

## Top Tips for Foster Parents

- 🐾 Check in regularly with the RHSPCA's foster coordinator. Email [rescueinfo@rhspca.org](mailto:rescueinfo@rhspca.org) anytime.
  - Call the shelter at **540-434-5270** during business hours Mon-Sat 10-4 and Wed 5-7 pm.
  - We will provide you with our **Emergency Contact** number during Foster Orientation.
- 🐾 Contact the shelter immediately if your cat/kitten stops eating.
- 🐾 Kittens crash fast, so contact the shelter 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. If not, call the shelter immediately.
- 🐾 Never use clumping litter with kittens under six months of age.
- 🐾 Wash your hands and change your shirt after handling sick animals to prevent the spread of illness.
- 🐾 Never let your cat run loose outside. Take steps to guard against escapes.
- 🐾 We generally feed **Purina Cat & Kitten Chow** to our cats. To prevent tummy upset, we recommend you do the same. We are grateful to our fosters for purchasing food for the pets in their care!
- 🐾 It's a good idea to keep your foster separate from your own pets for at least a few days to monitor the foster for signs and symptoms of illness. The RHSPCA is not responsible for and will not treat illnesses in your own pets. For more info: [ASPCApro.org/infection-control-foster-homes](http://ASPCApro.org/infection-control-foster-homes)

## Health & Wellness

When you pick up your foster cat or kittens, the shelter will inform you of any health issues we're aware of at the time. It's possible the cat or kittens are coming down with something or may contract an illness after leaving the shelter that we were previously unaware of. It's important for you to get to know your foster and observe their usual habits and behavior so you can notice if something is "off" about them. This may be an indication that he or she is not feeling well.

### Contact the shelter immediately if you notice any of these symptoms:

- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 🐾 loose stool or diarrhea          | 🐾 red or inflamed eyes  |
| 🐾 occasional or continual vomiting | 🐾 discharge or swelling in one or both eyes                             |
| 🐾 repeated frequent sneezing       | 🐾 not eating or drinking for more than a few days (one day for kittens) |
| 🐾 yellow or green nasal discharge  | 🐾 extreme lethargy for more than a day                                  |
| 🐾 bad odor from nasal area         | 🐾 obvious distress or pain  |
| 🐾 choking or wheezing              | 🐾 pronounced behavior changes   |
| 🐾 open-mouth breathing             | 🐾 extreme lethargy that lasts 2-3 days                                  |
| 🐾 shortness of breath              |   |

For **kittens** younger than 3 weeks old contact the shelter immediately if you notice extreme lethargy, labored breathing, open mouth breathing, not nursing or taking the bottle, and crawling away from the litter/mother.

If something happens or your foster doesn't seem right, and you think to yourself, "I wonder if I should call the shelter about this," then the answer is probably, "Yes." We would prefer you call early and deal with a potential problem (or no problem at all) before it progresses than wait too long and have the problem get worse.

## 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 (available from a vet's office), chicken broth or even tuna in water 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.

Nutraceutical is a high-calorie and nutrient-dense supplement that even sick cats will often accept when not otherwise eating. This can be purchased from a pet store.

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 foster cat is extremely lethargic, please contact the shelter right away. The shelter can administer subcutaneous fluids if needed.

## Veterinarian Visits

Many common and basic animal ailments can be treated at the shelter. Please contact us first to discuss whether veterinary care is needed. There are times it may be necessary for your foster animal to visit a veterinarian. The RHSPCA works with a limited number of vets in and around the local area. If the visit is pre-authorized, the vet will bill the shelter directly so there are no out-of-pocket vet costs to the foster care provider. If kittens are eating and active, there is likely no urgency in seeing a vet.

**Always** check with the shelter **first** before taking a foster animal to the vet. Call the shelter at **540-434-5270** during business hours Mon-Sat 10-4 and Wed 5-7 pm. If your foster animal experiences an emergency outside of the shelter's normal business hours call our **Emergency Number**. All vet visits for foster animals must be pre-authorized by the RHSPCA. You are responsible for paying for any vet visits made without pre-authorization.

## Vaccination & Deworming

Kittens need to be started on vaccines around six weeks of age. Boosters need to be given on a regular basis 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. We will inform you of when any boosters are due at the time you pick up your foster cat. Please make arrangements to be available during our normal business hours on the day the boosters are due so that we can vaccinate the kittens on schedule.

Strongid is a wormer given to cats and kittens to treat roundworms, hookworms and whipworms. A second dose of wormer must be given 10 days to two weeks after the first dose. 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. Different worms/parasites require different medications. If you happen to see worms in your foster cat's feces or vomit, please contact the shelter for guidance. We may ask you to bring in a sample of feces to help us determine the right course of treatment.

## Socialization

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

If possible, we aim 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 more 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.

Shy or fearful kittens may require some extra time and patience to gain trust in humans. Keep a shy kitten in a room with no inaccessible hiding spots. Making frequent visits to the room and just sitting gets kitty used to your presence. Try 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.

## Purrsonality

You will get to know your foster cat(s) better than anyone at the shelter. One way you can help her get adopted is to write a bio that accurately describes the cat's personality. A good story makes a big difference in the amount of attention a cat gets, so be descriptive!

Try to include things like:

- whether the cat likes to be petted or held
- is a lap cat or not
- purrs easily or loudly
- is vocal or quiet
- is active and playful or calm
- has good litter box manners
- uses a scratching post
- prefers any type of toys (laser, catnip)
- has experience with other animals or kids
- is a door darter or an ankle weaver

If the cat has some bad habits, this should be discussed with the adoption coordinator and can be relayed to potential adopters. The bio should generate interest, not turn people away. An accurate description is always better than attempting to "jazz up" the cat. We don't want to mislead people; however we really try to focus on the positive. Please email the bio to the Coordinator at [rescueinfo@rhspca.org](mailto:rescueinfo@rhspca.org).

Some of our cats will be selected for transfer to one of our rescue partners. This means some foster cats may not go up for adoption locally, which means we won't list them on our website. The foster coordinator will tell you if this is the case as soon as they are aware. It's still helpful for us to know about their personality so we can pass on any relevant info to the rescue.

## Questions?

Contact us at **540-434-5270** during the shelter's business hours Mon-Sat 10-4 and Wed 5-7 pm or email [rescueinfo@rhspca.org](mailto:rescueinfo@rhspca.org) anytime.

For urgent questions after hours, call our **Emergency Number**.