



Humane Society of Wickenburg Cat Foster Parent Guidelines¹

Introduction

Welcome to the wonderful world of fostering! You are giving an once-in-a-lifetime chance to a kitten who has never known love or affection from people. We can't thank you enough for your dedication to making a better world for these kittens. The following manual is designed to give you helpful information as you embark on your foster journey.

Is There A Risk For My Pets At Home?

Possibly. HSW strongly recommends you keep foster kittens separated from your own pets for the following reasons:

1. To prevent the transmission of diseases between animals, and
2. To avoid possible injuries that may occur due to stress or temperament issues between animals.

All members of your family, visiting neighbors, friends, and children should be instructed to use caution around kittens in foster.

If your pet contracts a disease or becomes injured due to the fostered kitten, HSW is not responsible for providing veterinary medical treatment for your own pets. Medical treatment will be your responsibility.

It is very important that all of your pets at home are up-to-date on ALL their vaccinations! It is more likely that they will be exposed to something carried by the kittens than the other way around. Most viruses have an incubation period of one to two weeks, and the kittens you foster may not be showing symptoms of disease until several days after you bring them into your home.

¹Some material from the Tri-Counties Humane Society and Tompkins County SPCA have been used in these guidelines.

Viruses are primarily species-specific. Dogs spread viruses only to other dogs, and cats only to other cats. However, recently there have been viruses discovered that can infect between species. Viruses are generally airborne, or spread by direct contact between two animals. Viruses usually don't live outside the body for any length of time, but washing your hands before and after handling the fostered kittens is always a good idea.

Many parasites, such as fleas, ticks, and ear mites, can be spread between dogs and cats. Therefore, **we strongly recommend keeping foster kittens separated from all pets currently in your home.**

Remember: HSW will supply all necessary medications for any kittens you are fostering. HSW will not reimburse you for expenses incurred for treating your own pets, or if you choose to take the fostered kitten to a veterinarian without authorization from HSW.

Recommended Supplies for Foster Parenting & Basic Fostering Advice

The items below are helpful to have on hand when welcoming a kitten into your home:

- t Good quality wet and dry kitten food
- t Chicken or Turkey human baby food (meat and broth only)
- t Variety of toys
- t Non-clumping cat litter (kittens like to eat it)
- t Litter pans and food and water dishes
- t Blankets and bedding
- t A small radio (for accustoming kittens to human voices)
- t Scale (for weighing kittens and assessing if they are eating and growing or failing to thrive). A healthy kitten should be gaining one-half ounce per day. **If you do not have an appropriate scale, HSW may be able to lend you one for periodic weighings. Please ask Shelter Staff.**

Medical Emergencies

If you observe any of the following signs in your foster kitten, please contact HSW.

Signs of a medical emergency: It is important to call the HSW *immediately* if you see:

1. Labored breathing, open-mouth breathing, excessive panting or coughing
2. Repeated vomiting
3. Severe diarrhea, especially when accompanied by vomiting
4. Limping or paralysis

5. Weakness, unconsciousness, seizures, or fainting
6. Marked changes in behavior
7. Persistent crying, whining, or growling
8. Painful, difficult, or frequent urination; discolored urine
9. Dehydration. (To test for dehydration, gently take up a pinch of skin on the kitten's shoulder blades between two fingers. When released it should snap back. If it stays elevated, the kitten is dehydrated.)
10. Loss of interest in food

A crisis situation can develop very quickly, especially in young kittens. If you notice anything unusual and you are not certain whether it's an emergency, please contact HSW immediately.

General Socialization of Foster Kittens

Importance of Early Socialization:

The temperament of an adult cat is greatly influenced by experiences early in their development. As a foster parent, you can have many positive, lifelong effects on the behavior of the kittens in your care. Inadequate socialization will result in an animal that is excessively fearful and potentially aggressive toward people and other animals. Prevention of these unwanted behaviors is much easier and more effective than attempting to correct them later in life. You have a responsibility to start the kittens off right in life with appropriate socialization.

There is a sensitive period of learning that begins around 3 weeks of age. It lasts until the kitten is roughly 12 weeks old. This is the optimal time for kittens to experience new events and learn to accept them without being fearful. Their natural response to all kinds of new events, sights, and sounds will be basically positive. It is crucial that they become exposed to many types, sizes, and ages of people and other animals during this period.

What to expect:

Typically, you will receive a kitten at about 4 weeks of age. Four-week-old kittens can usually be socialized to people in a matter of days. Kittens up to 8 weeks old can take approximately 2-4 weeks to socialize. Socialized kittens need weigh 2 pounds before they can be sterilized and be placed for adoption through the Rutland County Humane Society.

How to socialize:

Start by confining the kitten(s) to a large crate or carrier, or at least a small space. ***Do not let kittens run loose in your house.*** They can hide in tiny spaces and it can be close to impossible to find them and get them out. Kittens like to nibble and should be provided with dry food, available free-choice, beginning at about 4 weeks of age. Make sure all members of the litter are eating at least 2 - 3 times daily. Provide wet food 2 - 3 times daily on a spoon or on your finger and wait patiently until the kittens are eating in your presence. Chicken or turkey-flavored baby food is a special treat for kittens and can be very hard to resist.

How soon you begin handling a kitten depends on the kitten's age and temperament. To begin handling, use a soft towel to pick up the kitten and certainly wear gloves if you feel more comfortable. Wrap the kitten loosely in the towel and allow her head to stick out. Offer the kitten baby food or wet kitten food on a spoon. If she doesn't respond, dab some on her nose so she can taste it. When petting the kitten, approach from behind and pet the face, chin and behind the ears while talking softly.

When playing with socialized kittens, it is important to start them out on the right path by not using your hand as a plaything but rather giving them appropriate toys. A kitten nibbling your toes is cute; an adult cat stalking your feet as you watch TV is not!

Health Problems

HSW makes every effort to treat your foster kittens for fleas and worms before you receive them. The dates and types of the initial treatments, and any scheduled follow-ups, are indicated on the foster care agreement.

External Parasites

Fleas:

- Common in both dogs and cats and are very contagious to other animals
- Signs: scratching, hair loss near base of the tail and on the abdomen
- Flea feces, or "flea dirt," may be visible as small black, pepper-sized pieces of dirt at the base of the tail, on the tummy, or other areas. Flea dirt smears a rusty red color on white paper when dampened with water.

Ear Mites:

- More commonly seen in cats than dogs
- Are spread from ear-to-ear in dogs and cats; may be spread between dogs and cats
- Signs: head shaking, scratching ears, dark black to reddish crusty material in an ear canal

Internal Parasites

Please note that all parasites are different and require different treatment. ***Do not try to treat internal parasites on your own using store-purchased dewormers!***

Roundworms and Hookworms:

- Are more common than other intestinal worms, since they can be passed from the mom to the babies shortly before birth
- Signs: diarrhea, bloody stools, vomiting, or may show no signs at all
- After treatment you may see live worms in the stool or vomitus in heavy worm infestations. This is gross, but it is normal and indicates the worming medication is working properly.
- Zoonotic can be transmitted from animals to humans. Roundworms are transmitted by ingesting parasite eggs from objects contaminated with dog or cat feces (usually in young children eating dirt contaminated with feces). Hookworms are transmitted by direct skin contact with hookworm larvae from soil contaminated with dog or cat feces, or failing to wash hands after cleaning up the stool.

Tapeworms:

- Usually transmitted via infected fleas or rodents
- Signs: usually no clinical signs, but you may see segments resembling rice grains around the anus or sometimes in the stool

Giardia and Coccidia:

- Transmitted in drinking water or feces
- Signs: may cause diarrhea or may show no signs at all
- Treatment: with medication under the direction of the HSW

Sanitation is an important factor in controlling transmission, so wash hands thoroughly after handling kittens or waste.

Feline Viruses

Panleukopenia A.K.A. Distemper:

- Highly contagious between cats! It is transmitted by urine, blood, and saliva – a hardy virus.
- Signs: vomiting, diarrhea, fever, listlessness, anorexia
- The prognosis is poor. The best protection for the kitten is vaccination and colostrum (first milk from the mother).

- The virus is very stable in environment and can live for six months. If the virus is suspected, wash all items and areas with which the kittens had contact with a household bleach solution (1 part bleach to 30 parts water, or 1 ounce bleach per quart water). This includes all dishes and bowls, toys, kennels or cages, floors, and washing all bedding with bleach. Throw away any items that can be replaced.

Notes on Upper Respiratory Infection:

Upper Respiratory Infection (“URI”) is a broad term describing various viral infections that attack the upper airway, such as parainfluenza/bordetella infections in dogs and rhinotracheitis in cats.

Because of the incubation period, it is possible that your foster kitten will be placed in your home, only to begin showing symptoms a few days later. Symptoms include sniffly, running noses, sneezing, and coughing. Bear in mind that **URIs are extremely contagious**. There is always the risk that your own cats, even if vaccinated, could contract URI from a fostered kitten; however, vaccinating your own cats does reduce the risk. Confining the fostered kitten and your own pets to different areas of the home will decrease your pets’ exposure.

Finally, once the fostered kittens leave your home, disinfect everything with which the fostered kittens may have had contact (crates, kennels, floors, dishes and bowls, toys, bedding, etc.). This is always a good idea after every fostered kitten leaves, not just those who have had URI.

Giving Medications

To administer a tablet or capsule:

There are two options: (1) Place one hand on the upper jaw and press the lips gently against the teeth. With your other hand, pull the lower jaw down and place the pill on the base of the tongue, far back in the mouth. Massaging the throat and lightly blowing into the kitten’s nose will stimulate her to swallow. (2) Place the pill on a teaspoon, grasp the nape of the neck gently pulling the head back toward the back. This action relaxes the jaw and allows the spoon (and pill) to slip into the mouth. Tip the spoon to deposit the pill at the back of the mouth, remove the spoon and massage the throat or blow into the kitten’s nose to stimulate her to swallow.

To give a liquid:

Pull the corner of the lips out to form a pouch. Insert the syringe and slowly push the plunger to release the liquid.

To apply ear drops and ointments:

Pick up the earflap and discharge the medication with the applicator positioned gently in the base of the ear. The kitten's immediate instinct will be to shake his head, so be prepared for this and hold onto the kitten's head gently but firmly. Massage the base of the ear after applying the medication.

To place drops or ointment in the eye:

Use your thumb to pull down the lower eyelid. With the other hand, place the eye drops into the pouch you have formed. Whenever possible, avoid the kitten's line of vision as you approach the eye with the applicator. For example, stand over the kitten's head and talk to her so it she looks up and sees you, not the medication in your hands.

Conclusion

Thank you for giving your time and sharing your house with HSW kittens. Without foster parents, we would be unable to offer the many wonderful kittens we meet a chance at a loving home! We hope you enjoy the experience. We welcome any advice you have for future editions of these guidelines. ***THANK YOU!!!***