

Top Tips for Foster Parents

- ✿ Check in regularly with the RHSPCA's foster coordinator:
 - Contact **Jo Benjamin** at **540-434-5270** or rescueinfo@rhspca.org (Mon-Sat 10-4 and Wed 5-7)
 - We will provide you with our **Emergency Number** during Foster Orientation.
- ✿ Ask for advice if your puppy/dog has stopped eating.
- ✿ If your dog seems sick, check immediately for hydration – she should be drinking water, urinating, have elastic skin tone and a moist mouth.
- ✿ Wash your hands and change your shirt after handling sick animals to prevent spread of illness.
- ✿ Never let your dog or puppies run loose outside. Always keep a collar on and guard against escapes.
- ✿ Give your foster dog some space while eating. Keep bowl far away from any other eating pets.
- ✿ We generally feed **Purina Dog & Puppy Chow** to our dogs. 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 may be 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

Health & Wellness

When you pick up your foster dog, the shelter will inform you of any health issues we're aware of at the time. It's possible the puppies or dog 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 indicate that he or she is not feeling well. Your foster dog may not display any signs of illness until quite ill. Therefore, it's up to you to observe your dog closely each day.

Contact the shelter immediately if you notice any of the following:

Puppies under 12 weeks of age:

- Diarrhea that lasts for more than a day
- Vomiting & diarrhea for more than 6 hours
- Vomiting more than once in an hour
- Not eating for more than 12-24 hours
- Lethargy without fever for more than 12 hours
- Lethargy with fever

Dogs older than 12 weeks of age:

- Diarrhea that lasts for more than 1-2 days
- Vomiting & diarrhea for more than 1 day
- Vomiting more than 2-3 times in an hour
- Not eating for more than 24 hours
- Lethargy without fever for more than a day
- Lethargy with fever

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.

Veterinarian Visits

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.

Always check with the shelter **first** before taking a foster animal to the vet. 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.

Diarrhea

Diarrhea can be caused by several factors, including stress, change of diet, poor diet, eating garbage, parasites and viruses. If your foster dog has diarrhea for more than one day, call the shelter to discuss it. If necessary, we may ask you to bring a sample in to the shelter for us to test.

Provide plenty of fresh water since diarrhea can cause dehydration. To check for dehydration, pull the skin up over the shoulder blades. If it snaps back quickly, the dog is not dehydrated. If the skin goes down slowly, then the dog is dehydrated and needs fluids. Call your Coordinator immediately if you suspect your foster is dehydrated. Contact Jo Benjamin at 540-434-5270 or after hours, call our Emergency Number 540-383-8732.

Fleas

Most foster dogs have been treated when arriving at the shelter, but additional flea treatments are available if needed. Regular flea combing is the best way to detect, control and monitor fleas. Vacuum all areas of your house that your foster uses at least every two to three days. Good food, minimal stress, proper hygiene and TLC help keep the dog from getting fleas or an illness.

To check for fleas, inspect your dog daily, including rear groin, belly, tail, neck and under the chin and head. Look also for black specks of flea dirt. If fleas are present, contact the shelter so we can treat as soon as possible. The washing machine on a hot cycle will remove fleas, eggs and dirt.

If your foster dog had fleas, watch his stools for short pieces of white rice that are tapeworms, which come from ingesting fleas. Tapeworms can cause diarrhea. If you see tapeworms, call your Coordinator, who can provide you with medication.

Injured Dogs

Injured foster dogs will have specific needs. They'll most likely be recovering from surgery and will come with veterinary orders. Generally fracture, cast or other surgery patients may need to be confined to a crate or a small room to limit mobility.

This type of foster situation may require you to schedule follow-up appointments with the dog's veterinarian. As with all foster dogs, watch for signs of illness, since injured foster dogs are under additional stress and are more prone to illness. Lots of human contact is important for healing injured dogs. Active play should be limited, but cuddling, petting, talking, brushing and massaging are all good social activities for a recovering animal.

Kennel Cough

Kennel cough is typically a dry, hacking cough. Incubation of kennel cough is 5-10 days; its course is 10-20 days with symptoms generally more marked the first week. Fever, lack of appetite and a yellow-green-brown nasal discharge can indicate secondary infections. Call your Foster Coordinator if any of these symptoms occur. There may be some discharge from the nose and a clear liquid that is coughed up. It's generally a mild, self-limiting illness encountered in all age groups of dogs, but especially in those under unusual stress.

The shelter is much like a child day care – as soon as one dog has a cold, most all the dogs in the shelter get a cold. Just like people who have colds, kennel cough develops when the dog is stressed or when the immune system is compromised. Kennel cough usually goes away as soon as the dog has a warm, quiet and soothing place to sleep, where they can drink lots of water, eat healthy food and receive lots of TLC!

Because kennel cough is contagious, infected dogs should not be around other dogs until they're over their cough. If you have a dog at home and plan to foster a dog with kennel cough, we have found that if your own dog is healthy and has been vaccinated annually, then he will most likely not get sick. Talk to your vet about giving your own dog the Bordetella nasal vaccination. Immunity to kennel cough is usually established 3-4 days after vaccination.

Make sure your foster dog has plenty of fresh water and healthy food. If your dog is not eating, try cooking up something special and smelly such as eggs, chicken or steak. Take short, leashed walks. If you don't see improvement of the cough or cold after 3 days, or if the condition worsens, call your Coordinator.

Strenuous activity can bring on coughing episodes, so limit activity and encourage rest. Even baths can be stressful to the system and should be avoided. However bringing your foster dog into the bathroom while you're taking a shower can be beneficial as the steam can help loosen mucus.

Parvo

Parvo attacks the intestinal tract, white blood cells and heart muscle. Signs of infection are depression, loss of appetite, vomiting, severe diarrhea, fever and sometimes kennel cough symptoms. The illness is contracted through contact with the infected feces of another dog. Call your Coordinator immediately if you believe your foster dog may have this illness.

Parasites

Parasites can cause diarrhea, stomach bloating or vomiting. Parasites include tapeworms, roundworms, hookworms and mange. Tapeworms will look like pieces of rice coming out of your foster dog's anus or in his stool. Round worms and hookworms may be vomited, and roundworms look like spaghetti (hookworms are smaller and rarely distinguishable without the aid of a microscope). Mange is an infestation of tiny mites that bite and cause intense scratching, reddened skin and loss of fur. Only rare cases of mange (sarcoptic) are contagious to humans. If you suspect your foster dog has parasites, call your Coordinator immediately.

Vaccination & Worming

Your foster dog's vaccination and worming history will be given to you. Contact your Coordinator for more information. Your foster dog has had at least one dose of wormer upon arrival to the shelter. If you see worms in the dog's stool, call the shelter for more wormer. You will be instructed on the correct dosage and frequency.

Behavior

Housetraining

Be patient with your foster dog. Even housetrained adult dogs will make mistakes, especially if they've been at the shelter for a long time and have been eliminating in their kennel. If there are smells in your house from another dog or cat, some foster dogs may "mark" their territory. This action should be redirected immediately with a calm "Oops" – then escort him outside where he can finish. You will then want to use some odor neutralizer (like Nature's Miracle) on the areas where the dog "marked" to insure he will not smell and mark that area again.

You can begin to housetrain a puppy at 8 weeks of age. Even if you bring home an adult dog who is housebroken, you will want to follow these guidelines until your foster dog adjusts to his new situation and to your schedule.

Determine where you want your foster dog to eliminate – it could be the backyard, side yard or an indoor spot such as a Pup Head, litter system or one you have designed. Then take him there every time with a spoken command (such as "go potty"). Take him out when he wakes up, after he eats or drinks, after a play session, or at least every 2 hours. Puppies should go out every 45 minutes until you learn their pattern.

Stand with him for 5 minutes. If he eliminates, reward him (with treats, praise, a favorite game and your own special happy dance). If he doesn't go in 5 minutes, take him back inside and try every 15 minutes until he goes. Every time he goes, make sure you reward him!

Supervise the puppy closely while you're inside. If he starts to sniff the floor, or even squats to go, interrupt with a calm "Oops," scoop him up quickly and take him to the approved spot and praise when he finishes. If he eliminates in the house while you're not paying attention, don't correct him – it's not his fault. Clean it up and go back to your schedule. Use an odor neutralizer to get rid of the smell. Never put the dog's face in his mess or yell at him; he won't understand you, and you will only be teaching him fear.

Crate Training

Crates provide safe havens and dens for dogs. They calm them and can help prevent destructive chewing, barking and housetraining mistakes. Puppies should not be crated for more hours than they are months old, plus one. For example, a 4-month-old pup should not be crated longer than 5 hours.

How long an adult dog can be crated will depend on many factors. For example, if your foster dog was left outside, he has never been required to hold it for any period of time. It will take time for this dog to learn to hold it, and you will need to start slowly. Older dogs and dogs with some medical conditions may only be able to successfully hold it for short periods of time. Rigorous exercise should be given before and after any long periods in the crate, and good chew toys should be in the crate at all times. You may want to crate your new foster dog for the first few nights in your bedroom – most of them feel more secure in their crate and it protects your house from accidents.

Crates should never be used as a means of punishment; they're not to be used for keeping puppies under 6 months out of mischief all day either. Crates should be thought of as dog playrooms, just like child playrooms with games and toys. It should be a place dogs like to be and feel safe and secure.

Attention & Playtime

Gentle and calming human contact is important for dogs. Human handling is especially important for the healthy development of puppies. Be sure to give your foster dog several minutes of playtime periodically through the day.

Do not allow children to behave with the foster dog in a manner you would not want the child to behave with a younger sibling. Teach children to leave a dog alone when he is eating, chewing and sleeping. Never allow a child to remove a toy or any other prized possession from a dog.

Do not play tug of war or wrestle with your foster dog. If you have a shy or fearful dog, do not throw a toy toward the dog, because he may think you are throwing things at him and become more fearful. After you have finished playing with a toy, put it away so that you are controlling the toy and the playtime. When giving the dog a toy or treat, have him sit before giving it to him. That way he has to work to get the toy or treat – making it a reward.

Behavior Issues

Many of the behaviors that we find problematic – such as barking, whining, digging, chewing, scavenging and hunting other animals – are really just normal dog behaviors and can be explained as “dogs being dogs.” The easiest way to coexist with our canine companions is to provide more appropriate outlets for these behaviors.

If your foster dog is exhibiting any behavioral issues, ask yourself the questions below:

- Is my foster dog getting enough exercise?
- Is he being left alone for long periods of time?
- Does he have interesting toys to keep his mind engaged and stimulated?
- Is he getting enough attention and playtime?
- Am I reinforcing bad behavior? Some examples include verbally scolding a dog when he is seeking attention or engaging the dog when he uses bad manners to get you to play.
- Does my foster dog have a safe place that is dog-proofed with appropriate chew toys, or am I leaving my own belongings within reach?
- Am I providing specific outlets based on his natural instincts and drives?

We don't expect foster parents to be miracle workers. If your foster dog requires more attention, exercise or training than you can provide, talk to your Coordinator – another foster home might be best for both you and the dog. Regardless of the issue, we don't condone punishment, which will not address the cause of the behavior and in fact it may worsen behavior that's motivated by fear or anxiety.

Punishment may also cause anxiety in dogs who aren't currently fearful. People often believe their dog makes the connection to discipline because he runs and hides or “looks guilty.” But dogs display submissive postures like cowering, running away or hiding when they feel threatened by an angry tone of voice, body posture, or facial expression. Your dog doesn't know what he's done wrong; he only knows that you're upset. Punishment after the fact will not only fail to eliminate the undesirable behavior, but may provoke other undesirable behaviors, too.

Showcasing Your Foster

Adoption Events

Check the shelter's website and Facebook page for details of upcoming adoption events. Plan to attend!

Web Presence

If your dog's picture and biography are already on the shelter's website, feel free to send the coordinator updates and additions as you get to know his personality. A good bio makes a big difference in the number of calls the dog gets, so be descriptive! Try to include things like:

- What does the dog like to do? (play fetch, go for walks, etc.)
- Is he a cuddler or a nuzzler?
- Does he have experience with other animals and children?
- Does he like to play with toys? Which toys are his favorites?

Of course, any cute things that he does or anything you want to point out about his 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 dog has some bad habits, this can be discussed during the first phone conversation. The bio should generate interest, not turn people away. 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.

Photos

If you take some cute photos or videos of your foster dog, please share them with the shelter! We can use these on our website and in social media to help promote the dog to potential adopters.

Getting to Adoption

Out and About

Pack up your pup in her adoption vest and really pound the pavement – visit outdoor festivals and cafes, parks, etc. And be sure to bring a small print out with info on your dog to share with any potential adopters. Feel free to print out the dog's bio and pic from our website www.rhspca.org/dogs. For more helpful tips on marketing your foster dog, see the ASPCA's Adoption Ambassadors website: www.aspcapro.org/ambassadors.

Home Sweet Home

Use your best judgment, coupled with guidelines given to you by your Coordinator, in providing information to potential adopters about your foster dog. You know his needs best and can explain them to possible future owners. If you think you have met someone who might be a good fit, contact the shelter and encourage the adopter to as well so we can initiate the adoption application process.

Questions?

Contact the shelter at **540-434-5270** during business hours Mon-Sat 10-4 and Wed 5-7 or email anytime rescueinfo@rhspca.org. For urgent questions after hours, call our **Emergency Number**.