

FOSTER CARE MANUAL TABLE OF CONTENTS

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A special thank you to the Michigan Humane Society who gave us permission to use their Foster Care Manual and tailor it to our needs as well as Mary Hitchings who facilitated the rewriting of the Foster Care Manual.

Ali Balcer August, 2010

Contact Names and Numbers

Please call the Foster Program Coordinator Sunday through Thursday between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. with questions, concerns, or to schedule veterinary or other check-ups.

Foster Program Coordinator:
Hannah Workman
Desk: (207) 626-3491 ext. 102
Cell: (207) 446-9316

On days when the Foster Program Coordinator is unavailable, call the following staff members at KVHS:

Melanie Martinez (primary) (207) 626-3491 ext. 111

Emergency Protocol and Contact Information:

On occasion, foster animals have medical emergencies that happen outside of the normal hours of operation. In the case of an after-hours medical emergency, please contact the Foster Program Coordinator at (207) 446-9316. The Foster Care Program Coordinator carries the Foster cell phone and will return calls shortly if the phone is not immediately answered.

The contact person will direct you to either meet them at the shelter where they will administer the appropriate care, or they will direct you to a veterinary facility. Please note that if you decide to take the foster animal directly to an emergency veterinary facility without prior approval from KVHS, KVHS will not be responsible for any of the costs incurred.

Choosing Foster Candidates

Not every animal is eligible for the foster program. Animals available for foster care are those who are expected to be deemed adoptable upon completion of a term of foster care. Animals with severe health or behavior problems that would prevent their being adopted even after specialized care are not placed into the foster program.

Reasons animals are placed in foster care include, but are not limited to: weight gain, socialization, young age, wound healing, minor injuries, cruelty cases, URI (upper respiratory infection) and other illnesses/injuries at the discretion of KVHS staff. KVHS management retains discretionary authority for selecting animals for foster care. Animals will not be considered for foster care if any of the following apply:

- Represent a threat to public health or safety
- Have medical or behavioral problems in which the condition, prognosis or clinical course is unclear
- Have conditions (medical or behavioral) requiring an unreasonable investment of time and expense by the Kennebec Valley Humane Society, the foster parent or the potential adopter
- Have prognoses of poor quality of life or chronic pain and suffering

The following guidelines will also be followed:

An animal fostered for socialization will be at the shelter's discretion. If a state of overload (the number of animals in the animal care center exceeds available cage space) is identified by management, animals that are allowed to be fostered must stay in the foster homes until the overload status is removed. The Foster Care Coordinator and Director of Operations will be evaluating the overload status on a continuous basis.

Suggested Supplies

The following is a list of supplies recommended for the care and maintenance of your foster animals.

- Blankets and towels
- Paper towels and rags
- Bowls- ceramic or stainless steel are easiest to sanitize
- Grooming supplies- brushes, combs and flea combs
- Litter boxes- small, low sided litter boxes for kittens; covered litter boxes work well for adult cats
- Litter- use unscented, non-clumping clay litter for kittens
- Sheets or tarps- to protect floors
- Scratching post for cats
- Stain and odor remover- Nature's Miracle works very well
- Toys that can be cleaned and sanitized (rubber, nylon, etc.)
- Kongs- hard rubber chew toys that can be filled with treats for dogs and puppies
- Bleach
- Disinfectant
- Baby gates
- Food specific to the animal you are fostering (i.e. kitten chow, cat chow, etc.)

This list is not exhaustive. The above supplies are the basics that will help with dogs, puppies, cats and kittens. Not all of the supplies will be needed if you only foster certain types of animals. The foster caregiver's best judgment should be used when obtaining supplies.

Picking Up Your New Foster Animal

The Foster Program Coordinator will contact a list of potential foster parents by phone or email when an animal is in need of foster care. The first foster caregiver who responds to the request and accepts the foster assignment will receive the animal. You always have the option to decline a foster assignment for any reason. Foster assignments are generally made for two to 8 weeks with the option of extending your assignment if needed. Once you agree to foster an animal, you are responsible for arranging a pick-up time as soon as possible and driving to KVHS. You will sign the foster care contract and receive instructions specific to your foster animal if necessary.

Dog and Cat Proofing Your Home

It is important to ensure that your home and foster room are safe; animals can do the most unlikely things.

- All cleaning supplies and medications should be kept out of the reach of jumping and climbing cats and dogs.
- Place all small chewable items out of reach.
- Put all socks, shoes etc. away – they are tempting to chew.
- Block off all small areas and hiding places.
- Trash cans should be kept covered.
- Wires and mini blind cords should be placed out of reach.
- Drapery and shower curtains should be placed out of reach.
- Count your foster animals when opening and closing closet doors.
- Many house and garden plants are poisonous. Keep household plants out of reach and supervise your animals outside.
- Make sure your foster dog will not jump the fence before leaving him or her unsupervised in the yard.
- Toys must be safe! Avoid any toys that have small parts attached to them (i.e. eyes, ribbons, yarn, feathers, etc.). Also avoid soft rubber toys that can be chewed apart and squeaky toys.
- Protect your home from being damaged by using sheets, tarps and newspaper to protect carpet and floors. ANY unprotected surface can potentially be damaged.

Bringing Your Foster Animal Home

Ideally, set up the area where your foster animal will be staying before you bring your foster home. New foster animals should be kept separate from your existing companion animals. Cats with litters of kittens should be kept separate for their entire stay. If you have no other animals in your home, introduce your foster animal to one room of the house at first. Try to have homecoming be a quiet experience for the animal. Cats and kittens need a cozy, secure place with a bed to snuggle up in. The bed can simply be a low box with a blanket in it. Show each cat and kitten where the litter box is located. Dogs and puppies should have a crate. Allow your foster animals to acclimate to their new environment in a safe and quiet place. Give them plenty of time.

Health and Medical Issues

Even if your foster animals appear healthy when you pick them up from KVHS, they may be incubating a disease such as upper respiratory infection or kennel cough. It is very important that your companion animals of the same species be current on all vaccines for their own protection and well-being. Due to the increased chance of exposure to animals with diseases, your veterinarian might recommend vaccines that are not routinely given. It is important to observe your foster animal for any signs of illness. Warning signs to watch for include:

- Sneezing and or coughing
- Green mucus from the nose or eyes
- Squinting or crusting over of eyes
- Gagging /wheezing
- Tiring easily
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Straining to urinate or defecate
- Bleeding from any part of the body
- Twitching abnormally
- Loss or decrease in appetite
- Change in attitude or behavior

- Lethargic or depressed
- Breathing heavily
- Rectal temperature over 102.5 degrees
- If your foster animal develops severe or bloody diarrhea and vomiting, contact the Foster Program Coordinator immediately

Please be prepared with the following information when you bring your foster animal to KVHS:

- o When were the last signs of illness observed?
- o Is the animal drinking regularly?
- o Any diarrhea?
- o Activity level
- o Date of last medications given
- o Is the animal eating regularly?

NOTE: If you are able to cover the cost of veterinary care for your foster animal with your own veterinarian, please let the Foster Program Coordinator know.

Common Illnesses and Medical Conditions Seen in Foster Animals

URI- Upper Respiratory Infection can infect dogs and cats. Cats cannot give URI to dogs, nor can dogs give it to cats, but it can be spread within the same species. Symptoms include sneezing, coughing, discharge from the nose or eyes, lethargy, loss of appetite and elevated temperature.

Diarrhea- Generally, feces should be brown and formed. Diarrhea can be a symptom of many different illnesses and parasites. Diarrhea can also be caused by overfeeding, especially in puppies. If your foster animal develops diarrhea, you will need to bring a sample of the most normal part of the stool into KVHS so that the necessary diagnostic tests can be run. Feed a bland diet of cooked white rice and boiled chicken (3 parts rice to 1 part meat) until the diarrhea subsides.

Dehydration- Animals with diarrhea can quickly become dehydrated. To check for dehydration, pull up gently on the skin at the scruff of the neck. If it bounces back quickly when you let go, hydration is fine. If it does not go back or goes back slowly, your foster animal is dehydrated. Call the Foster Care Program Coordinator to see how to proceed.

Fleas- Fleas can affect dogs and cats. A foster animal with fleas will be given a general flea treatment called Frontline. Do not use any over the counter flea treatments at all. If you notice fleas within a week of having the animal in your home, call the Foster Program Coordinator. Although we do try to prevent fleas, we recommend that all of your pets be on a flea preventative.

Worms- Your foster will be tested and, if necessary, treated for worms before coming to your home. If you detect worms in your foster's stool, contact the Foster Program Coordinator to make arrangements for treatment. Tapeworms resemble a grain of rice, and roundworms resemble spaghetti.

Administering Medications

Ask the Foster Care Program Coordinator how to administer medications specific to your foster animal. If you have never given a cat or dog a pill or liquid medication, make sure you have an Animal Care Technician show you the proper technique before taking your foster animal home.

Care of Puppies and Kittens

Please let the Foster Program Coordinator know if your foster animal is developing behavior problems.

General Information:

Puppies and kittens younger than 4 weeks are usually not fostered without their mother. Most mothers do a very good job of feeding, cleaning and caring for their newborns. However, it is important that you be observant to ensure that no problems arise. A puppy or kitten's condition can change very quickly.

If you have a litter of puppies or kittens, it is important that you are able to identify them. Make a list of their names, and any distinguishing markings so you can keep a record of their progress.

Once puppies have had their first vaccination and are in their foster home (not at the shelter), they can be walked in areas where there is not much dog traffic. Avoid dog parks with puppies that are less than 4 months old.

The area where you keep your foster puppies and kittens must be clean, dry, warm and free of drafts. Puppies and kittens younger than 2-3 weeks cannot maintain their own body temperature and can die if they become chilled.

Puppies and kittens with mothers should be kept separate from other animals in the house. The mother may be protective and can attack other animals or people if she feels threatened.

Use towels or blankets for bedding. Bedding should be changed daily (or more frequently if necessary). The mother will try to keep the area clean, but that can be a difficult chore, especially with a large litter.

The mother will take care of the babies' elimination needs by frequently cleaning/licking them. Puppies and kittens begin eliminating on their own without stimulation from their mother at about 3 weeks of age.

Failure to thrive: Rarely, one or more puppies or kittens in a litter will begin to "fade" after a week or two of life. They will stop growing, begin to lose weight, stop nursing and stop crawling. They may cry continuously and lose the ability to stay upright. There is no clear cause for the condition. Puppies and kittens fade very quickly and often do not recover, even with intensive care. Contact the Foster Program Coordinator immediately if you suspect a problem.

Feeding

Nursing mothers should be fed dry puppy or kitten food mixed with some wet food. They need to be fed more often and in larger quantities than usual.

Starting at about 3-4 weeks of age, most puppies and kittens will begin trying to eat on their own from their mother's dish. At this time, make sure the dish is large enough for the litter to gather around or use multiple dishes.

Mix ground dry puppy or kitten food with water and a small amount of canned food to make a semi-solid mixture.

Some puppies and kittens may need to be introduced to the food. Place a small amount on your finger and allow the puppy or kitten to lick it off or place a small amount on their lips. Slightly warming the food makes it more palatable.

Feedings should be done at least 2-3 times a day. Several feedings throughout the day will ensure that your puppies and kittens do not overeat. Overeating can cause vomiting or diarrhea.

It is important to make sure that each puppy and kitten is eating. If it appears that one or more puppy or kitten is not making its way to the dish or is getting squeezed out, set up another dish away from the first and closely monitor that puppy or kitten's intake.

Do not feed cow's milk to a puppy or kitten.

Remove the mother during puppy and kitten feeding times so she will not eat their food. It is also helpful to remove the mother 1-2 hours prior to feeding time to stimulate the puppies and kittens' appetites. Puppies and kittens will continue to occasionally nurse during this time.

Litter Box Training

By about 4 weeks of age, kittens are ready to begin using the litter box.

Make sure you have a low sided litter box for the kittens to get in and out of easily.

Start them off by putting them in the litter box and scratching the litter with their paw. The kittens will pick this up very quickly. While they are learning to use the litter box, put them in it several times a day for a couple days if necessary.

Kittens who are unfamiliar with the litter box will taste the litter. Use unscented, non-clumping clay litter for young kittens. Ingested clumping litter will cause illness.

More than one litter box may be necessary depending on the size of the litter.

Kittens are very messy when first learning to use a litter box. They will step in their excrement and track it through the room. At this time, it is especially important to keep all surfaces clean and covered.

Kitten Behavior

Kittens are very curious and like to run, jump and climb. Remove all breakable and dangerous items from their reach. Kittens love to play with toys of any kind. Even a crumpled piece of paper can provide amusement. A single kitten will likely cry a lot the first couple of nights. Make the kitten's area as cozy as possible by providing a blanket and stuffed animal.

Puppy Behavior

Nipping is a common behavior in puppies. A loud squeal will usually get their attention so you can give them a proper toy to chew. Try to start your foster puppies off on the right foot by keeping them off of the furniture, not letting them jump, etc. This will make their transition to a new home easier. A single puppy will cry a lot the first couple of nights. Make the crate as comfortable as possible by providing a blanket and stuffed animal.

Socialization of Puppies and Kittens

Beginning at 3 weeks of age, it is important to begin handling puppies and kittens frequently. Make sure each puppy and kitten is handled and played with regularly. Gradual exposure to new and different things and people; sights and normal household sounds is important to ensure that your foster animal is well adjusted. Puppies and kittens learn to play by wrestling with their littermates.

Care Of Cats

Feeding Cats:

Dry food in an appropriate amount should be available at all times. A serving of canned food can be given once or twice a day. Milk should NEVER be given to cats. Fresh water should always be available. Cats should be fed away from their litter box.

Cat Behavior:

Cats should be provided with a scratching post or other suitable surface to scratch. Give your foster cat a variety of toys to play with. Foster cats should never be allowed outside. Contact the Foster Program Coordinator for suggestions and advice about specific behavior issues.

Care Of Dogs

Feeding Dogs:

Dogs should be fed twice daily at the same time every day. The amount of food depends on the dog's age and weight. If your foster dog is unwilling to eat, you can mix in some warm water or a SMALL amount of canned food. Fresh water should always be available.

Dog Behavior:

If your foster dog exhibits fearful behavior, do not give in to the temptation to comfort him or her. It is only natural to try to make him or her feel better, but what you are doing is reinforcing the message that being afraid is okay. Ignore the fearful behaviors and be alert for indications of curiosity or interest so you can praise him or her enthusiastically. Providing chew toys helps to relieve boredom and alleviate stress. Teaching your foster dog basic manners will help your dog become more adoptable. Dogs should not be left outside for long periods of time. Even if a dog is housetrained, an accident upon arriving at home is common. Contact the Foster Program Coordinator for any suggestions or advice on specific behavior issues.

Sanitizing Your Home Between Foster Animals

In order to prevent disease and parasite infestations in your home, thoroughly clean areas where the foster animal has stayed. Wash bedding in hot water, detergent and bleach. Discard non-washable surface toys. Disinfect all washable surfaces with a mild bleach and water solution (bleach/water ratio of 1:32 or 4oz of bleach per gallon of water is recommended). Bleach solutions should be prepared as needed, because they lose their strength after 24 hours. Bleach is inactive in the presence of organic matter so clean up dirt, hair, feces, etc. before using bleach to disinfect. Bleach solution must stay in contact with the surface being sanitized for at least 10 minutes to be effective. Vacuum all carpeted areas. Soak toys in bleach water for 20 minutes. Scrub and bleach crates, carriers, litter scoops, food bowls, and litter boxes. Clean any urine or feces soiled areas with an enzyme cleaner immediately to remove any odors. Regularly clean up any waste in the yard to decrease the risk of spreading disease.

Quarantine Periods

Sometimes an animal is sent into a home before evidence of a serious disease has manifested. Quarantine periods are used to allow infectious diseases to die off in the environment. This protects future foster animals from being infected with the virus or disease. Specific quarantine periods are as follows:

- Feline Leukemia/FIV : 2 weeks
- FIP or Canine Distemper: 6 months
- Panleukopenia or Parvovirus: 6 months

If a foster animal is infected with one of the above illnesses, the foster parent will not be allowed to bring another foster into the home for the designated quarantine period.

Adopting a Foster Animal

While it is tempting to adopt your first or subsequent foster animals (and we certainly do allow it), you will be more valuable to the program if you continue to foster new animals rather than adopting and then ceasing to foster. Foster caregivers are special volunteers with advanced training. We never seem to have enough trained foster caregivers. Losing even one reduces the resources available to animals in our care. Learning to bond with a foster animal, seeing the animal grow and thrive under your care, and then passing the animal on to an adoptive home is immensely rewarding. It is also sad to see a foster animal leave. Give yourself time to grieve the loss, but also think about the animal's new life ahead. Please think very carefully before requesting to adopt a foster animal. Would you have been interested in adopting if you hadn't fostered?

Ready for Adoption!

Once your foster care animal is returned to KVHS they will be spayed/neutered and ready for adoption. Occasionally you will be asked to take them home for a short period of time after surgery to recuperate in a quiet environment. If at any time during the foster care period someone becomes interested in adopting one of your foster animals please let the Foster Care Program Coordinator know. The interested party will need to come in to KVHS and fill out an adoption application. All applications are subject to approval by the adoptions counselors.

Occasionally after foster animals are returned to KVHS they become ill. At such a time you will be called and asked if you are willing to take the animal back for a short period of time until they are well and ready to come back to the facility for adoption. There is no requirement to take a sick animal back into your home.

Thank you for choosing to participate in our Foster Care Program. Enjoy your time with your foster animal and we thank you for your volunteer service!

If the Unthinkable Happens

While we always hope for the best with foster animals, sometimes not so great things can happen. If your foster animal gets outside and is lost, please call the Foster Care Coordinator immediately. You may also call your town Animal Control Officer or Police Department to report your missing animal. Make sure to tell the Foster Care Coordinator that you have done this or ask them to make the call for you. If an animal in your care dies call the Foster Care Coordinator. The animal will need to be brought back to KVHS where it can be examined and the body properly taken care of.