

Humane Society of Parkersburg

# **Foster Care Handbook**

A Reference for Volunteer Foster Caregivers

(3.12 Version)

## INTRODUCTION

### **WELCOME TO OUR TEAM OF DEDICATED FOSTER CARE VOLUNTEERS**

If you have never cared for a foster animal before with the HSOP, you are about to experience the joys of being a pet owner without the lifetime of responsibility. The following guidelines will help you with the care of your foster animal(s) and help you understand the policies and procedures of the HSOP's Foster Care Program.

If you have any questions at any time, please contact our Foster Care Coordinator:

**Debbie Hines 304-482-0330**

### **FOSTER CARE PROGRAM OBJECTIVE**

The HSOP's Foster Care Program allows animals that are too young for adoption, are recovering from surgery or illness, are awaiting transfer to a rescue, or are in need of other special care to stay in private homes until they are ready to be placed.

Volunteer foster homes provide a safe place for foster animals to stay, nutritious food, socialization and health care to their animal guests. This important program enables us to save the lives of animals that might otherwise have to be euthanized. Before taking on the responsibility and commitment of becoming a foster care volunteer, please take the following into consideration:

### **DO YOU HAVE TIME?**

The time commitment for foster care may range from a few days to up to 8 weeks depending on the animal's situation. Common foster situations and durations are:

- Puppies or kittens under 8 weeks of age that are very susceptible to disease in the shelter environment are placed in foster homes until old enough to be adopted or to be transferred to a rescue. Commonly requires 3 or 4 weeks of foster care.
- New born puppies and kittens with or without their mother need quiet foster homes until puppies/kittens are old enough to be placed up for adoption or sent to a rescue. The foster period could last as much as 8 weeks with newborns and require bottle-feeding.
- Adult animal, puppy or kitten old enough to be placed but is awaiting spay/neuter appointment and we need space in the shelter. Fostering usually only lasts a day or two or up to a week.
- Adult animal, puppy or kitten old enough for placement that has been chosen by a rescue and is awaiting transfer to rescue. Foster period is usually about a week.
- Animal is sick or injured and needs quiet, healthy environment to recover. Foster period could be as short as a week or two or as long as several weeks or months depending on the illness or injury. This does not occur frequently. However foster parents for special needs animals may require a significant time commitment and experience with injured animals.

In addition to time spent caring for and socializing your foster animal(s) in your home, you must consider the possibility of additional time for vet checks and/or emergency care, transporting to and from the vet for spay/neutering, record keeping, meeting the rescue transports (usually Thursday or Saturday mornings at 7:15 a.m.) and meeting potential adopters.

The need for foster homes varies according to the season of the year, the number of animals currently being fostered, and the number of foster homes available.

### **DO YOU HAVE ADEQUATE FACILITIES TO HOUSE FOSTER ANIMALS?**

We ask that you only take on the number of animals that you can house comfortably, keep adequately clean and fed, and provide adequate socialization for. If you only have time and space to provide proper care for three puppies, for instance, don't volunteer to take on a litter of ten. Always keep the needs of your own personal pets in mind whenever you consider fostering. See next section, Housing Your Foster Animal for details about housing.

### **ARE YOU PREPARED FOR THE EMOTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS?**

Caring for puppies, kittens, and animals requiring medical attention and socialization can be fun, but it is also a lot of work. You will also develop an emotional attachment to your fosters, and must face the reality that, in spite of your best efforts, not all foster animals will thrive. While our foster animals have a high rate of placement, we cannot guarantee that each and every animal will find a permanent home. We do everything in our power to treat illnesses or other health problems that may befall foster animals, but you must be prepared that some illnesses, health problems or injuries may not be treatable because they are life-threatening, cost-prohibitive, or not in the best interest of the animal in the long run. The possibility of death or euthanasia of one or more of your fosters, though remote, is a reality that must be considered.

## HOUSING YOUR FOSTER ANIMAL

Considering where to house your foster animals is a key factor in the overall success of your foster experience. This section will provide some guidelines for housing your foster animals and proper cleaning and disinfecting of the areas you choose to keep them in. Remember, this is meant to be a fun, fulfilling experience, so please keep in mind that your home life can be greatly enhanced or disrupted based on how you implement our suggestions.

Our foster care coordinator(s) can also assist you in setting up the most appropriate environment for the animals in your care and your lifestyle. Please feel free to consult with them about housing questions, issue or ideas that you have.

The following guidelines are just suggestion.

- ❑ We recommend an area that is separate from your household pets.
- ❑ A spare bedroom, bathroom, or utility room can be ideal if uncluttered and puppy/kitten proof.
- ❑ Basements and garages can also transform into wonderfully, efficient foster areas.
- ❑ When good weather arrives even a screened-in porch can be used for fostering dogs and puppies if safe and secure.
- ❑ Cat/kitten foster parents should consider noise/activity levels in the area when fostering felines as they are less stressed in a quiet environment.

Think smart, safe, and creatively when considering where to house your foster animals.

Wherever you decide to house your fosters you must keep in mind that the area must be easy to clean and disinfect. Flooring is a major factor in your ability to properly disinfect the area where you foster your animals. Good flooring options are:

- ❑ Cement
- ❑ Linoleum
- ❑ Sealed wood
- ❑ Tile.

### Basic Supplies You'll Need for Fostering

#### Dog & Puppy supplies

Newspaper  
Bleach  
Crates  
Towels  
Play Pens  
Water & food bowls  
Toys  
Brushes

#### Cat & Kitten supplies

Newspaper  
Bleach  
Litter  
Litterboxes & Scoops  
Food & water dishes  
Cat Condos  
Large Wire Crates  
Toys  
Towels  
Cat comb

## Puppy Proofing Your Home

Puppies have a lot of energy and a natural curiosity. This is what makes them so much fun but also could lead them into harmful situations. We need to take the time to evaluate the environment our fosters will be staying in. Think of it as child-proofing your home, except that a puppy is smaller and more active than a baby and can therefore get into more things.

The following tips are designed to help you keep your foster animals safe.

### Indoor hazards

- ❑ Know which plants are toxic
- ❑ Electrical cords, computer cables, or wires (tie up loose cords & keep out of sight)
- ❑ Draw strings from draperies or blinds
- ❑ Cleaning supplies, rags, sponges, chemicals, detergents
- ❑ Remote controls, knick-knacks
- ❑ Candles, potpourri, air fresheners
- ❑ Toilet tissues or Kleenex (boy, if you've ever seen a puppy running with a long tp trail it's funny! But, not much fun to clean up and ingesting it is potentially harmful)
- ❑ Fireplaces, wood stoves
- ❑ Be careful of your foster animals around furniture. A rocking chair can harm a tail or leg, and a curious puppy may crawl under an open recliner or sofa bed.
- ❑ Keep doors and windows closed. Keep screens on windows and sliding glass doors securely fastened and in good repair.
- ❑ Many dogs will eat cat feces from litterboxes. Aside from being a nasty habit it can be dangerous. Cat litter can cause an intestinal obstruction, not to mention intestinal worms the cat may have passed on.

### Outdoor hazards

- ❑ Please do not leave your puppy outside unsupervised.
- ❑ Gasoline, oil, paint, fertilizers, pesticides, auto supplies, etc. should be in secure containers and out of reach.
- ❑ Be especially careful with antifreeze and rat poison, both taste good to dogs and both can be deadly if ingested.
- ❑ Pools, ponds, hot tubs and drainpipes are also dangerous.
- ❑ Fire rings, barbecues and other heat/fire sources.
- ❑ Walk around your property and look for other areas and items that could be hazardous (broken glass, nails, sharp objects)
- ❑ Many outdoor plants, flowers, and shrubs are poisonous.
- ❑ Please do not take the puppy on visiting trips to friends or on walks unless you are carrying it. The puppy can be exposed to Parvo anywhere outside. The puppy will be better protected from Parvo after it receives its second vaccinations (DHLPP shot).

The list could go on and on. Simply ask yourself, "If I were a puppy, would this be an interesting place to explore? Would this be fun to chew, shred, carry or hide?"

## Kitten Proofing Your Home

Many of the puppy proofing tips can be applied to fostering kittens as well but felines have the ability to find unique dangers all on their own.

- ❑ Kittens and cats are by their nature VERY curious about their surroundings, so you will need to make sure there are no hidden "escape routes" that lead outdoors for your indoor-only kitty. If you have young children, or any concerns about the cat getting out, you can even make and post small signs at each doorway reminding the family to close them carefully and watch for kitties!!
- ❑ Keeping your toilet bowl closed after use is a must for small kittens, Move glass or breakable treasures inside a locked cabinet, or use special anchoring clay to keep them secured from being knocked over by an inquisitive paw.
- ❑ Always keep your washing machine and dryer doors closed, and check carefully before and after each use to make sure your kitty hasn't somehow gotten inside.
- ❑ For some reason, all kittens seem to love exploring underneath the refrigerator - make sure that they cannot get all the way under or behind the refrigerator by filling up those spaces or putting boards or other material there to keep the kitties out.
- ❑ Be very aware that not all cat toys are safe - be especially careful about leaving any string, yarn, thread, needles, safety pins, rubber bands, small pieces of a toy like eyes or bells that can easily come off and be ingested. Unfortunately, having a feline swallow a foreign object is a fairly common and often fatal event which almost always could have been prevented. Make sure that any toys you make or purchase have no small or sharp pieces that can poke or be chewed off and be swallowed.
- ❑ Cats seem to love household items such as twist ties for plastic bags, but these can be deadly. Twist ties can be swallowed and perforate intestines.
- ❑ You can make aluminum foil balls that your cat will love because they are easy to bat around and make a nice noise on hard floors, but be sure to wad the foil up very tightly so your kitty can't chew off and swallow bits of foil, and also be sure the ball is large enough that we can't swallow it.
- ❑ Please do not leave young children unattended with young kittens. They could easily hurt the kitten unintentionally.

Other types of potential hazards for kittens and cats include anything with loops on them, such as grocery paper or plastic bags with the carry handles still on them; litter box liners of the drawstring type if they are pulled closed and the loop is left where kittens can get stuck in them, and even the vertical pulls for window blinds. All of these can be deadly if the kitty gets his or her head caught in the loop. Keep ALL plastic bags safely away from kitties.

## HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

### PROTECTING OUR ANIMALS

Prior to being placed into foster care, all animals old enough will be vaccinated, wormed and given flea/tick treatments as necessary.

Cats:

- If older than 4 weeks of age and less than 1 year of age, kittens will receive 3 vaccinations. They will be revaccinated every 2 weeks until they have received these 3 vaccinations.
- If older than 3 weeks of age, they will be wormed with Pyrantel every two weeks until they have received three treatments.
- If over 6 weeks of age, cats will receive an Advantage or Revolution treatment for fleas. Unless fleas continue to be seen, this treatment will not be repeated. (This treatment is not a vaccination, but is an oily substance placed on the back of the neck. This treatment also must be reapplied if the animal is bathed within 3 days of the treatment.)

Dogs:

- All dogs will receive DHLPP (distemper parvo) vaccination.
- If under 1 year of age, puppies will need to be revaccinated every 2 weeks until they have received 3 vaccinations.
- Will be wormed with Pyrantel if over 3 weeks of age and rewormed every two weeks until they receive 3 treatments.
- If over 6 weeks of age, dogs will receive a flea treatment for fleas. Unless fleas continue to be seen, this treatment will not be repeated. (This treatment is not a vaccination, but is an oily substance placed on the back of the neck. This treatment also must be reapplied if the animal is bathed within 3 days of the treatment.)

Please contact the Foster Care Coordinator if you suspect your foster animal has parasites and an appointment will be set to assess and/or treat the animal(s).

When you pick up your foster animal(s) you will receive Foster Care Home Instructions that will provide any specific instructions you should follow in the care of your foster. The foster care coordinator will keep track of when worming and shots are due and notify you to meet up with them.

### PROTECTING YOUR RESIDENT PETS

When bringing any new animal, including foster animal, into your home, please keep in mind that it may be carrying an illness that could affect your resident animals' health. We ask that you separate foster animals from your own pets for at least one week. The only way to avoid possible exposure of your pets is to keep them separate from your animals for the entire foster period. However we **highly recommend** that your animals be current on all vaccinations **and** that your dogs are also current on the Bordetella vaccination (Kennel Cough).

When fostering kittens, be aware that they may be too young to be tested for Feline Leukemia and Feline AIDS until after the foster period is over. This means that, even if no apparent symptoms were seen in your home, your pet may have been exposed to the virus; it is therefore extremely important to be sure your own pets are fully vaccinated at all times for their own protection.

If your foster animals seem healthy and you do choose to introduce them to your resident pets, it is a good idea to prohibit sharing of food and water bowls, litterboxes and toys. Any

introduction should be made with great care and under constant supervision, especially if you are planning to introduce a protective mother cat or dog to your resident pets.

When handling foster animals, it is always a good idea to wash your hands with soap and water before handling your own pets. This will further reduce the possibility of exposing your pets to illness.

#### **DISEASES THAT ARE TRANSMISSIBLE FROM ANIMAL TO ANIMAL:**

- ❑ **Distemper/Upper Respiratory Virus (Dogs and Cats)** – These are the basic yearly vaccinations your pet(s) should be kept current on at all times for both their protection and that of the foster animals.
- ❑ **Feline Leukemia (Cats)** – Your resident cat(s) must test negative and be kept current on Feline Leukemia vaccinations at all times. Foster cats and kittens will be tested and found to be negative before being sent into the foster home. Since kittens under 3 months of age may show a “false” negative when tested, it is a good idea to keep them completely separate from your own cats, if at all possible. Feline Leukemia is transmitted between cats via fluids. This normally occurs through licking and shared litter boxes.
- ❑ **FIV (“Feline AIDS”) (Cats)** – To prevent infection of your cats and foster animals, your resident cat(s) and foster cats or kittens must also be tested and determined to be negative of this virus. This test is usually given in conjunction with the Feline Leukemia test. Be aware that there is currently no vaccination against FIV in cats. FIV is normally transmitted by deep bite wounds.
- ❑ **Parvovirus (Dogs)** – Annual vaccinations protect against this serious and often fatal canine disease. Your own dogs must be kept currently vaccinated against parvo at all times. Be aware that parvovirus is not a disease that affects puppies only. Unvaccinated elderly animals are at risk, and must always be kept current on their parvovirus inoculations.

**The following are infestations that there is no vaccination to prevent, so identifying them and understanding how they are transmitted is important to avoiding the problem.**

- ❑ **Roundworms** – Roundworms are big worms. Typically they are white, about the diameter of a spaghetti-strand and about 4 inches in length. Roundworms are particularly common in puppies and may produce no symptoms other than diarrhea. However, it is also common for roundworms to be seen in the animal’s stool or to be vomited or coughed up. Cats and dogs can be born with roundworms, get them from their mothers milk or through the feces of an infected animal. This commonly occurs through shared water and food bowls, bedding materials, or even in the yard. So your pets could pick up this worm from an infected foster animal.
- ❑ **Tapeworms** – This worm looks like rice when they are dead or like a short piece of spaghetti noodle, when still alive. Tapeworms are not as common in puppies as in adult animals. They will usually be seen in the stool or on the hair around the pets rear end. You may also find them on the ground, carpet or bedding. Another sign may be diarrhea streaked with mucous.

Animals mostly commonly get this worm from fleas or specifically from eating the flea or intestines of other animals (mouse, bird, rat, etc.) that has fleas. What this should mean to you, is that even if your animals are flea free, they could come into contact with fleas if your foster animal has them.

- ❑ **Hookworms** - This worm is generally invisible to the unaided human eye. They are about 1/2 inch long and very, very thin. Kittens or puppies may be born with hookworms, get them during nursing or ingest a Hookworm larva found in the environment (like on a blade of grass, a toy, water or food dish). Signs of hookworms vary, but may include nonspecific diarrhea; dark black (tarry) diarrhea; bloody diarrhea; vomiting; poor or no appetite, pale mucous membranes in the mouth and generalized pallor; weakness, emaciation and poor growth.
- ❑ **Ringworm** – Ringworm is a skin infection caused by a fungus, not an actual worm. Ringworm is transmitted in a variety of ways, although physical contact with an infected animal is the most common. Dry scaly spots will appear after one to two weeks, and are usually confined to the hairier regions of the scalp, forearms and face. Hair will break off at the roots, creating bald spots. Exposure occurs through physical contact of any type with an infected animal. Animals should receive immediate attention by a veterinarian.
- ❑ **Mange** – The parasite that causes mange is transmitted through physical contact. This animal-to-human form is less serious than the human-to-human form, and usually cures itself in three to four weeks. Infected animals suffer blisters, scabs and hair loss. Physical contact with infected animals and their bedding should be avoided. There are two types of mange: sarcoptic and demodex. Sarcoptic mange can be transmitted to people and other animals. Demodex cannot be passed from one animal to another.

## PROTECTING YOURSELF AGAINST DISEASE

Zoonotic diseases are diseases that are transmitted from animals to people. They are always of concern to those who handle or work with animals on a regular basis.

### DISEASES THAT MAY BE TRANSMITTED FROM ANIMALS TO HUMANS:

- ❑ **Roundworms** – Roundworms are big worms. Typically they are white, about the diameter of a spaghetti-strand and about 4 inches in length. Roundworms are particularly common in puppies and may produce no symptoms other than diarrhea. However, it is also common for roundworms to be seen in the animal's stool or to be vomited or coughed up.

Cats and dogs can be born with roundworms, get them from their mothers milk or through the feces of an infected animal. This commonly occurs through shared water and food bowls, bedding materials, or even in the yard.

Children are particularly susceptible to roundworms because they often play in the dirt and sand where the larvae reside. Once ingested, the roundworms will migrate to the lungs, liver, heart, brain and eyes – causing severe damage! To prevent infection, avoid public areas (such as parks and school grounds) where animals frequently defecate, and wash your hands often.

- ❑ **Tapeworms** – This worm looks like rice. They will usually be seen in the stool or on the hair around the dog's anus. You may also find them on the ground, carpet or bedding.

Animals mostly commonly get this worm from eating a flea that has ingested the eggs of a tapeworm.

While generally people don't get tapeworms from animals, on very rare occasions, children have been infected with tapeworms by swallowing a flea accidentally and generally causes tremendous cramping and discomfort.

- ❑ **Giardia** – This intestinal disease occurs throughout the world and is common in cats and dogs. Like many zoonosis, Giardia is contracted by the fecal-oral route. Symptoms may

include weight loss and chronic diarrhea. There are now reliable tests and drugs for treating Giardia, but a veterinarian or physician should be contacted at once! Giardia can be prevented through proper and thorough hand washing.

- ❑ **Toxoplasmosis** – Cats are the primary cause of Toxoplasmosis among humans. The lifecycle of this parasite is very complex, but infection usually occurs when an owner comes into contact with a cats feces. Human symptoms include headaches, enlarged lymph nodes and a flu-like illness. This disease can cause serious birth defects if contracted by a mother during early pregnancy. Most humans will be unaffected by its presence, however, an expectant mother can avoid exposure simply by avoiding litterbox duties while pregnant.
- ❑ **Ringworm** – Ringworm is a skin infection caused by a fungus, not an actual worm. Ringworm is transmitted in a variety of ways, although physical contact with an infected animal is the most common. Dry scaly spots will appear after one to two weeks, and are usually confined to the hairier regions of the scalp, forearms and face. Hair will break off at the roots, creating bald spots. Exposure can be greatly reduced by wearing rubber gloves and thoroughly washing after handling an infected animal. Animals should receive immediate attention by a veterinarian.
- ❑ **Mange** – The parasite that causes mange is transmitted through physical contact. This animal-to-human form is less serious than the human-to-human form, and usually cures itself in three to four weeks. Infected animals suffer blisters, scabs and hair loss. Physical contact with infected animals and their bedding should be avoided. There are two types of mange: sarcoptic and demodex. Sarcoptic manage can be transmitted to people and other animals. Demodex cannot.

## **INFORMATION TO KEEP YOU HEALTHY**

- ❑ You need not come into direct contact with an infected animal to contract a disease. Many zoonoses are transmitted via bodily fluids, on hands, shoes, clothing, tools, etc.
- ❑ Make it a habit to always practice good hygiene, including washing your hands thoroughly with hot water and antibacterial soap after handling your foster animals.
- ❑ Be aware that animals can carry a zoonosis without exhibiting any symptoms. Do not trust your eyes. Use the same precautions with a healthy-looking animal as you would with a sick one.

## **WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY FOSTER ANIMAL BECOMES ILL?**

There are typically many symptoms to indicate an animal is not feeling well. Always be observant of your foster animals. Symptoms of illness may include: diarrhea, vomiting, loss of appetite, lethargy, weight loss, runny eyes or nose, sneezing, and coughing. If you have a concern during the day that your foster animal may be getting sick, please don't wait until night time when staff are unavailable.

If a foster animal should begin to show symptoms of illness while in your care please follow these procedures so that your animal will receive the care it needs:

**CONTACT THE FOSTER CARE COORDINATOR IMMEDIATELY. THE COORDINATOR WILL INSTRUCT YOU WHAT TO DO.**

- ❑ Please be prepared to provide information including the animal's name, age, your name, and the symptoms of illness.
- ❑ If an animal is vomiting or has diarrhea, but is still active, alert, eating and drinking, you can probably wait until the next day to receive help. If the animal is lethargic and shows no interest in food or water, however, it is wise to seek emergency help as soon as possible.

### **CRITERIA FOR CERTAIN EMERGENCIES**

- ❑ Continuous diarrhea (particularly if liquid or foul-smelling)
- ❑ Continuous vomiting
- ❑ Bleeding of any kind – from the nose or mouth, or in urine or stools
- ❑ Any trauma: hit by a car, dropped, limping, stepped on, unconscious
- ❑ Difficulty breathing
- ❑ Very young puppies and kittens – significant change in behavior, energy level, or appetite

**Reminder:** If you choose to take the animal to a private veterinarian, please be aware that the HSOP may be unable to reimburse you for any charges you may incur. Due to the limited funds of the foster care program, emergency clinic or private veterinary services may only be reimbursed under unusual circumstances, and only with prior approval from the Foster Care Coordinator or the Executive Director of the HSOP.

### **Finally...**

A word of caution, it is a sad fact that puppies and kittens, through no fault of your own, sometimes die. The mother dog or cat may reject them or kill them. Your own pet might fatally injure or kill one if they come in contact, or one might simply be found dead of unknown causes.

If an animal in your care should happen to die, please be sure to call the Shelter Manager or Foster Care Coordinator immediately. It is imperative that we have the opportunity to examine the animal to determine the cause of death. Some conditions may be contagious and we want to protect any other foster animals in your care, as well as your own pets. We will handle disposal of the animal's remains for you.

Catastrophes don't happen often, but depending on how long you have cared for the animal and how attached you have become, you will feel something between distress and devastation. We also offer the thought that, although we sometimes fail to save each and every animal placed into foster care, your participation is vital to this program, and saves the lives of thousands of animals each year.

## GETTING STARTED

### WHAT YOU NEED AND NEED TO KNOW

#### Transport Carriers, Crates or Cages

Normally we will provide you with an animal transport carrier, cage or crate for your foster animal, that will need to be returned to the shelter when you are finished fostering the animal. If you become a regular foster, you may choose to purchase your own crate or cage but it should be safe, secure and an appropriate size for the animal you are fostering. Regardless we will provide you with a safe way to transport your foster animals to and from the shelter.

#### Confinement Area (See Housing Your Foster Animal for more details)

A large box or other enclosure such as a playpen or folding exercise pen might be desirable if you are fostering a litter of puppies or kittens. This type of enclosure will allow you to see in, keep your animals confined, as well as provide plenty of room for a mother and her growing litter.

#### Food

Food can be provided to fosters upon request. However, if you choose to provide your own food, it must be a quality dry puppy, kitten, cat and dog food. We generally recommend Iams and Purina products. However, if you want to feed something other than these, please talk with the Foster Care Coordinator before commencing feeding that product.

To avoid causing potentially harmful digestive problems, do not feed cow's milk, human formulas, table scraps, more than a very small amount of canned food (and then only if absolutely necessary to stimulate appetite) or "generic" pet foods. Canned food should only be fed if necessary during the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> week of age. Puppies and kittens should be able to eat dry food by 7 weeks of age, even if it has to be soaked in warm water. Do not change foods on the animal because it can cause digestive problems.

#### Food and Water Dishes

Food and water dishes will be provided by HSOP to foster homes as needed. You are welcome to experiment with dishes you might have on hand – flat-bottomed cake pans work well for puppies, small saucers will be adequate for kittens. We suggest using heavy crock-style dishes for puppies and kittens to keep the water from being easily tipped over. Be sure to keep whatever type of dish you use absolutely clean on a daily basis to avoid bacterial growth.

#### Cat Litterboxes and Litter

Litterboxes will be provided as available and on request to foster caregivers. The average litterbox may be too high for small kittens to easily use. As an alternative, you may wish to try an oblong cake pan. Small, cut-off boxes, shoeboxes, or cardboard boxes that 12 packs of soda come in also work well when lined with plastic.

HSOP will also provide the "gravel" type of cat litter, if you wish to supply your own, we strongly caution you against using the "clumping" or "scoopable" litters; these litters can easily be ingested by kittens, and can result in intestinal blockage and death.

#### Nail Trimmers

We strongly suggest trimming puppies' and kittens' claws on a regular basis with a good pair of pet nail trimmers. You may purchase your own pair at the pet supply store; please ask the Foster Care Coordinator if you would like instruction on proper and safe trimming.

### **Toys and Other Playthings**

Part of the fun of sharing your home with young animals is playtime. Toy mice and balls make kittens happy and can be laundered and reused if your litter does not have any contagious diseases. You are welcome to purchase any safe toys you'd like.

Safe puppy toys include Nylabones and hard rubber balls and tugs. Raw carrots are nutritious teething toys for puppies. Be sure all toys you provide are safe (remove any small, loose parts or button eyes as you would for a human baby) and discard any that become worn beyond safety.

As with human children, puppies and kittens will also play with anything they can find. Drapes, lampshades, electrical cords and crystal ornaments may look like as much fun as the toys listed above. Take special care to "puppy-proof" or "kitten-proof" your home before allowing your fosters free run of any area. As you fosters grow, their climbing abilities will develop, so anything irreplaceable should be kept well out of reach.

## **ADDITIONAL CARE HINTS**

### **Cleanliness**

Puppies and kittens without a mother can get pretty messy! It is important that you do your best to keep them as clean as possible – one way to accomplish this is to stroke each puppy or kitten with a warm, damp cloth, using short strokes to mimic the mother's tongue. A flea comb may be used to remove dried feces or food from the fur. Be sure to dry the puppy or kitten well so he won't get a chill. Be sure to check each puppy or kitten thoroughly from one end to the other – sometimes dried feces can become caked on the underside of the tail or between their toes. Dried feces may be softened and removed by dipping the puppy or kitten's back end into a basin of warm water and carefully combing through the coat with the flea comb. Many puppies and kittens will not even notice that they are partially wet, but some will protest violently and scramble to escape, so beware of sharp little claws. (It's always a good idea to trim the nails before the bath.)

### **Nail Trimming**

We strongly urge you to trim your foster animals' claws on a regular basis. Besides helping to reduce snags and scratches (on your furniture, clothing, and your own skin!), regular nail trimming – once a week, more or less – can help socialize your fosters. The handling they receive during this procedure will help them get used to being gently restrained and worked with. Many animals who grow up without this type of regular maintenance will be difficult to handle as adults; your efforts in this regard will help your fosters to be well adapted and easier for their future owners to manage.

### **Common Sense**

Caring for puppies and kittens mostly requires common sense and patience. In most cases you can use your good judgment. Knowing your foster animals will probably find a permanent, loving home, you have the chance now to begin teaching your fosters good habits. Even though you may not mind this certain behavior, the animal's permanent home might:

- Don't feed foster animals from the table.
- Don't feed foster animals table scraps.

- Remember, canned food should only be fed if necessary during the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> week of age. Puppies and kittens should be able to eat dry food by 7 weeks of age, even if it has to be soaked in warm water.
- Discourage mouthing or play biting in both puppies and kittens.
- Discourage kittens from climbing on counter tops, kitchen tables, drapes, etc. Keep a squirt bottle handy.
- Discourage puppies from sleeping on furniture or beds. Designate an area with warm bedding just for them.

## SOCIALIZATION

One of the most important parts of your job as a foster parent is to convince your foster animal(s) that humans are kind and loving. Some puppies and kittens will adjust quickly to you and their new environment, but to some, you may seem like a strange and frightening giant! To make their transition into your home an easy one, you will need to give foster animal a day or so to accustom themselves to their new surroundings.

The principles of socializing are the same for all puppies and kittens – love them and they will respond. An outgoing, friendly kitten or puppy can be cuddled and played with freely. The less social ones will need some encouragement. Try sitting on the floor with a puppy or kitten held against your chest, supported underneath, and facing outwards, so he can't see how big and scary you are. Stroke him and speak gently, telling him how cute and brave and fabulous he is. Continue this for about 30 seconds and then put him down before he starts squirming. You want this to be a pleasant experience. Sometimes holding a pair together helps – they seem to reassure each other. If your puppies or kittens are fearful and run away from you when you approach, try sitting on the floor near them and let them come to you. This is a lot less intimidating to them than to see a pair of big scary feet walking towards them.

There is no such thing as a “bad” puppy or kitten. Even if your litter doesn't enjoy being held and cuddled. If they will tolerate being stroked and don't cower under the sofa, they will make someone a wonderful pet. Some of the most aloof puppies and kittens grow up to be the most friendly and loving adults.

Some adult animals that need socialization will require even more patience and understanding. Dogs that need socialization will benefit greatly from being around other dogs that are comfortable with people. Even more important to socializing a dog that is timid or scared is exercise. Exercise at the end of a leash is extremely important in creating social standing for your foster dog. Please be certain that in walking your foster dog that they are walking beside or behind you. This positioning will reinforce that you are leading them and they will be more comfortable following you than acting as the leader.

Also, do not reinforce behavior such as fear, nervousness or aggression by touching, talking or coddling the dog when they exhibit any of these behaviors. While it is very natural to want to pet or comfort them when they are scared or timid, this in fact is encouraging them to continue with that behavior. Rather you should ignore such behavior and act like whatever is causing them to act this way is nothing. The more you demonstrate that it's nothing, the more they will sense this from you and eventually act the same way. Take them for a walk. You should try and remain relaxed, calm but assertive as you walk them to give them confidence in you. Eventually this will encourage them to relax. When they relax or show any calmness, give them lots of positive attention, pets and words of praise.

Unfortunately, while these animals need and deserve lots of love, it does not fix behavior problems (if this were the case we would all have perfect children). However calm assertive leadership will. So show them lots of calm leadership and then show them lots of love when they respond with their own calm, relaxed behavior.

## READY FOR A FOREVER HOME

You have survived the past few weeks, and that bittersweet day has arrived. Your foster animal is ready to take the next step towards their forever home. Whether they are being adopted, returning to the shelter or being transferred to one of the rescue groups we work so closely with, your job as foster parent for this lucky animal is almost over. But before they leave your care, there are few last things you can do for your foster.

The first is to make certain that they are healthy enough to be placed. Especially in cases where they are going to rescue, it is especially important that they not have any illness that can be transferred to other animals also being transported. As normally our animals are transported in a cargo van with several other animals in close proximity disease such as upper respiratory is easily passed between animals in these close quarters. So make sure that you contact the Foster Care Coordinator if you see any signs of illness, even if it is the morning they are due to leave.

Second, make certain your foster has received all vaccinations or treatments they are due. If not, inform the Foster Care Coordinator or the Shelter as soon as possible.

Next, it is also very helpful for the new owner of your foster to benefit from what you have learned about the animal during their time in your home. Please feel free to take the opportunity to share your insights via a letter to their new owner. You can also include your mailing address or e-mail so that they may correspond with you about the progress of your foster after they have been adopted. Know that in some cases, new owners may not choose to correspond after the fact. However your letter can help make the transition to their new home easier if you can share with them all that you know about your foster. It's the last gift you will give your foster and their new owner, so please consider it. Also you might send with them a favorite or special toy. This can make their new home feel more like home.

Lastly, the final step is to remember to pat yourself on the back for having done such a wonderful thing. Your hard work and loving care has paid off and you've quite literally been a life-saver. We sincerely thank you for giving the gift of life to those animals who might not have been so lucky without you. All fosters realize a sadness when one of their animals leaves their home for their next, but there is also great fulfillment and happiness in knowing what a difference you make in an animal's life. Remember that and share it with your next foster.

## THE FOSTER CARE PROVIDER CHECKLIST

- ❑ Must meet the qualifications of an volunteer, attend a volunteer orientation and volunteer for two hours in the shelter before applying to be a foster.
- ❑ Must meet the qualifications of an adopter including agreeing to allowing landlord checks and complying with landlord restrictions.
- ❑ Must agree that all family members of the household be in agreement about opening the home to fostering, and will follow the guidelines for animal care given by the Foster Care representative.
- ❑ Must agree to foster only one animal or litter per household at any one time unless pre-approved facilities are available to sufficiently keep animals/litters separate from each other.
- ❑ Must agree that a litter is defined as a group of animals born at the same time from one mother.
- ❑ Must agree that, unless prior approval is requested and granted, no animal from any other organization will be fostered while fostering for the HSOP.
- ❑ Must agree to a home check upon the request of the Foster Care Coordinator.
- ❑ Must complete and sign a Foster Care Application before acceptance as a Foster caregiver.
- ❑ Must agree that any dog(s) or puppies fostered will be kept indoors unless otherwise discussed and approved by the Foster Care Coordinator.
- ❑ Must agree that any cat(s) or kittens fostered will be kept indoors at all times.
- ❑ Must agree to meet with the Foster Care Coordinator when requested.
- ❑ Must agree to meet with potential adopters to allow them to meet your foster animal.
- ❑ Must agree to keep all household pets fully vaccinated to avoid their contracting disease from fostered animals.
- ❑ Must agree that fostered animals should be isolated from household pets during at least the first week of care.
- ❑ Must agree that the HSOP will not be responsible for veterinary care of household pets or medical care of humans contracting diseases from foster animals.
- ❑ Must agree to provide a nutritious diet to the foster(s), following the recommendations of the Foster Care Coordinator.
- ❑ Must agree to contact the Foster Care Coordinator at the point of any medical difficulty with any foster animal.
- ❑ Must agree that all decisions made by medical staff and/or shelter management are final.
- ❑ Must agree to immediately report any bites and/or aggressive incidents with a foster animal to the Foster Care Coordinator.
- ❑ Must agree that all foster animals are the property of the HSOP, and must be relinquished to the shelter upon request.