

A Guide for Cat Foster Parents



Friends
for
Animals
of Metro Detroit

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Foster Program Overview

Thank you for opening your heart and home to one of our shelter's orphaned cats. Your generosity will provide young and old, injured and sick, abused and under socialized cats a chance to grow or heal before finding their forever homes. FAMD began its foster program in June 1996. The foster program plays an integral part in the shelter's ability to adopt out as many as 1,300 orphans annually.

How the Program Works

Volunteers of the Foster Team work with shelter staff to determine which animals are most in need of foster care. As an approved foster volunteer, the Foster Coordinator will then contact you to see if you are available. We will match you with cats or kittens that are a good fit for your lifestyle and capabilities. Our goal is to set your family and the animals up for success. We will also arrange for a meeting and pick up time for you and the foster pet. The shelter will provide you with all the necessary supplies for fostering and support you throughout the entire process. We are always available to address any questions and concerns.

Reasons to Foster

Fostering is a wonderful experience for you and your family—you can feel good knowing you have helped save an animal's life. Even better, you've created space in the shelter to accommodate other homeless pets. Foster animals provide companionship and purpose—your act of kindness is repaid in rewards that are beyond words.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is expected of me as a foster parent?

You are a critical member of the shelter team! As a foster parent, you will be expected to:

- Love and care for your foster cat with shelter-provided supplies and advice.
- Teach your foster cat boundaries and behaviors that will make them more adoptable.
- Help market your foster cat by taking photographs, writing descriptions, and keeping them visible to potential adopters.
- Return your cat/kittens for surgery at the appointed time.

What types of cases (cats or kittens) will I get? Can I pick and choose the cases?

Yes! We do not want you to feel overwhelmed by taking a case that you are not prepared for. We have all types of cases, from small bottle babies that require round the clock nursing, or a mellow adult or senior cat that just wants some extra space to stretch its paws. The most common cases are:

- Kittens too young and/or immature to be adopted.
- Kittens and young cats that require more socialization than available at the shelter.
- Older or senior cats that will be more comfortable in a home environment.
- Injured cats and/or those recovering from surgery.
- Cats suffering from “shelter stress” in need of a calming home environment.
- Cats with colds or with special medical needs.
- Abandoned mothers with litters of kittens.
- Cats that need to lose weight.
- Any cat when the shelter becomes overcrowded.

How long are animals in foster homes?

It completely depends on the cat and the situation. The average stay in a foster home is about 2 months. However, most kittens and some cats with great photos and stories on the web may stay only a few weeks. Others recovering from an injury, and senior cats, may stay much longer. If at any time you need to bring your fosters back early due to emergency, feeling overwhelmed or vacation time, call the foster coordinator to arrange a time to drop off.

Can I adopt my foster pet?

You are likely to fall in love with one or more from every litter you foster. We encourage you to be selective with how many you adopt. Kittens are highly adoptable and our adoption counselors are great at finding loving families. If you decide to adopt, fill out the adoption questionnaire at www.metrodetroitanimals.org. We must have the questionnaire filled out to be able to put an animal on hold for you. All adoption questions are handled by the adoption counselors at The MaryAnn Wright Adoption and Education Center. You can reach them at 313-943-2697 X 6001. The foster coordinator does not authorize adoptions.

Learning to bond with a foster animal, see the animal grow and thrive under your care, and then passing the animal on to an adoptive home is immensely rewarding. It is also sad to see a foster animal leave. Give yourself time to grieve the loss, but also think about the animal's new life ahead.

If I have my own animals, can I foster?

Yes, but keep in mind that it's always a health risk to expose your animal to other animals whether it's walking at parks, vet waiting rooms or other common animal areas. The health risk is minimal if your animals are current on their vaccinations, maintain a healthy diet and lifestyle, and are not elderly or very young.

What supplies are needed to foster?

Foster parents provide space, basic obedience training, exercise and love for the animals. The shelter will provide you with all the other supplies needed throughout your foster experience. If you purchase your own supplies, FAMD does not do reimbursements, however, we can provide you with a Gift in Kind receipt.

Do I need to have prior medical knowledge or expertise?

No, but you may have to dispense medicine to your foster pets, so you will need to be able to follow veterinarian's instructions if fostering a sick or injured animal.

What if my foster pet becomes sick?

You must contact the Foster Coordinator if the pet becomes sick. Additional detail is provided in the Health section beginning on page 12. All vet care must be cleared before making an appointment. Contact numbers are provided below:

During shelter business hours
Monday-Saturday 8am-4pm
Contact the shelter at: 313-943-2697 X 1011

After hours
Trish at: 313-525-8329

If you take the animal to the vet without permission, refunds may not be possible.

How can I help my foster cat become more adoptable?

First and foremost is marketing. If no one knows about your foster cat, or how

wonderful they are, then it's next to impossible to find them a forever home. Supplying great photos and a good bio regularly, and giving a foster pet regular exposure by telling your friends and family about them will help create a "network effect" and will speed up the process.

What if I have children?

Fostering is a wonderful family experience and can build a foundation of philanthropy in your children. The shelter staff will work with you to select a cat that is age appropriate for your children. You must also be diligent about providing guidance, instructions and rules to your children about caring for an orphaned or special needs cat.

Can I let my foster roam outdoors?

NO! Foster cats are always strictly indoor cats; please guard against escapes! They can and will push out screens, escape from balconies, jump high fences, and take advantage of doors/windows left open by visitors and/or children.

Getting Ready to Foster

After being approved to foster, but before you bring a foster animal home, we suggest you prepare yourself, your family and your home for a new foster animal companion.

Be Physically and Mentally Prepared. Fostering is a family affair, so please make sure that everyone in your household is ready, willing and able to provide a loving home for an orphaned animal. Many adults and children have a hard time “giving up” an animal to its forever home. Make sure everyone is ready for this.

Be realistic about the time commitment to a foster animal, and make sure your daily activities will allow for it.

Selecting an Appropriate Shelter Cat to Foster

Now that you're ready to foster, it's time to find an appropriate shelter cat to bring home. After being approved by the shelter staff as a qualified foster home, the Foster Coordinator will contact you to see if any of the cats/kittens are a good match. We will contact you directly to schedule a meet and greet with the potential foster cat. The shelter staff may also recommend a different cat based on your lifestyle, experience or situation. After meeting the cat in person, you and the shelter staff will decide if it is a good match. Both you and the shelter staff must feel that it's the right match to proceed!

Where to Keep Your Foster Animals

The goal of fostering an animal is to provide additional care and socialization in a family environment. Your foster cat should feel like a welcome member of your family, spending time with you when you are available to directly supervise the cat. When you have to be away from your home, we strongly

recommend keeping the cat/kittens in a crate. This will not only prevent unexpected damage in your home but it will also help keep them safe.

Fostering – The First Week

Now that you're home with your foster cat, you should start a regular routine so your cat can begin to adjust to your household. During this adjustment period, please keep stimulation to a minimum. Some recommendations include:

- Find a quiet room to keep the cat/kitten in. This room should have the litter box and food and water in it. Allowing the cat a box to hide in would also be a nice way to help them feel safe.
- Don't introduce your foster cat to people who are visiting for at least the first week. For the first 7-14 days (could be more or less) your foster cat should lay low while he tries to figure out just what this new situation is. You may not see any unwelcome behavior initially. Eventually all will be revealed.
- If possible, get the bed the cat was laying on in the shelter. This way he/she will have something that smells like them for comfort.
- During the first week you should try to spend quality one-on-one time with your new foster cat. The most important thing to do during this initial transition time is to clearly establish the household rules. In addition, take care not to "indulge" your foster cat's timid, tentative or fearful behavior; we understand how tempting this may be as many of our orphans have come from less than ideal situations, but in the long run it does not benefit the cat.

Once You Are Home with Your Foster Cat

- Make sure your room is all set up for the cat or kittens (litter box, food/water bowl, and cat bed, something that smells like her when you let her out of her cage). This helps to reduce stress.
- Keep the visitors and noise in the cat's room down to a minimum.
- Do give your own cat LOTS of love and praise.
- Do talk normally. Let the cats know that you are fine; they are fine; everything is fine!
- Be patient and go slowly with your foster cat to help them adjust.
- Don't leave your foster cat unattended with your resident pets. Even if they seem to get along well in your presence, you should separate the animals when you leave your house.
- Keep your foster cat indoors at all times.

Feeding Cats/Kittens

- Cats should be free fed, kittens should have dry food all day. Offer canned food 3 times a day and use it as a training reward for appropriate behavior.
- Fresh water should always be available. Kittens can only have KMR formula, never give cow or goat milk.

Kitten Behavior

- Kittens are very curious and like to run, jump and climb. Remove all breakable and dangerous items from their reach.
- Kittens love to play with toys of any kind. Even a crumpled piece of paper

can provide amusement.

- A single kitten will likely cry a lot the first couple of nights. Make the kitten's area as cozy as possible by providing a blanket and stuffed animal.
- Kittens are not allowed outside.
- Close toilets lids and do not have access to buckets/tubs of water or plants.

Socialization of Kittens

- The day after you bring them home, begin to handle the kittens regularly.
- Beginning at 3 weeks of age, it is important to begin having other people, friends, co-workers etc., handling kittens frequently. Make sure each kitten is handled and played with regularly.
- Gradually expose your kitten to new and different things and people. Your foster animal will be better adjusted as they get used to normal household sounds and sights.
- Kittens learn to play by wrestling with their littermates.
- If introducing kittens to dogs or other cats in the house, it is useful to put them in their crate in a common area so they can observe each other prior to interacting.

Cat Behavior

- Cats should be provided with a scratching post or other suitable surface to scratch.
- Give your foster cat a variety of toys to play with.
- Cats are not allowed outside.
- Contact the Foster Team for suggestions and advice about specific behaviors.

FAMD has partnered with the Maddie's

Pet Assistant App

- Biting at humans
- Fearful/hiding that does not improve
- Rough play; such as biting and scratching
- Not using litter box
- Inappropriate elimination
- Not eating or drinking well

This app has basic advice for the above situations and more. When you fill out your survey it is automatically sent to the foster coordinator who will get in touch with you to make sure everything is improving.

Your Foster Cat's Health

- Keep vaccinations/worming up to date. (Foster Team will keep you informed when kittens should be brought to shelter for health care.)
- Never use clumping litter for kittens under six months of age (health hazard.) The only exception would be the natural corn or wheat based clumping litter (i.e. World's Best).
- Monitor sick cats for symptoms to clear up or improve within a week or so in foster care. A worsening condition may require a vet visit.
- Keep medications on schedule for sick cats.
- If your foster becomes sick, here is what you should do:
- **Mild Symptoms**: occasional sniffing, clear discharge from eyes/nose, eyes red or swollen, but eat/play normally. Watch closely and keep your Foster Team in the loop for a second opinion. It may be that the cat is stressed out for some reason and it should clear on its own with some tender loving care.
- **Severe Symptoms**: lethargy, not eating, diarrhea, brown/green discharge from eyes/nose, eyes red or swollen, and not eating/playing normally. Contact the Foster Coordinator immediately.

When to Call the Foster Coordinator with Health Issues

- Diarrhea
- Vomiting and diarrhea for more than 6 hours
- Vomiting more than once in an hour
- Not eating for more than 2-24 hours - depending on age
- Constipation
- Bloody stool
- Lethargy
- Not gaining weight or losing weight

Diarrhea

Diarrhea can be caused by several factors, including stress, change of diet, poor diet, eating garbage, bacteria, lack of probiotics, parasites and viruses. If your foster cat has diarrhea and has no other symptoms, make sure they stay on the same dry and canned food they were given at the shelter. Switching food is very harsh on their fragile bodies.

Provide plenty of fresh water since diarrhea can cause dehydration. To check for dehydration, pull the skin up over the shoulder blades. If it snaps back quickly, the cat is not dehydrated. If the skin goes down slowly, then the cat is dehydrated and needs fluids. Dehydration can kill a kitten, so call the Foster Coordinator immediately. You can mix unflavored pedialyte with the formula or just syringe feed it on it's own. Make sure to syringe slowly and that the kitten is swallowing so as to not cause aspiration.

Call the Foster Coordinator to arrange a fecal test to be scheduled. The sample needs to be fresh. If the diarrhea is liquid, try to scoop it up as best as possible.

The test takes 15 minutes to run. If you cannot wait, we will call you with

results and let you know if you need to pick up medications. If after hours and diarrhea is severe, contact the foster coordinator immediately as they will have emergency supplies at home.

Diarrhea can lead to **Kitten Fading Syndrome** which causes the kitten to crash quickly. Signs of KFS are loss of consciousness, inability to suckle, dehydration, no urine, dark urine, lethargy, gasping for air and chilliness. If after hours:

- Warm the kitten up and swaddle in warm blankets or towels.
- Hypoglycemia: give .1ml of karo syrup per 8 oz of body weight, if smaller than that, just rub on the gums every 3 minutes until the kitten becomes alert.
- Syringe feed the kitten unflavored Pedialyte. The kitten should be on his belly and make sure he is swallowing.
- Keep the kitten hydrated with the Pedialyte.
- When the kitten recovers, you may resume feeding formula or gruel, use Pedialyte to mix it.
- For kittens already eating food, give a small amount of Supplicol.

The foster coordinator will schedule an appointment as soon as the medical team can evaluate the kitten. Your kitten will receive fluids if needed.

If you are feeling overwhelmed, reach out to senior foster parents on our Facebook page: FAMF Foster Care. You can post on that page what issues you are having and lots of folks will respond. Never contact another foster directly without their consent, particularly during a stressful moment or late at night. If for any reason, you feel the situation is more than you can handle, contact the foster coordinator, even after hours. We want your foster experience to be the best it possibly can be.

Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)

URI is typically sneezing, and watery eyes. There may be some discharge from the nose and eyes, and a clear liquid that is coughed up. It's generally a mild, self-limiting illness of the trachea and bronchi encountered in all age groups of cats and kittens, but especially in those under unusual stress, crowding or close confinement. URI exists in shelters, boarding kennels, groomers, veterinary offices, etc.

Because URI is contagious, infected cats should NOT be around other cats until they're over their cold. If you have a cat at home and plan to foster a cat with URI, we have found that if your own cat is healthy and has been vaccinated annually, then your cat will most likely not get sick. Provide plenty of fresh water daily and monitor eating. If a loss of appetite occurs try feeding canned food—it's hard to eat with a stuffy nose and this may entice them to eat.

It is important to keep the nose clear of drainage:

- Put them in the bathroom while running a hot shower, 15 minutes in the steam will help.
- Use a warm cotton ball to wipe the discharge away.
- Use "little noses" saline drops.
- If you are still having problems, talk to the Foster Coordinator to pick up a nebulizer.
- It's also helpful to put a heating pad on low under one end of the carrier. This helps them stay warm, but they can move off it if they get too warm.
- Babies cannot manage their body temperature well, so we need to assist them with that.

Poisonous Foods and Household Items

Many household products can be toxic to cats. Remove any rat or mouse poisonings, antifreeze and windshield wiper fluid from your home before fostering!

Store cleaning products and the items listed below out of reach of pets:

- Chocolate
- Caffeine

- Grapes/raisins
- Macadamia nuts
- Mushrooms
- Onion and garlic
- Rhododendron
- Castor beans
- Lilies
- Tulip bulbs
- Marijuana
- Sago palm
- Azalea

Marketing Your Foster cat

You will be critical in marketing your cat for adoption. Think about what you would want to know about your cat if you were considering adoption, and what type of person or family would be the perfect environment for your foster cat.

We need your help with the following marketing needs:

- Take photos of your foster cat in a variety of poses—both full body and head shots.
- Write a biography of your foster cat that captures their personality and characteristics.
- Provide the photos and biography to the Foster Coordinator (todonnell@metrodetroitanimals.org).
- Coordinate with the Foster Coordinator to determine when your foster cat will be ready for adoption.
- You may share on social media, however, let any interested parties know they have to fill out the adoption questionnaire and we cannot guarantee any adoptions. The Adoption Center will contact them when they receive the questionnaire.

Tips for Taking Great Photos

We can't stress this enough...a picture is worth a thousand words.

- Take a lot of digital pictures (any smart phone will do).

- **Pictures taken in natural light are usually much better than those taken with a flash. Lighting is very important for accurately capturing a cat's coloring and detail. Have the sun or light source behind you and check to make sure you're not casting a shadow on your subject.**
- **Use treats and/or a toy to capture the cat's best expression. Sometimes having two people makes this process easier.**
- **Try taking pictures using a neutral backdrop. Select a background that contrasts with the cat's coloring. Darker-colored cats will show up better against a lighter backdrop. Most cats look great against a lush green lawn.**
- **The cat is the subject of your picture so the cat should take up the majority of space in your picture. Avoid excessive amounts of background. The cat's eyes should be focused on you. Try to capture at least one "hero" shot, where the focus is on the cat's face. A full body picture is also a great way to show size and scale. Get fun and cute shots!**

Tips for Writing a Great Bio

You will improve your cat's chances of finding a home if you write a thorough description. A good bio is part press release, part story telling. Don't turn it into a lengthy restaurant review, but instead try to pull the reader into the bio so that they can start to imagine a life with this new feline friend. It can be very helpful to read the bios of other similar cats on Petfinder.com.

Tell it from the animal's perspective—the most compelling thing you can write on behalf of an animal is what you imagine the animal is thinking, feeling or remembering. A list of just facts probably won't catch a potential adopter's eye.

The introductory paragraph should describe “who your cat is.” This will help a potential adopter visualize the cat. Your second paragraph might go into personality traits, and provide information about training, tricks or cute behavior.

Preparing for Your Next Foster Animal

Once your foster cat has been adopted or has returned to the shelter, we ask that you take a break of at least a week. This gives you a much needed break—time to grieve and time to prepare your home for the next foster animal.

Sanitizing Your Home between Foster Animals

In order to prevent disease and parasite infestations in your home, thoroughly clean areas where the foster animal has stayed. The one week “break” period between foster assignments provides the opportunity to do this.

- Wash bedding in hot water, detergent and bleach.

- Discard non-washable toys (those that can't be bleached or washed in a washing machine.)
- Disinfect all washable surfaces with a mild bleach and water solution (bleach/water ratio of 1:32 or 4oz of bleach per gallon of water is recommended). Bleach solutions should be prepared as needed, because they lose their strength after 24 hours. Bleach is inactive in the presence of organic matter so clean up dirt, hair, feces, etc. **before** using bleach to disinfect. **Bleach solution must stay in contact with the surface being sanitized for at least 10 minutes to be effective.**
- Vacuum all carpeted areas.
- Soak toys in bleach water for 20 minutes and scrub and bleach crates, carriers, scoops, food bowls and litter boxes.
- Clean any urine or feces soiled areas with an enzyme cleaner immediately to avoid residual odor (Nature's Miracle Stain and Odor Remover works well).

Quarantine Periods

Sometimes an animal is sent into a home before evidence of a serious disease has manifested. Quarantine periods are used to allow infectious diseases to die off in the environment. This protects future foster animals from being infected with the virus or disease. To prevent difficulties when cleaning and disinfecting your foster area, remove as many of your personal household items as possible. Limit unremovable fabric surfaces, or cover with a blanket or sheet. For ringworm, panleuk, calici and any other extremely infectious diseases, the foster coordinator will give you a proper dilution of Rescue disinfectant to sterilize your room with. You will wipe down surfaces and walls 3 times in a row and let the rescue dry in between. We typically would wait 2 weeks before you would be able to take new kittens home.

For URI and parasitic infections, you can just clean with bleach water. Never mix chemicals!

Contact Info

Director of Operations:

Trish O'Donnell

office phone: 313-943-2697 X 1011

cell phone: 313-525-8329

Email: todonnell@metrodetroitanimals.org

Facebook @ Trish O'Donnell

Facebook @ FAMD Foster Care group, request invite

There is also a lot of great information on Hannah Shaw's website:

<http://www.kittenlady.org/>

