

SIoux FALLS AREA HUMANE SOCIETY

CAT AND KITTEN FOSTER MANUAL





Taking care of a foster cat requires a commitment from you to make sure the cat is happy and healthy.
Thank you so much for opening your heart and your home
to these cats who desperately need your help.

Welcome to Foster Care!

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Tips for Being a Successful Foster

1. Give your foster animals lots of attention and affection.

The animal you are fostering likely has special needs that require time and energy. Your foster may have had a difficult life before coming to us. Your love and attention will help to heal physical and emotional wounds.

2. Learn as much as you can about pet care.

Learn as much as you can about caring for that animal. Read about feeding, grooming, and training. Study the warning signs that may indicate the animal needs veterinary attention.

3. Make your home pet-friendly.

Before you bring your foster animal home, make sure that you “pet-proof” your home. See the examples in the following pages.

4. Keep foster animals away from your own pets.

Even though your pets are vaccinated against many diseases, it’s a good idea to keep the foster animal away from your pets as an added precaution.

5. Recognize your limits.

Fostering requires a great deal of time and energy, both emotional and physical. Don’t over-extend yourself by fostering animals too frequently or you risk burning yourself out.

6. Return the animal to the shelter on time.

The shelter depends on you to make this program work. Be sure to return the animal to the shelter at the scheduled time.

7. Understand that some foster animals will not survive.

Many animals that arrive at the shelter come from unknown backgrounds. Despite your best efforts, the animal you foster may develop a severe illness that cannot be treated. Do the best you can to help the animal, but know that you cannot save them all. Especially with newborn kittens, sometimes mother nature has a different plan than we do, no matter how hard we try.

8. Enjoy being a foster parent!

Although fostering takes a great deal of time and commitment, it can be an incredibly rewarding experience. You are temporarily providing a needy animal with a loving home environment and helping that animal become more suitable for adoption into a responsible, lifelong home.

Supplies Needed

The Sioux Falls Area Humane Society will provide you with everything you need. We will provide you with:

- Blankets and towels
- Food
- Dishes
- Litter
- Litterbox
- Toys
- Kennel or Crate

You do not have to wash any soiled blankets or towels if you do not wish to. Please place any soiled blankets or towels in a garbage bag and bring back to the shelter for us to wash. When you bring these back, please either place in a laundry bin outside the laundry room or give to the front staff and tell them it is soiled foster blankets or towels. We will then provide you with new towels or blankets. You may do this as often as needed.

Prepping for Your Foster Cat

When you take your foster cat home, he or she may be frightened or unsure about what's happening, so it's important not to overwhelm him or her. Prepare a special area for the foster cat to help ease the adjustment into a new home environment. Sometimes it is better to confine the foster cat to a small room or area at first, to let them adjust before giving the cat free rein in your home. This area should be large enough for an appropriately sized crate for the cat and should allow the cat access to food, water dishes, toys and litterbox.

We request that all foster cats be housed indoors only. A garage or backyard is not a suitable accommodation for a foster cat.

During the first couple of weeks, minimize the people introductions to your foster cat, so that he or she is only meeting immediate family. If you have other pets at home, it is especially important to give your foster cat a space of their own where he or she can stay while getting used to all the new sounds and smells. Don't leave your foster cat unattended in your home with your personal pets.

Cat-Proofing Your Home

Foster cats come from a shelter environment, and even if they have previously lived in a home, we don't always know how they will react in a new home. So, before bringing home a new foster cat, you'll want to survey the area where you are going to keep your foster cat. Remove anything that would be unsafe or undesirable for the cat to chew on, and latch securely any cupboards and doors that the foster cat could get into. People food and chemicals can be very harmful if consumed by cats, so please store them in a place that the foster cat cannot access.

Never underestimate your foster cat's abilities. Here are some additional tips for cat-proofing your home:

- Make sure that all trash cans are covered or latched and keep them inside a closet. (Don't forget the bathroom trash bins.)
- Put away small items that a kitten can swallow
- Keep both people and pet food out of reach and off all counter tops.
- Move house plants or secure them. Some cats like to play with them and may knock them over.
- Make sure aquariums or cages that house small animals, like hamsters or fish, are securely out of reach of your foster cat.
- Remove medications, lotions or cosmetics from any accessible surfaces.
- Move and secure all electrical and phone wires out of reach. Cats may chew on or get tangled in them.
- Block off any spaces that kittens could crawl into and hide in, or possibly get stuck.
- Relocate knickknacks or valuables that your foster cat could knock down.
- If your kittens are staying in a bathroom, make sure that the toilet lid is closed at all times.

Children Introductions

Since we don't always know a foster cat's history or tolerance level for different types of people and activities, please teach your children how to act responsibly and respectfully around your foster cat. We will do our best to place you with an appropriate animal for your home situation, but you should still supervise all interactions between children and your foster cat. Key things to remind your children:

- Always leave the foster cat alone when he/she is eating or sleeping. Some cats may scratch, nip or bite if bothered while eating or startled while sleeping.
- Do not tease or rile up your foster cat.
- Don't use your hands as toys, as that may encourage biting.
- Don't chase the foster cat around the house or run quickly around the foster cat; it may scare him or her.
- Pick up the foster cat only when an adult is there to help and if the cat wants to be held. Cats can become scared when picked up, and they sometimes scratch with their sharp nails, even though they don't mean to cause harm.
- Be careful when opening and closing doors as to not accidentally let the foster cat outside.
- Never hit your foster cat or intentionally step on your foster cat's tail.

Daily Care

Feeding

All foster cats should be fed a diet of dry cat food, unless otherwise specified by the foster coordinator. We use Purina and ask that you only use the food provided. Feed your foster cat once or twice daily; the amount will be based on the age and weight of your foster cat. Make sure the cat always has access to fresh, clean water. Do not feed your foster cat milk, tuna or any other people food as this will upset their stomach. Unless instructed by the shelter veterinary staff, please do not give your foster cat wet cat food.

Daily Routine

Moving to a new environment is stressful in itself for many cats, so keep introductions to people to a minimum the first couple of weeks after you bring your foster cat home. It also helps to establish a daily routine of regularly scheduled feedings and play times.

Litterbox

Make sure your foster cat has easy access to their litter box. You can prevent litter box issues by keeping the box as clean as possible. If your foster is not using the litterbox, please notify the foster coordinator so you can work on resolving the issue before it becomes a habit. Keep in mind that a cat may miss the litterbox if they have a medical issue like diarrhea or a urinary tract infection.

Grooming

A clean and well-groomed cat has a better chance of getting adopted. You may brush your foster, especially if he or she is a long hair. Contact the foster coordinator if you feel that your foster cat needs to see our volunteer groomer at the shelter. We ask that you do not trim your foster's nails. Please let the foster coordinator know if this needs to be done and we can have it done at the shelter. Cutting nails too short by doing it yourself, can cause pain and bleeding if you trim the nails too short.

Mental Stimulation and Exercise

Encourage your foster cat to play with you at least once or twice a day. Try a variety of toys (balls, bells, string, etc.) to see which ones your foster cat prefers. Remember to discourage the cat from playing with your hands, since mouthing won't be a desirable behavior to adopters. Never leave your foster alone with feathers or string as they may ingest them.

Safety Requirements

Foster cats must live indoors, not outside. Please do not leave your foster cat outside unsupervised, even if you have a fenced yard. Do not let your foster cat ride loose in the car. Use a carrier at all times to transport your foster cat.

Litter Box Training

When kittens are about four weeks old, they will begin to play in, dig through and explore loose, soft materials such as dirt or litter. So, kittens do not have to be taught by either their mothers or humans to relieve themselves in soft, loose materials, or to dig and bury their waste. Kittens are simply born knowing how to do it. It's not necessary to take kittens to the litter box and move their paws back and forth in the litter. Doing so may actually be an unpleasant experience for them, causing them to have some negative associations with the litter box.

However, litter boxes that don't provide an acceptable place to eliminate (from the cats' point of view) may cause cats to relieve themselves elsewhere. That's why it's important to provide a litter box that meets the kittens' needs. You want the kittens to like the box and use it consistently.

- **Location** - Most people want to put the litter box in a basement. Kittens may not be able to get down a flight of stairs in time to relieve themselves. Adult cats new to a home may not remember where the litter box is. If your litter box is next to a sometimes-noisy appliance, such as a furnace, cats may become startled when the appliance turns on. This may cause them to associate the litter box with the frightening noise, and they may then refuse to use the box. You can compromise by placing the litter box in a location that gives the cat some privacy. If you place the litter box in a closet, make sure the door is open from both sides to keep the cat from being trapped.
- **Type and depth of litter** - With kittens younger than eight weeks, use only non-clumping litter. The reason for this is that very young kittens tend to taste their litter and play in it. If you use clumping litter, the dust from the litter can solidify in their respiratory or digestive tracts. Different cats prefer different depths of litter, but most cats don't like litter that's more than about two inches deep. It's not true that the more litter you put into a litter box, the less often you will have to clean it. Regular cleaning is essential, regardless of the depth of the litter.
- **Number of boxes** - Try to have at least as many litter boxes as you have cats. That way, no one can be prevented from using the box because it is already occupied. It also keeps one cat from "guarding" the litter box and preventing other cats from accessing it.
- **Cleaning the box** - Litter boxes should always be kept clean. Feces should be scooped out of the litter box daily. The number of cats and the number of litter boxes will determine how often the litter needs to be dumped and completely changed. Twice a week is a general guideline.
- **Never punish for accidents.** If – and only if – you catch your foster in the act of soiling, do something that startles him/her and immediately take your foster to the litterbox to finish. DO NOT rub the cat's nose in the mess and NEVER hit your foster. This will teach your foster to be afraid. If you find a soiled area, but do not catch your cat soiling, do nothing but clean it up. Animals do not understand punishment after the fact, even if it's only seconds. Punishment should punish the behavior, not the animal.

Health and Medical Protocols

When you pick up your foster, you will receive a sheet that specifies the dates that vaccines are due and any known medical conditions to treat. You are responsible for making sure you are bringing your foster back at the appropriate times for these treatments or vaccines.

If you are fostering a cat who is on medications, please make sure that he/she gets all the prescribed doses. Do not end medication early for any reason. If your foster has not responded to prescribed medications after five days, or in the time instructed by the veterinarian, please contact the foster coordinator.

Veterinary Care

SFAHS provides all medical care for our foster animals. Because we are ultimately responsible for your foster's well-being, our staff must authorize any and all treatment for foster animals. If you take your foster animal to a veterinary clinic without approval, you may be held responsible to pay for those visits in full.

Signs of Illness and What To Do Next

It is important that you keep a close eye on your foster cat and kittens and monitor them for any signs of health problems. Things to watch out for include, but not limited to:

- 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
- Loss or Decrease of Appetite
- Change in Attitude or Behavior
- Lethargic or Depressed
- Breathing heavily
- Frequent ear scratching
- Swollen, irritated ears
- Hair loss
- Frequent crying
- Coldness
- Paleness or Blueness
- Weight Loss

Common Illnesses/Medical Conditions

Upper Respiratory Infection

This is a highly contagious respiratory infection in cats. It is like when a human catches a cold. It spreads easily from cat to cat. Symptoms include a lots of sneezing, watery nasal discharge, lethargy, loss of appetite, crusting over of eyes, diarrhea and vomiting.

Diarrhea

Generally, feces should be brown and formed. Diarrhea can be a symptom of many illnesses and parasites. Diarrhea can also be caused by overfeeding, especially in kittens. If your foster animal develops diarrhea, you will need to bring a sample of the most normal part of the stool to the shelter so that the necessary diagnostic tests can be run.

Worms

If you suspect or see that your foster(s) has worms in their feces, contact the shelter to make arrangements for treatment. Tapeworms resemble a grain of rice, and roundworms resemble spaghetti. All cats are dewormed with Pyrantel upon entering the shelter, however, Pyrantel does not treat tapeworms.

Ringworm

Please contact the foster coordinator if you notice any hair loss on your foster. It can be normal for cats to have thinner fur around lips, eyelids and in front of the ears, but clumpy patches of hair loss or thinning hair, following by scabbing may be early signs of Ringworm. Ringworm is contagious to people and pets and is easily transmitted.

Fading Kitten Syndrome (Emergent)

Symptoms include unwillingness to eat, dehydrations, lethargy, weight loss, coldness to touch and difficulty with breathing or labored breathing. If a kitten is displaying a combination of these symptoms, please contact the foster coordinator immediately or use the emergency number if after hours. These ailments can be fatal.

Panleukopenia or Feline Distemper (Emergent)

Symptoms include unwillingness to eat, vomiting, diarrhea and dehydration. The diarrhea often has a mucoid texture and/or is bloody. If a kitten is displaying a combination of these symptoms, please contact the foster coordinator immediately or use the emergency number if after hours. These ailments can be fatal.

Criteria for Emergencies

What constitutes a medical emergency for your foster? A good rule of thumb is any situation in which you would call 911 for a person. Here are some specific symptoms that could indicate an emergency:

- Not breathing or labored breathing
- Symptoms of fading kitten syndrome or distemper/panleukopenia
- Extreme dehydration: dry gums, weakness, vomiting, not urinating, skin tenting (when the skin is pulled up, it stays there)
- Abnormal lethargy or unable to stand
- Unconsciousness or unable to wake up
- Cold to the touch
- Broken bones
- Any trauma: hit by a car, dropped, stepped on
- A large wound or profuse bleeding that doesn't stop when pressure is applied
- Loss of appetite for more than 24 hours.

If your foster is vomiting or has diarrhea, but is still active, eating and drinking, you can probably wait until the next to get help.

If you feel that your foster pet(s) has a medical issue, please contact the shelter to talk to a member of medical staff. If it is during shelter hours, you can call 605-338-4441.

If it is an after-hours emergency, you can call our On-Call phone at 605-254-4058 and they will be able to assist you.

Please feel free to call with any questions or concerns you may have.

Pregnant Mom and Kitten Care

Prep

- You should disinfect the foster kitten area before new kittens are introduced. The best way to disinfect the area is to use a mild bleach solution (1-part bleach to 32 parts water) on all surfaces, bowls, toys, etc.
- We recommend also keeping kittens in a room with hardwood floors or tile, instead of carpet as it will be easier to clean or disinfect if needed.
- You will need to keep the room where the kittens will be warm. Their bodies cannot regulate temperature as well as yours may be able to, so keep it between 75 – 85 degrees is optimal.

Extra Supplies

- **Queening Box** - You will be provided with a litterbox or kennel to use a queening box. This will be where the kittens will stay while they are with their mother. It is important to have a structure big enough for the cat to move around with walls that will keep the kittens in.
- **Newspaper** – Keep several layers in the bottom of the box, and they will come in handy when kittens start to roam. Newspaper will need to be changed daily, if not several times a day. Some fosters prefer to use sheets or fleece blankets which can be quickly laundered and re-used.

Caring for a Pregnant Foster

Feeding recommendations for the pregnant and nursing cat:

- Last 3-4 weeks of gestation – the nutritional needs increase towards the end of pregnancy, and will continue to increase when the kittens are nursing. You should be feeding your momma only dry kitten food that has been provided and feed the same amount as usual, until the kittens are born.
- During the nursing period the nutritional needs are markedly increased. Nursing moms may need 2-4 times the normal maintenance diet to maintain milk production and avoid weight loss. The easiest way to ensure these needs are met is by free feeding dry kitten food, until the kittens are weaned.

Delivery

Most cats give birth without assistance or outside help, it is quite possible that you will miss the birth entirely. It is still important that you know what to expect, and when you should call for assistance.

- Just before delivery, the mother will often show signs such as restlessness and nesting. If you are suspecting that the birth of the kittens is impending, gently guide the mother to the designated nursing area. If she refuses to stay there, or if she has had her kittens outside of the pre-assigned area, wait till she is completely done with the delivery, and then move them all into the designated area.
- Some cats will look to you for company and comfort during birth, and will try to follow you if you leave. If this is the case, stay with her and talk to her in a calm, soothing manner. The need for your presence will often subside with the birth of the first couple of kittens, as she will be very busy and not so dependent on your presence. It is however still a good idea to stay nearby so that you can monitor the progression of the delivery, and make sure all the kittens are alive and healthy. On the other hand; some cats will crave privacy, and may try to get away from you and hide. If this is the case: give her the space and time she needs, but keep checking in on her regularly.

Stages of Labor

- During the first stage, uterine contractions begin. The mother will appear very restless. Cats may pace, dig, shiver, pant, whine or even vomit. This is all normal so just keep an eye on her, make sure she is undisturbed, and that she has water available should she want it. The first stage may last 12 - 24 hours, and is often longer in case of first time pregnancies.
- The second stage is the hard labor stage in which the kitten is expelled. In this stage, the water breaks and straw-colored fluid is passed, a kitten will be delivered a few minutes later. Kittens are born covered in membranes that must be cleaned away to open their airways, or the kitten will suffocate, the mother will usually bite and lick these membranes away. Allow her a minute or two after birth to do this; the mother should lick her offspring clean and bite through the umbilical cord

This is an important process for the bonding between mother and offspring, and allows the mother to learn to recognize the kittens as her own. Do not disturb her. The treatment she gives her offspring may seem rough, but in reality, this serves to stimulate breathing and blood circulation. If the mother shows no interest in her offspring, even after resting for a few minutes you must clean the kitten for her and make sure it is breathing and alive. Simply remove the slippery covering and rub the kitten with a clean towel, then place it back with the mother. Kittens should begin nursing between subsequent births.

- Kittens are born anywhere from minutes to hours apart, so you can expect most deliveries to take a significant amount of time depending on the size of the litter. Expect a new kitten every 30 to 60 minutes; the mother will usually strain for 10 to 30 minutes before each newborn. It is normal that the mother takes a rest partway through delivery, and for some cats you may have up to 4 hours without any signs of straining between kittens. If a kitten is not born within 2-4 hours, if the mother appears to be continually straining for more than 1 hour, or if she shows signs of distress, you should consult the emergency contact immediately. This may be an indication that she needs a Caesarean section or drugs to stimulate contractions. If the mother is content and happy, she is probably finished, or taking a rest. It is always better to call if in doubt.
- The third and final stage refers to the expulsion of the placenta and afterbirth. Usually the placenta follows a few minutes after delivery of each kitten, but not always; the mother may pass two kittens and then two placentas. This is normal. The mother will probably eat some or all of the placentas - this is also normal.

General Neonatal Care

- In the first 2 weeks of life kittens are helpless and vulnerable. They are still developing basic reflexes, their hearing and vision is still not fully developed, and they are unable to properly control their body temperatures. They should therefore be confined to the nursery area.
- Tracking food intake and weight gain is also important, fosters will be provided with daily health and behavior charts to easily track kitten's growth and to see if there is weight loss, or decline in appetite. If a kitten stops eating, or the mother begins to separate it from the other contact the SFAHS immediately.
- During the first 2-3 weeks of life, kittens do not urinate and defecate on their own. In nature, this is stimulated when the mother is cleaning them, but in the absence of a mom you will need to do the job. Fortunately, it's a fairly easy task as it should be done every few hours. Gently rub a warm moist paper towel or a baby tissue on the kitten's anus and genital area; this will stimulate them to urinate and defecate on the paper towel. Doing it just after feeding is an easy way to ensure it gets done regularly.
- As the kittens get older, from 4-5 weeks of age, they can be allowed to roam a larger area of your house, but they should still be closely supervised and kept in a secured area when not confined to their nursing area. Remember these kittens are still very vulnerable to infections, and should be separated from other pets if possible.

Problem Behaviors in Momma Cats

Here are some details about problem behaviors in momma cats and what you can do about them.

- **Maternal neglect.** Sometimes a mother cat stops providing care to one or all of her kittens. The neglect may be because of a birth defect or weakness in the kitten; she may just be trying to follow nature's course, focusing her attention on the stronger kittens. Neglect may also happen because she is inexperienced or she's in a stressful environment. It's important to make daily observations to ensure that she is caring for her babies. If you notice that she is spending all of her time away from the kittens, is not grooming or nursing them frequently, or doesn't respond to their cries, please call the foster coordinator right away.
- **Maternal aggression toward other animals.** Aggressive behavior directed at other animals is common and expected from mother cats because they have a maternal instinct to protect their young at all times. Please do not try to introduce her to the other animals in your home. They should have a quiet room of their own away from all other pets so that she and her babies can always feel safe. If she has seen another animal and becomes stressed or aggressive, it is very important to leave her alone and not try to comfort her.
- **Maternal aggression toward people.** Sometimes mother cats will act aggressively toward people. These behaviors may include hissing, growling, swatting and biting. Again, the mother is merely trying to protect her young. We try to evaluate cats for these behaviors before sending them into foster homes, but sometimes the behaviors develop later. If you have a mother exhibiting these behaviors, do not try to "correct" the behavior with a spray bottle or any type of punishment. She is only acting out of instinct to protect her babies and you could cause her aggressive behavior to escalate.

Contact the foster coordinator at the first sign of any of the above behaviors so we can assess the situation and decide on the safest option for momma and her babies.

Separating kittens and moms

If all of your foster animals, mom included, are healthy and friendly, we have no reason to separate mom from kittens before they are eight weeks old. But there are a few medical or behavioral reasons for separating them earlier than eight weeks:

- If the mother cat is showing signs of maternal neglect and is no longer caring for her kittens, the foster coordinator may decide to separate her from her kittens.
- If there is a medical concern about the mom or babies, a veterinarian could make the decision to separate the kittens from the mother cat.

The kittens' best chance at survival is to stay with their mom. Please do not separate your foster kittens from their mom for any reason, or attempt to supplement the mother's milk with formula, without consulting the foster coordinator.

Kittens: Week by Week

0-1 Weeks

- Mom with Kittens: They should nurse vigorously and compete for nipples. Newborns can nurse up to 45 minutes at a time. Be sure to watch kittens nursing at least once a day, if the mom will permit it.
- Check that everyone is nursing and that there isn't too much jockeying for position. A great deal of activity and crying could indicate a problem with milk flow, quality or availability. When the mom reenters the box, there should be some fussing for only a few minutes before everyone has settled down to serious nursing.
- Environment: The temperature of the nest box should be nice and warm: 75-85 degrees. Chilling is the number one danger to newborn kittens.
- Behavior and training: At one week of age, the kittens should be handled minimally. Kittens will sleep 90% of the time and eat the other 10%.

1-2 Weeks

- Environment: Temperature should be 80 to 85 degrees.
- Behavior and training: Ear canals open between 5 and 8 days. Eyes will open between 8 and 14 days. They open gradually, usually starting to open from the nose outward.
- Healthy kittens will be round and warm, with pink skin. If you pinch them gently, their skin should spring back. When you pick a kitten up, it should wiggle energetically and when you put it down near the mom it should crawl back to her. You may also start hearing their voices at this time and they may cry out if they are unsure of where they are and where mom is.

2-3 Weeks

- Environment: The floor temperature of the nest box should be 75 to 80 degrees.
- Behavior and training: Mom will begin to spend larger periods of time out of the nest, though she will not go far from it.
- Locomotion: Kittens begin to crawl around day 18 and can stand by day 21. They will begin to play with each other, biting ears, tails and paws even before their teeth have come in. Their milk teeth are cut during this period. They learn to sit and touch objects with their paws.
- Socialization: Kittens begin their socialization phase - they will be strongly influenced by the behavior of their mother for the next six weeks. To further socialize kittens, increase the amount of handling, and get them accustomed to human contact. It is important not to expose them to anything frightening; children may seem intimidating and should be supervised closely while visiting to ensure gentle handling.

3-4 Weeks

- Environment: Room temperature between 70 to 75 degrees from this point onward.
- Behavior and training: Adult eye color will begin to appear, but may not reach final shade for another 9 to 12 weeks. Kittens begin to see well and their eyes begin to look and function like adult cats' eyes.
- Kittens will start cleaning themselves, though their mother will continue to do most of the serious cleaning.

4-5 Weeks

- Kittens usually can drink and eat from a saucer by 4 weeks. Weaning should be done gradually. Introduce them to solid food by offering kitten food mixed with a little water, in a shallow saucer. You can begin by placing one kitten by the plate of food gruel, and hoping for the best - if they start eating, great! Littermates will probably copy and do the same. The kittens may walk in it, slide in it, and track it all. Some kittens may prefer to lick the gruel from your fingers, if this is the case; slowly lower your finger to the plate and hold it to the food. This way the kittens will learn to eat with their heads bent down. Be patient, sometimes it takes two or three meals before they catch on. If they do not seem interested enough to even sniff your finger, try gently opening the kittens' mouth and rub a little bit of the food on their teeth. Hopefully this will result in the kitten starting to lick your finger. Mom will usually begin weaning by discouraging her kittens from nursing; however, some cats (particularly those with small litters) will allow nursing until the kittens are old enough for permanent homes. Some nursing activity is the feline equivalent of thumb-sucking, that is, for comfort only. Even if kittens appear to be nursing, they may not be getting all the nutrition they need from mom. Make sure they are eating food and gaining weight. Be sure that the kittens always have access to fresh water in a low, stable bowl.
- Behavior and training: Begin litter training at four weeks of age. This can be done by placing a litter box in a corner. After each feeding, place the kitten in the litterbox. Be patient! They may not remember to do this every time, or may forget where to find the litter box, but will learn quickly. It is a good idea to confine the kittens to a relatively small space, because the larger the area the kittens have to play in, the more likely they will forget where the litter box is. Keep the litter box clean and away from their food.

5-6 Weeks

- Feeding: Feed gruel 4 times a day. Thicken the gruel gradually by reducing the amount of water mixed with it. Introduce dry food and water.
- Behavior and training: At about five weeks, kittens can start to roam around the room, under supervision. The strongest, most curious kitten will figure out how to get out of the nest. The others will quickly follow.

6-7 Weeks

- Mom comes back to the shelter: By six weeks' mom has done her job, and is likely already weaning the kittens away from her as they have developed teeth and nursing is painful.
- Feeding: By this age the kittens should be eating dry food well. If one kitten appears food-possessive, use a second dish and leave plenty of food out so that everyone can eat at the same time. Although the kittens may not eat much at a single sitting, they usually like to eat at frequent intervals throughout the day.
- Behavior and training: By this time, you have "mini-cats." They will wash themselves, play games with each other, their toys, and you, and some may come when you call them. Be sure they are using the litterbox after eating or after naps. These are the usual times that kittens need to eliminate.

7-8 Weeks

- Feeding: Offer dry food. Leave down a bowl of water for them to eat and drink at will.
- Begin preparing for the kittens to return to SFAHS. You know the kittens better than anyone, so prepare for their return by writing a short memo about each of them. Adopters will want to know about their personality, how their litter box training is going and quirks about them. If you have names, make sure you let us know what you have been calling them and which one is which. Names are not required to be provided. The staff will do what we can to keep these names, but they may change if we already have an animal with that name at the shelter.

Contacts

Shelter Hours

Saturday – Wednesday: 11am – 6pm Thursday & Friday: 11am – 7pm

Shelter Medical Staff – *Available during open hours*

- Veterinarian - Anna Braunschmidt, DVM: 605.338.4441 Ext 116
- Vet Techs – Lisa, Cami or Nick: 605.338.4441 Ext 117

General Questions or Concerns

- Foster Coordinator or Kennel Staff - (605) 338-4441

After-Hours Emergency Contact

- On-Call Humane Officer - (605) 254-4058

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I pick and choose if I foster a cat or mama and kittens?

Yes, you may choose when and what you would like to foster. We may suggest the most 'in-need' cat at that time. Animals seeking a foster home will vary on a day-to-day basis. There may not always be a cat or kittens to fit your situation. We do not want you to feel overwhelmed by taking on more than you are prepared for, or taking on a cat that does not fit into your lifestyle. We will make sure that your foster animals are a good fit for you and your family and home.

How long will I need to foster?

Length of foster care stays vary with each animal, depending on their age and circumstances. It can range from 2 weeks to 12 weeks, depending on the animal(s).

How much time does it take on a daily basis?

It can take 2 – 5 hours a day, depending on the animal's circumstance. This could be how much socialization they need, if they are ill, or depending on their age.

How much does it cost to foster?

There is no cost to be a foster. The Sioux Falls Area Humane Society will provide all supplies you will need to foster. This includes dry food, toys, blankets, dishes, litter and litterbox and carrier and more if needed. If you would like to provide anything else that isn't provided at your own cost that is fine.

Do I need to have prior medical knowledge or experience

No. If you have questions, you can call the SFAHS at any time. Numbers are provided under the "Contacts" page. We want this to be a fun and rewarding experience for you.

My foster is sick, what do I do?

Please contact the shelter if you feel your foster has any of the signs described on the "Health and Medical Protocols" page. We will then discuss with you the best plan of action, be it medicine or diagnostics. **Do not take your foster(s) to a veterinarian. If you do so without the approval of SFAHS, you may be responsible for the cost of the visit.** If an emergency occurs, contact the emergency numbers provided on the "Contacts" page. The medical staff at the shelter will decide what needs to be done and proceed accordingly. The shelter employs a veterinarian and trained veterinary technicians and assistants that oversee the care of all shelter animals.

Can I let my fosters and my pets interact?

do not let your fosters and animals interact. Many of the cats come in as strays, and we do not always know if they are carrying a disease that may be harmful to your pet. We are also unsure of how your foster may react to other cats or dogs, as we don't know much about their history. If you have further questions, feel free to ask!

Can my foster go outdoors?

No. We ask that you do not let your foster cat or kittens roam outdoors, supervised or not.

Can I adopt my foster?

Yes, as long as you are a good long-term match! As foster parents, you have the first chance at adopting your foster. You will still need to fill out an application and be approved by the shelter staff before the adoption would be finalized.

Can I let my friends and family have the first pick of my foster kittens or cat?

Please do not promise friends or family a foster animal. We cannot do any holds for your fosters once they go up for adoption. Please refer your friends to our website or to the shelter and have them fill out an application to be pre-screened for adoption. Once they are up for adoption, they may spend time with the animals at the shelter for the required 20 minutes and if they are a good match, they may adopt then.

Can I return my fosters if I am no longer able to foster?

Yes, you can. We understand situations arise that are unforeseeable, but please consider all options before returning them. It can be very stressful on the cats or kittens to move around so much before they are ready for adoption. We do ask that if you are looking to accept a foster into your home, you commit to the entire time frame that is needed to care for them.

Will my fosters ever be euthanized?

We understand how much love, time and energy goes into your foster animals. Unfortunately, there are times when illness overtakes a foster pet that cannot be treated, or where the cat or kitten is suffering. No animal is ever euthanized at SFAHS for breed, space or time restriction. We want to save them all, and sometimes mother nature has other plans for us and we understand that this is a highly sensitive topic. We welcome you to ask any questions or have a discussion with us if you need to.

How can I help my foster get adopted?

One of the best ways you can help your foster get adopted is to help us get to know him or her! Keep note of his or her favorite things, tell us about their personality and interactions with people and children. We will provide a personality packet for you to fill out. If you haven't received one, please contact the foster coordinator. Some people write a little biography about their foster cats, which we encourage, though they may be edited. We also welcome any quality photos that you take of your foster cat in your home; we can use the photos to accompany the online biography and photos our staff will take. These things help us have accurate information about the cat's preferences and quirks!

Can I name my fosters?

Yes, you're more than welcome to name your fosters. Please providing identifying marks on which cat is which. We will try our best to keep their names, but they may change if needed at the shelter.

Will it be hard to say goodbye to my foster when they are ready to go up for adoption?

Saying goodbye can be the most difficult part of fostering, but keep in mind that more cats will need wonderful foster homes like yours in the future. You are a crucial role in helping us save homeless pets each and every day. Your foster will be placed with a loving and caring family that is the best match possible.



If you have any questions at all, please feel free to reach out to the foster coordinator or call the shelter. We are so excited to have you as a foster and thank you for opening your heart and home to these animals who need us all so much.