

Welcome to HSWC



Foster Care Program

Guide for Cat Foster Homes

Top Tips for Foster Parents

- ♥ Always notify the foster office whenever you pick up a new foster cat or adopt one out.
- ♥ Check in regularly with the foster office (this can also be accomplished at foster clinics).
- ♥ Ask for advice if your cat/kitten has stopped eating.
- ♥ Kittens crash fast, so alert the Foster Care 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.
- ♥ Never use clumping clay litter for kittens under four months of age. They must have non-clumping clay or one of the natural litters.
- ♥ Wash your hands and change your shirt after handling sick animals to prevent spread of illness.
- ♥ Keep fosters separate from your own animals (and from other groups of fosters) for AT LEAST 10 days after you take them home, to prevent spread of illness. We can provide medications for foster animals, but we cannot provide it for your own animals, so it's your responsibility to keep your animals safe.
- ♥ Never let your cat run loose outside; guard against escapes.
- ♥ Do not feed seafood flavors of wet food to your kittens. It often causes diarrhea.
- ♥ Routine care for foster animals is provided at foster clinics. Please see flyer for days & times.
- ♥ We have a Foster Care Resources website at www.hswcfostercare.wixsite.com/website. It has pretty much everything you'll need. The password is HSWCFosterFam.

Thank you for participating in the Foster Care Program at the Humane Society of Washington County. Fostering is a wonderful way to contribute to the shelter and its mission by providing love and care to sick, injured or underage animals. By you temporarily caring for these animals in your own home, more kennel space is available for pets ready for adoption. The individualized attention you provide your foster animals is priceless - you are making a lasting impact on their physical and emotional wellbeing.

This manual is a guide to provide you with important information about caring for your foster animals and will clarify many questions or concerns that you might have along the way. Feel free to call or email the Foster Care office with additional questions or concerns. Our goal is to make your foster care experience enjoyable. If you have a friend or family member who is interested in becoming a Foster Care Volunteer, please direct them to the website at <http://hswcmd.org/get-involved/foster>. There is an FAQ they need to read & an application to fill out. Again, thank you for accepting this important responsibility. We truly appreciate your commitment. Good luck and happy fostering!!!

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HSWC Foster Care Contact Information:

Director of Animal Admissions and Foster Care

Sonia Nicholson
301-733-2060 ext. 240
snicholson@hswcmd.org

Foster Care Team

Karen Poston – Foster Care & Technology Supervisor
Monica Bulat – Foster Care Coordinator
301-733-2060 ext. 215
240-452-6907 – foster cell- for any matters during business hours, and urgent/emergency matters after hours
kposton@hswcmd.org

Medical concerns when the shelter is open:

Call the shelter at 301-733-2060.
Staff is available every day from 10am-6pm except Wednesday when we open at 1pm. If it is an emergency, tell the person who answers the phone. They will make sure you talk to somebody who can help you.
For a list of holiday closures, see our webpage - www.hswcmd.org.

Emergencies after hours:

First, try Monica on the foster cell - 240-452-6907. If you can't get through, try Sonia Nicholson at 240-674-0974

If unable to reach call our emergency answering service at:
301-733-2060

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PREPARING FOR YOUR FOSTER ANIMAL(S)

Before you pick up your foster(s), you will want to prepare your home for its stay. If you have other pets in your household, you must provide a separate room for your foster animal for the safety of all animals involved. No matter how friendly your dog or cat may be, you never know how the new foster will react to your pets. Also, although our shelter animals are examined by our staff when they arrive, they may be harboring an illness that could be contagious to your own animals. We encourage you to keep your foster animals away from your pets. The room you keep your fostered animals in should be free from valuables that may become damaged.

For the safety of the animals, please take the following steps:

- Choose an area that is climate-controlled. If it's uncomfortable for you, it's uncomfortable (and possibly life-threatening) for them
- Check for exposed electrical cords
- Close toilet lids
- Remove breakable items that could be knocked off shelves
- Remove small, ingestible items such as rubber bands or pieces of string
- Remove any plants from the area that might be poisonous.

If you are fostering a pregnant mom or a very young litter, you will want to create a nesting box.

Always provide your fostered animals with access to fresh water (bottle-feeding infants excepted).

Litter pans should be placed away from food and water; **if you have kittens less than 12 weeks of age, do not use clumping litter.**

When fostered animals are not being supervised, you may crate them to prevent damage.

HSWC can provide bedding, a litter pan, and any necessary medication for the animals for the duration of their stay. If needed, an initial supply of donated food or litter is available. The shelter may be able to continue to supply food and litter if the resources are available. Everything we have to give to fosters has to be donated to us before we can pass it on to you.

When you pick up your foster animal, an HSWC staff member will go over the specific needs of that animal, instruct you on how to administer medicine (if needed), give you feeding guidelines and answer any other questions that you may have about that animal.

We encourage you to take more than one kitten at a time to help promote socialization and normal behavioral growth. Multiple kittens are not only fun, they can entertain each other! The pros and cons of combining litters will be discussed later.

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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, chicken or turkey baby food (only meat & broth as 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 the Foster Care Coordinator know – feeding her with a syringe may be necessary. If you don't know how to do this, we can describe it or show you how. Nutrical is a calorie- and nutrient-dense supplement 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.

Ask the foster office about using the home remedy of saline solution as eye/nose drops to help decrease the severity of a URI. We have this available for foster parents to pick up.

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. Please contact us right away if you think your cat is dehydrated. We may 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 or has a fever (over 103 degrees F, rectally, constitutes a fever), let the Foster Care Coordinator know immediately.

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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. If your cat is ill, please bring it to a foster clinic. If we can't treat it effectively, we will either schedule an appointment with our vet or have you take it to an outside vet.

Other Common Issues

Let the Foster Care Manager know if you notice any of these:

- **Loss of appetite** – Can be normal the first day as foster adjusts to a new home. If you're foster is not eating the second day- call that day.
- **Diarrhea** – If stools are soft but not watery, monitor for two days. If there is no improvement- call the third day. If stools are watery- call that day. Do not give seafood-based wet food to kittens, as it can cause diarrhea, as can any sudden change in diet.
- **Blood in stool** – call that day.
- **Difficulty urinating** – call immediately.
- **Vomiting** – If you're foster throws up food two or more times- call that day. If it vomits bile or liquid- call that day. If vomiting is frequent or projectile- call immediately.
- **Dehydration** – Dehydration is generally associated with diarrhea, vomiting and/or loss of appetite. To test for dehydration, pinch the animal's skin gently just above the shoulder blades. If the skin springs back slowly (takes more than 1 second), it is dehydrated. Call immediately – dehydration can be fatal to animals!
- **Sneezing** – More than three times a day- bring to a foster clinic. (If you are fostering cats, check the litter box to see if the litter is overly dusty as this may be the cause of the sneezing.)
- **Runny nose or congested-sounding breathing**- call that day. These are often signs of an Upper Respiratory Infection (a fancy way to say "cold").
- **Coughing** – call that day.
- **Hair loss, even in very small patches** – bring to clinic.
- **Watery, goopy or red eyes** – call that day.
- **Itchy/dirty/smelly ears** – call that day.
- **If your foster animal is on medication but is getting worse or not getting better after a couple of days** – call that day.

Some animals do not show traditional signs of illness. They may be less active than normal, have a loss of appetite, avoid their litter box or avoid other animals or people. Please call us if you notice any of these changes.

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Parasites

External Parasites

Flea infestation, particularly in very young animals, can lead to anemia and even death. To check for fleas, part the animal's hair, especially on its back near the rump, or its stomach and look for flea dirt, a gritty, black substance that is the feces of fleas. You can also run a flea comb through the animal's hair to check for signs of fleas. Certain topical flea treatments can be used on animals over 4 weeks of age, but can be very toxic to infant kittens. Ignoring a flea infestation can be deadly as infants can become anemic to the point of death from just a few fleas. Infants can be washed in warm water with Dawn. Make sure to dry them thoroughly with a towel and a hair dryer set to low. (If you use a hair dryer, be VERY careful- make sure it is constantly in motion and not close to the animal.) Use a flea comb to brush their hair after they are dry. If you find evidence of fleas, call the shelter for advice. Once treated, you will need to thoroughly wash all bedding and toys.

Ticks carry diseases and must be monitored for. If you notice a tick engorged in your animal (it will feel like a small, soft bump), wrap a piece of tissue or toilet paper around it, pinch it firmly as close to the animal's skin as you can and slowly pull out the body and head. If the body breaks off, the tick will die. Don't worry; if the head is left in the body- the animal's body will push it out on its own. If you are able to pull out the entire body, the tick will still be alive. Dispose of it in the toilet. Do not squeeze it or it will pop and you could risk exposure to disease from the blood. There will be a scab on the animal for a week or two. You can put a little antibiotic ointment on it.

Ear mites live in the ear canals. Though microscopic, they leave behind a chunky brown residue- their fecal matter. The fecal matter must be cleaned out. You can use cotton balls dipped in a small amount of mineral oil to clean out the ears. Then the ears must be treated with ear mite medication. If you suspect an ear mite infestation, please contact the shelter.

Ring worm is a contagious infection caused by a fungus that grows in the dead, superficial layers of the skin, hair or nails. Animals and people may become infected either by direct contact with an infected animal or by exposure to a contaminated environment or object such as grooming tools, clippers or bedding. Spores in the environment are very robust and without treatment can remain infectious for up to two years. The appearance of animals with ringworm is very variable. Some have severe skin disease while others have only very minor lesions or no lesions at all and look completely normal. Typical skin lesions are discrete, roughly circular areas of hair loss, particularly on the head, ears or extremities of the paws. The hairs surrounding affected areas appear broken. The affected skin is often scaly and may look inflamed. If you see any of these signs, notify the shelter immediately.

Internal Parasites

If **worms** are seen (they often resemble spaghetti or rice) in the stool, vomit or around the anus, call the shelter. It may be necessary to collect a stool sample for analysis. All animals that come into the shelter are dewormed immediately if

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they are over 2 weeks old, and again every time you bring them in for booster shots; however, it is common for kittens and puppies to have worms and they often need to be dewormed multiple times for treatment to be effective. After we determine what type of worms your foster has, we can give you the dewormer to administer at your home. We will need to know the weight of the animal to determine the correct dosage. If you do not have a way of weighing your foster, please bring it to the shelter and we can weigh it here.

Coccidia is a protozoal parasite that can cause sudden bouts of vomiting, diarrhea and listlessness. Collect a stool sample and call the shelter for advice.

Contagious Diseases

Zoonotic diseases are diseases that are transmittable from animals to humans. The following is a list of common transmittable diseases:

Coccidia/Giardia (internal parasites) can be

Roundworms can be transmittable, but infrequently- mostly a problem with children handling feces; transmittable through fecal exposure; Toxoplasmosis, transmitted through fecal exposure, can be serious to a pregnant woman;

Ringworm skin lesions transmitted through contact and handling;

Fleas transmitted by proximity;

Sarcoptic Mange (Scabies) is a contagious skin condition transmitted by handling an infected animal.

Rabies virus is a neurotropic virus that causes rabies in humans and animals. Rabies transmission can occur through the saliva of animals and less commonly through contact with human saliva.

Animal to Animal Disease Transmission

Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) - Highly contagious. We test our cats and kittens before placing them in foster homes; however, kittens under 6 months of age may test false negative, so keep them isolated from your cats. It is transmitted through saliva and nasal secretions, urine, feces and milk from infected cats;

Feline immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) - is transmitted through bite wounds and bodily fluids;

Respiratory Virus/ Kennel Cough- Highly contagious. Vaccinations protect against most of them. Your pets should be currently vaccinated. Sick animals must be kept isolated from other animals;

Parvo-Highly contagious. It is transmitted through fecal matter;

Rabies- Your pets should be current on their rabies vaccinations;

Parasites- External and Internal;

Ringworm skin lesions- Transmitted through contact and handling; fungal infections.

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Panleukopenia (panleuk) is a viral infection that most commonly affects kittens, young cats, and unvaccinated cats. It has a very high mortality rate, even with treatment.

Unfortunately, this illness can be frustrating to deal with because the virus can survive in the environment for years. This means that other unvaccinated cats/ kittens can become infected with panleukopenia simply by coming into contact with places where an infected cat has been. Symptoms include fever, diarrhea, lethargy, vomiting, loss of appetite and even sudden death. The virus is highly contagious to other cats, especially through contact with infected feces or vomit but also contact with contaminated objects such as bowls, hands, clothes, etc. **To prevent transmission of these diseases to your pets, we recommend that fostered pets are totally separated from your own pets.**

FIRST AID EMERGENCY CARE

An animal's health can deteriorate rapidly. If you discover you're foster is in a very weak condition, here are the things you should immediately do while waiting for medical attention:

1. Check body temperature. Animals should be warm, not hot or cold to the touch. Warm up a cold animal gradually with a hot water bottle or heating pad on low. Cool off your foster by placing ice water in a water bottle. If you feed animals that are too cold, they will not be able to digest the food, and it could make them even more ill.
2. For infants, force-feed carefully a small amount (1 to 2 ML's) of a sugary solution such as corn syrup or maple syrup that is warmed up in a little water. Pedialyte can also be used. Continue this every 15 minutes or so until the kitten is strong enough to nurse on their own. When feeding, make sure the kitten is swallowing. Forcing a kitten who isn't swallowing to eat can cause aspiration, which can lead to pneumonia and death.
3. Seek immediate medical attention. Refer to the front of this manual for the correct phone numbers for assistance.

In the unfortunate event that a foster animal passes away at your home, please inform us. You are free to bury them at home or bring them to the shelter.

We rarely know the full story of the animal before it came to the shelter. It could have congenital defects, malnutrition, undetected illness, hypo- or hyperthermia, a severe parasite infestation, or any number of other problems that could lead to death.

Please understand that death is an unfortunate possibility when fostering animals, especially infants. Usually the circumstances are unavoidable. REMEMBER THAT IT IS NOT YOUR FAULT! Also remember that you gave that animal every opportunity to survive.

Veterinary Visits

All vet visits must be pre-authorized unless you are willing to pay for the visit yourself. Check with the Foster Care Coordinator first.

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All authorized vet visits are paid by the HSWC. We work with a number of vets in and around the Washington County area. They bill the shelter directly so there are no out-of-pocket vet costs to a foster parent.

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.

Any time you take an animal to an outside vet, you must give the shelter any paperwork you get from them. If you don't get any, you must contact the foster office and tell them what the vet said & any medications they recommend, so we can get it in the animal's medical history.

Medical Supplies

To help save money, please do not accept these items from veterinary clinics as they can be obtained at the shelter, and always call the shelter to see if we have additional medications:

- Advantage/Revolution (for fleas)
- Cestex (for tapeworms)
- FVRCP/HCP vaccination or boosters
- Nutrical
- Tresaderm (for ear mites)
- Panacur (routine wormer)
- Pyrantel Pamoate (routine wormer, mainly for roundworms)
- Albon (coccidia)
- Ponazuril (coccidian)
- Ofloxacin (eye drops)
- Tobramycin (eye drops)
- Metronidazole (giardia)
- Clavamox (antibiotic)
- Azithromycin (antibiotic)
- Triple antibiotic eye ointment

Please ask if your cat needs subcutaneous fluids for dehydration and lethargy. Fluids can be administered at the shelter, and can be sent home if you are comfortable giving them. This will often get help to a sick cat faster and also save money.

Normal saline can be used as an eye drop and nose drop in cats/kittens with URI and/or eye inflammation. This home remedy may reduce the severity of URI symptoms and the need for veterinary care, as well as other medications.

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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 Foster Care Coordinator.

Vaccination & Worming

Kittens should be started on vaccines when they reach two weeks. By this age the maternal antibodies (from the mother's first milk) are beginning to fade. Boosters need to be given every two 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. Kittens cannot get boosters if they have URI symptoms or a fever.

Pyrantel, Panacur, and Albon are the wormers most commonly given to cats and kittens. Different worms/parasites require different medications. Additional doses may be required, depending on the type of parasite.

Get complete instructions from the foster office or attending veterinarian.

Spay/Neuter

When kittens are at least 8 weeks and 2 pounds, they can be scheduled for spay or neuter surgery. We try to do as many of our surgeries as we can through the HSWC. You will let me know when your animal is ready (at least 8weeks/2lbs and not sick) and I will notify the vet clinic. They will contact you with when to bring them in for surgery. During kitten season, we may need to give you a voucher to get the surgery done at one of a few outside vets, if we have too many for our vet clinic to handle. You will then choose one of the vets on the voucher and make an appointment at your convenience. **You MUST take the voucher with you to the appointment!** If the kitten is at least 3 months/3 lbs, they will get the rabies shot at the same time. If the surgery is done through the HSWC, a microchip will be given. If the surgery is done with a voucher, you can either pick up a microchip to take to the surgery appointment, or you can bring the cat back to a foster clinic to receive the microchip. ****You need to bring in any paperwork given to you by the vet, including rabies certificates and discharge papers** This must be done BEFORE the cat will be considered adoption-ready**

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Types of Fostering

PREGNANT ANIMALS

Fostering an expecting animal is a wonderful experience. You will be able to witness the miracle of life right before your eyes. Pregnant moms need extra care and consideration while they are preparing to give birth. They should be kept in a room or enclosure where they can be quiet and comfortable. Food and water should be available at all times. Moms should be eating kitten food for the extra fat and nutrients. Please provide a nesting box space for the mom to give birth. They like to hide and have privacy while they are giving birth to their infants. In most cases, infants will be born in the middle of the night and mom does all the work. If it seems that the mother is having trouble going into labor, please contact the shelter. **After the infants are born (within a day or two), please contact the Foster Care Coordinator to report how many babies were born and their colors, so we can get them into the system.** Sex can be very difficult to determine in newborns, but if you have a guess, we'll put it in the system. If you have names, we'll put those in, too.

MOMS WITH LITTERS

When a mom first comes to your home with her babies, allow her to have some time and space to get used to her surroundings and reduce her stress. Do not touch the babies for the first 2-3 days until the mother is more trusting with you. Have patience. Take some time during the day to sit in the room with mom and babies and let the mother come to you. Mothers with their litters should be kept in a relatively quiet environment to reduce stress. A nesting box should be provided for moms with very young litters or a large bed should be for moms with older babies. Food and water should be available for mom at all times. The room or enclosure where the litter is kept should be baby-proofed. Even kittens with their eyes still shut are very mobile and can easily find themselves in harm's way.

Please monitor mom's nursing. If one particular baby is not eating enough, place it right up to mom's nipple. If mom is not doing a good job nursing her infants, please contact the Foster Care Manager. Infants can continue to nurse up to 6-8 weeks of age. Occasionally give mom some time away from her infants, but bring her back shortly because she helps provide the warmth they need. Always be cautious around moms with their litters as they can become protective of their babies. Watch for warning signs such as growling or hissing. **Nursing mothers must never be around unneutered males!** A nursing mother is most fertile at this time and will get pregnant.

Maternal neglect – In some cases, about 8% of the time, kittens die from poor maternal care. There are a few causes of this. Some cats lack maternal instincts and, in other cases, it is nature's way of handling sick or weak kittens. Environmental stress is an important factor, which is why it is important to create a calm environment for mom and the litter. As the foster parent, watch for signs of maternal neglect. Call the Foster Coordinator if you notice the mom avoids feeding and grooming her kittens and ignores their cries.

Maternal Aggression – As mom protects her kittens, it is common for her to be aggressive towards humans or other animals. Do not try to introduce your household pets to your foster mom as this adds too much stress to the environment. If aggression becomes severe, call the Foster Coordinator.

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NEONATES

Fostering infant kittens is challenging, but extremely rewarding. Animals of this age (up to 4 weeks old) are completely dependent on their “surrogate mother” for safety, warmth and food. By following the guidelines below, you will be able to nurse your infant into a playful adolescent, right before your very eyes.

Location

Infants should be kept in a quiet, confined space such as a small carrier or nesting box. Always have blankets or towels down and a heat source for warmth. The heat source should cover only half of the area, so babies can get away if they start to overheat. Infants need to be kept clean and dry. Please wash bedding as needed. A small stuffed animal may be used for the infant to snuggle. Infants should never be outside, except when being transferred to and from the HSWC.

Warmth

Keeping infants warm and free from drafts is very important because babies under 4 weeks of age are not able to regulate their body temperature and are incapable of shivering. The safest method is a Snuggle Safe, rice sock, hot water bottle, 1 liter bottle filled with hot water, or an IV fluid bag microwaved for 2 minutes (Please use caution when heating in microwave). In order to prevent overheating or burns, be sure to cover any surface with a towel. (An old tube sock works well on a 1-liter bottle.) Make sure the heat source takes up no more than ½ of the area!

As a last resort, a heating pad may be used. Heating pads should be placed on the lowest setting, covered, and anchored so that the infant cannot crawl underneath. Please use extreme caution when using a heating pad! This should only be used in cases of emergency when a safer source is not available. Infants should feel warm, not hot or cold to the touch.

Feeding

When feeding infants, always pay close attention to feeding guidelines. Always make sure a kitten is warm before feeding them. Feeding a cold kitten can cause severe digestive problems. There are two types of formula – powdered and pre-mixed. Powdered is most frequently used, but can occasionally cause constipation. Pre-mixed formula can sometimes cause diarrhea, so sometimes a balance needs to be found. Mix powdered formula carefully according to the directions, and **NEVER give cow's milk to any animal as it can cause severe stomach trauma**. Use good hygiene/cleanliness with all food supplies. Avoid overfeeding and make all food changes gradually. Mix only as much as the kitten(s) will use in 24 hours. Unused formula must be discarded after 24 hours. A glass jar with a lid works well for both mixing & storage of mixed formula. The following is a breakdown of what you need to know in order to feed infants according to their age:

Infants 0-2 weeks old

- Should be fed every 2-4 hours (There are several good brands – do NOT use Hartz or Whiskas)
- Mix formula according to directions. Opened formula cans must be stored in the refrigerator.
- Formula should be fed at room temperature. You can mix the formula with warm water or reheat Refrigerated formula by placing bottle in a pan or mug of warm water. Test the milk on your wrist for correct temperature. **Do not heat formula in microwave. Microwave heating causes nutrient loss in formula and hot spots can develop.**
- If there is not an opening in the nipple already, make a small hole with a hot needle or a cross cut with small scissors. Nipple opening should be only large enough for a few drops of milk to drip out when the bottle is held upside down and

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squeezed gently. Milk should NOT stream out. This is important so that the infant does not inhale formula into the lungs and develop pneumonia. Bubbles of milk coming out from the nose indicates that the animal is aspirating. In this case an adjustment must be made in the nipple size or the thickness of the formula. If the baby has nose bubbles, stop feeding until the kitten has cleared its nose, usually by sneezing. If they're having trouble, a 1cc syringe or bulb aspirator can be used to get milk out of the nose.

- The best method of feeding is for the infant to lie on its belly as it would when nursing on mom. Lightly grasp the infant around the head with one hand, then place the tip of the nipple to the infant's mouth and squeeze a little milk into the mouth with your other hand. The infant should latch on. Do not hold the infant too far upright or tip the infant's head as this can cause the infant to choke or aspirate. Sometimes, kittens get air bubbles when eating, just like human babies, and may need burped. Gently pat their back to burp them. **Never feed a kitten on its back!**
- The amount of formula the infant should eat depends on its weight. Please refer to the directions on the can for the correct amounts. Some infants will want to eat more than is listed on the can. This is okay, but please being aware that this can cause diarrhea.

If kittens have loose stools, you can try mixing powdered formula with unflavored Pedialyte instead of water.

- If an infant refuses to eat for 2 consecutive feedings, call the shelter.

Infants 3-4 weeks old

- Should be fed every 4-6 hours.
- At this stage you can start introducing the infant to soft food: kitten food and/or dry food moistened with formula. Mix formula and kitten wet food to introduce soft food. It will look like slurry. Some kittens will prefer moistened dry food to slurry. Introducing wet food sometimes gives infants diarrhea. Avoid seafood flavors.
- Encourage infant to lap from a shallow dish. Put some of the gruel on your finger, put it in the infant's mouth, then lower your finger to the food dish and encourage infant to lap from the dish. Don't be alarmed if the infant is not interested; it can take a couple of days.
- After infant is eating from a dish, start reducing the amount of formula and increasing the amount of soft food. The goal is to wean the infant off of formula all together. After being weaned dry food should also be made available.

This is a messy time of life for kittens! Feed on a mat or in the bathtub to make cleanup easier. You can clean messy kittens with unscented baby wipes or in the sink. Just make sure you dry them thoroughly.

Urination and Defecation

Infants 1-2 weeks old need to be stimulated in order to urinate and defecate before and after every feeding. Gently pat its anal area with a cotton ball or soft toilet paper that has been moistened with warm water. Gently rubbing the infant's belly also encourages movement. Be sure to keep the anal area clean and dry by sponging with warm water and patting with a soft towel. Don't panic if it does not defecate every time. Once a day is fine; although, they may defecate as frequently as after every meal. Consistency of stool can vary from quite loose to toothpaste and can range in color from yellow to dark brown. When infants first begin to eat solids, the time has come to begin potty training.

Kittens: Place litter pan in a convenient place where the kitten is familiar. Try to find a quiet area so that the kitten will not be stressed or too distracted. In the general area of the kitten's bedding and food is a good place. Simply place the kitten in the litter pan and pat anal area with a moist cloth. When kitten starts to urinate or defecate, remove the cloth

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and allow the kitten to use the pan. Instinctively, the kitten should start scratching and burying waste. Repeat these steps until the kitten goes into the litter pan on its own. It usually takes about 1-3 times. Never rub the kitten's nose in their urine or feces when they relieve themselves in the wrong place. Accidents are common at this stage, especially if they have lots of room to roam away from the litter pan. If kittens are too small to get in a regular litter box, shallow foil baking pans from the dollar store work great!

SELF-SUFFICIENT KITTENS

Once kittens are eating on their own, around 4 weeks of age, they are considered self-sufficient. At this age, they no longer need to be kept in a confined space and should be in a room where they can run and play. A bed should be provided along with food and water and a litter box for kittens. Make sure their space is completely baby-proofed and damage-proofed. Accidents are still pretty common at this stage, so if you can keep them somewhat confined near a pan until completely potty trained, your floor will thank you. They will want to play and be held and cuddled often. Don't be afraid to have fun!

Kittens should continue to be kept inside. These animals may be still too young to be vaccinated, so keeping them away from other animals and possible exposure to disease is very important.

RECOVERING ANIMALS

Shelter animals that are recovering from an illness or operation may be placed in a foster home until they are completely recovered and able to be adopted. These animals will be handled on a case-by case basis and HSWC staff will make sure you are aware of all of the specific needs of the animal. If medicine is to be administered, it will be provided for you and instructions given as to dosage. Please follow instructions carefully and be diligent about medicating. It is important that your foster animal receives medication on schedule. It is imperative that these animals be kept away from other animals, both to prevent the spread of illness and disease and to lessen the stress on the foster animal. If any conditions get worse, please contact the shelter. The animal may need to be brought in for a check-up.

BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION/SOCIALIZATION

Certain animals may need to be placed into foster care for modification of unwanted behaviors or general socialization. For example, a dog that is so nervous that he is constantly hiding in the back of his cage and refusing to eat will benefit from individualized love and attention in a foster home. Likewise, a kitten that is just a little bit "feral" will benefit from spending time around humans in a home environment. Volunteers that take in these special assignments must be prepared for a little extra work. These animals need extra time spent building their trust (sometimes through hand-feeding) and possibly some minor training. These animals will be handled on a case-by-case basis and any specific handling instructions will be relayed to you when the animal is picked up.

COMBINING LITTERS

Sometimes, we will have single kittens come in to the shelter. While people can certainly help single kittens to behave appropriately, it is better to have other cats teach them. One cat can also easily become bored, and is more prone to getting into scrapes. Combining litters doesn't come without risks, though. As you read above, cats that come to the shelter often carry parasites and illnesses, some of which are apparent within days, but some of which won't show up for weeks or months. While the recommended 10-14 day quarantine period will help protect against the transmission more immediate things like URIs and some parasites, it will do nothing for diseases like FeLV and FIV. If you are interested in combining litters, please discuss the risks with the foster coordinator before doing so.

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Socialization

When you get your new foster kitty home, they will probably be stressed. This is normal. Allow them time to adjust to your home. Especially nervous cats may require being crated for a while, so they don't get themselves in dangerous situations. Cats have been known to wedge themselves behind heaters or air conditioners, or rip their way through window screens (and the plastic wings on window A/C units) to escape. For kitties slightly less nervous, it can also be helpful to have a carrier with the door open or box that they can use as a “safe space” while they get comfortable with you and their new living quarters.

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.

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 hiding spots that are inaccessible to you. Making frequent visits to the room and just sitting gets kitty used to your presence.

For semi-feral or feral kittens, next use 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](https://www.aspcapro.org/resource/saving-lives-behavior-enrichment/using-food-successful-kitten-socialization)

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Showcasing Your Foster

Our foster program has a public Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/hswcmdfostercare/>. We also have an Instagram account at [hswcmd_fostercare](#) and a Twitter account at [@hswcmdfoster](#).

You are welcome to post pictures and stories of your fosters on our Facebook page. When your animals are ready for adoption you should write a story about the cat's personality, and send pictures to kposton@hswcmd.org. We will then make sure they end up on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. 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.

Check the 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. In order for us to share adoptable fosters without a specific event attached, you must be willing to contact potential adopters once we alert you to their presence. Trying to negotiate meeting times and places is much easier when there's no middleman.

You may also share your kittens on your own social media sites. We just ask that you keep it positive and don't tag individual HSWC staff or volunteers. You are welcome to tag HSWC Foster Care on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

♥ **For photos and descriptions that entice adopters, check out these techniques from ASPCApro: [resource/saving-lives-adoption-marketing-foster-care/tips-presenting-your-adoptable-animals-well](https://www.aspcapro.org/blog/2014/06/12/tip-week-all-your-selfie) [aspcapro.org/blog/2014/06/12/tip-week-all-your-selfie](https://www.aspcapro.org/blog/2014/06/12/tip-week-all-your-selfie)**

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Adoption

Your foster cat must be up to date on shots, be fixed, and have a microchip (and the information must all be entered in the computer at the shelter) before it can be adopted. This must be done PRIOR to taking your cat to get adopted, as adoption counselors are not trained to enter paperwork. Each cat needs to have a Foster Adoption Checklist completed by the foster office. This checklist should accompany them to all foster clinics, and MUST be brought to be filled out when you bring spay/neuter, rabies, and microchip information to be entered into the computer. Rabies vaccines can be given at 3 months and 3 pounds, and are legally required by 4 months. If a kitten is too young for rabies when it gets fixed, and you still have it when it is big enough, you need to contact us about getting it a rabies shot.

Any inquiries about cats posted on our FB page will go to the foster care office. We will either tell the adopter that you'll be at an event, or we will provide you with their contact information so you can contact them. Call and discuss the cat and screen them as you like. If they sound like suitable adopters, you will arrange a meeting with them, either at your home or at the shelter. The process for adoption should then be followed if things work out.

Adoption Events

There are a few ways to find homes for your foster cats. The most common way is through adoption events on the weekends. Check our Foster Care Facebook page for a schedule. Traveling Fosters are the foster parents who bring their animals to events. Some of them are trained to do adoptions, as well.

Adoption Ambassadors are fosters who are trained to do adoptions, and are provided with the materials necessary to perform them. Adoption Ambassadors are allowed to adopt out their own fosters from their homes or take them elsewhere to be adopted. If you would like to be trained as an Adoption Ambassador, let the foster department know.

Sitting with your foster cat(s) at a Traveling Foster/ Adoption Ambassador event is a great way to meet potential adopters and exchange information so you can remain in contact (if you want to). If somebody wants to adopt one of your cats at an event, it will be done right there, and they will take the cat home when the adoption is complete.

Unless you have been trained to do adoptions, you are only there to promote your own foster cats.

All cats that go to events MUST have their paperwork with them, including the completed Foster Adoption Checklist. This is the folder we keep at the shelter on each animal. You can ask at the Adoptions desk, and they'll find it for you. Please make sure that it has, at the minimum, the original and copy of each of the following: surgery paperwork, microchip, and rabies certificate (if the animal is old enough to have it). Note – if you are fostering an animal that already had these things, but was surrendered without paperwork, you may

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not have originals. They do, however, need some sort of documentation. Being spayed or neutered can be listed in the medical history, and you can request that Customer Service print the tag screen for rabies and microchip.

Showing in the Shelter

If you cannot make it to weekend events, you can bring your foster cats back to the shelter, space permitting. Please call or email prior to bringing them in, so we can check and see if we have the space. If we don't, we will put you on the waiting list. Once a space opens and it's your turn, we will contact you. We can hold the space for no more than a day. If you won't be able to get in that day, we'll move on to the next person, and contact you when the next space opens. It will get pretty crowded in here during the late spring and summer, so it really is best if you can take your fosters to events, because it could potentially be weeks before you get a space in the shelter. If you need to bring your cats to the shelter, please fill out the bio form for each cat, so customer service will have an idea of your cats' 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. If you are an Adoption Ambassador, you can do the adoption yourself. If not, you can have them meet you at an event or back at the shelter, where somebody else will do the adoption for you. Either way, they must still fill out the application and pass an animal cruelty check. If you want to adopt one of your fosters yourself, you are welcome to do so! Just follow the same steps. Adoptions WILL NOT be able to be done the same day as surgery. It may take a few days after surgery to get the paperwork entered & everything ready.

As foster volunteers, you have given the animals you cared for and loved a very special gift-a second chance at a full and wonderful life.

THANK YOU FOSTER VOLUNTEERS!!

Trusted Resources

You can use them for webinars or general information

ASPCA Pro

The Kitten Lady

Maddie's Fund