**Top Tips for Foster Parents**

* Check in regularly with Paws and Claws staff. Facebook messenger is an easy way to get a hold of staff- even after hours.
* 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.
* Please ask for any supplies or help you might need.
* 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, 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 us 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. Calorie- and nutrient-dense supplements are available 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.

**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 us 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 our staff 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 or antibiotics 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.
* Fleas or flea dirt (black pepper-like substance in the fur). A topical is usually applied if fleas are noticed at the shelter. If you see flea dirt, we can check records and decide on the next treatment option.
* **This is a resource on infection control in the home:**

**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.

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 may 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. Contact the shelter 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**

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

* Flea and tick preventatives
* FVRCP vaccination or boosters
* Nutracal- or other high calorie, nutrient dense supplements
* Otomite or Acarexx or other ear mite treatments
* Wormers
* Antibiotic eye ointment
* Common antibiotics

**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 the Huntsville Veterinarian Clinic, but any time a cat has to undergo anesthesia for a procedure he should be altered at the same time. Hernias can also be repaired then.

**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.

Pyrantel is the wormer usually given to cats and kittens. The dose is 0.1 mL per lb. An adult of 10 lbs. would receive 1 mL, a kitten weighing 1 lb. would get 0.1 mL. Worming should start between 2-4 weeks. Pyrantel treats roundworms or Ascarids and hookworms, which are very common in kittens. Different worms/parasites require different medications.

A second dose of wormer must be given 10-14 days after the first dose.

Since Pyrantel 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 the shelter 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 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**

**Showcasing Your Foster**

**Web Presence**

If the 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.

You are also welcome to promote the cat on your own social media. Please add in a link to our website so potential adopters can fill out an application- thepetshelter.org

**Photos**

If your cat’s picture is not yet on the Web site, then you can take some yourself and send them to us on Facebook, or we can take pictures either at the shelter or at your home.

* **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**

 **resource/saving-lives-adoption-marketing-foster-care/tips-presenting-your-adoptable-animals-well**

 **aspcapro.org/blog/2014/06/12/tip-week-all-your-selfie**

**Getting to Adoption**

Once pictures and stories are posted, calls or applications will come into the shelter and we will set up appointment times that work for you, the potential adopter, and staff.

**Adoption Events**

Your animal may take part of one of our adoption events, especially if you have a whole litter! You and your family are welcome to come to the event and talk to potential adopters about the animals you have fostered and their personalities.

**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 have them contact the shelter directly by calling or at thepetshelter.org. Shelter staff 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.

Please remind them that cats can live over 15 years, and that this is a lifetime commitment! What will they do if they move? Travel? If the cat gets sick?

**Based on material generously shared by Seattle Animal Shelter**

**ASPCApro.org/ambassadors**

**Supplies**

* Food
* Litter
* Crate
* Bedding
* Comb or brush
* Litter scoop
* Litterbox
* Kitchen weight scale
* Cat scratcher
* Pet carrier
* Cat toy variety pack
* Wipes
* Nesting box (tall enough to contain kittens, mama can exit)
* Cat treats for socialization

Please write down items that will need to be returned to the shelter \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_