tied at the end, then microwaved to create a heat source for the kittens. This should also be wrapped in a towel or cloth before placing with the kittens to make sure that it is not too hot.

If you choose to use a heating pad, it should be used on the lowest setting. Never place the heating pad across the entire bottom of the box; the kittens need to be able to move away from the heat if it becomes too hot for them. Heating pads must be covered with a waterproof material and they should be placed in the box in such a way that the kittens cannot crawl under the heating pad. Whenever you are using a heat source, please monitor the kittens closely to avoid burns.

Feeding Kittens, Newborn to Two Weeks of Age

Neonatal kittens need to be bottle fed using a milk replacer specifically designed for kittens, such as KMR (Kitten Milk Replacer); these products can be purchased at most animal supply stores. Follow the guidelines on the label of the milk replacer to determine the amount to feed each kitten. Be careful not to overfeed, as this may cause diarrhea which leads to dehydration. Make sure you hold the kitten up right and do not force too much milk into her mouth or the fluid will go into her lungs and she could aspirate.

When feeding orphaned kittens, they will reject the milk replacer when they are full. However, please keep track of how often they reject the milk replacer. If the

kittens miss two consecutive feedings, please contact your veterinarian immediately as this could be an indication that something is wrong with the kittens.

If diarrhea develops upon increasing formula, return to the previous feeding level for at least three to four days. After this period, you may increase the amount of formula. If diarrhea persists for more than 24 hours, please see a veterinarian immediately.

The eyes of newborn kittens open between seven and twelve days. Once the kittens have opened their eyes, encourage them to lap the milk replacer from a shallow bowl. Leave the bowl in the box with the kittens for one hour to allow ample time for the kitten to lap the milk replacer. If after one hour, the kittens will not lap from the bowl, then go back to bottle feeding. After three to five days of continued bottle feeding, try to encourage the kittens to lap the milk replacer from a shallow bowl again.

Once the kittens are comfortable with lapping the milk replacer from the shallow bowl, add small amounts of kitten food (canned wet food or moistened dry food) to the formula. This will help to transition the kittens to solid food.

Please make sure to never feed chilled or listless kittens. Chilled kittens should be warmed gradually, and upon returning to their normal body temperature, they can be offered a small amount of warm water before resuming a regular feeding schedule. If the kittens remain chilled or listless, please see a veterinarian immediately.