



FOSTER HANDBOOK

Animal Welfare & Enforcement

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Thank you for volunteering with the foster care team!

Fostering an animal is essential to our impact on the lives of the animals in our care and in Gwinnett County. Animals need foster care if they're too young or too little for their sterilization surgery and adoption, if they're recovering from an illness or injury, if they're under-socialized or still learning to trust, or if they're in protective custody. The primary purpose of our foster program is to give pets a greater chance to grow, heal, and eventually find permanent homes. The commitment and responsibility of fostering a pet is huge and we appreciate you! Our goal is success for the animals, and we are here to help you along the way.

KNOW THE BASICS

Home inspection

After completing the animal foster application, a representative from Animal Welfare & Enforcement will perform a home inspection required by the Georgia Department of Agriculture before the application is approved. Periodic routine inspections throughout the foster period will be conducted to ensure the welfare and environment of the foster animal(s) is appropriate.

Getting matched

When you apply to be a foster family, you select the type of animal (cat, dog, etc.) and situation (needs medication, bottle-feeding, etc.) that you're comfortable fostering. When we have a foster opportunity that we think is a good fit, we will contact you and provide full details about the animal so you can decide if you want to foster that animal.

Cost of fostering

All essential supplies such as pet food and litter are provided. Our dedicated veterinary team provides full medical care for foster animals, from routine visits to any illness or injury.

Time involved

Most foster families work full-time jobs outside the home and still maintain their everyday lives. Adult cats and dogs generally need only a few hours of daily care to be fed, go potty, and have some one-on-one time. Kittens and puppies need a little more time as they develop into healthy adults. Young animals not yet eating on their own need care every three to four hours as they're weaned off formula.

Length of stay

Foster animals typically need two to four weeks of care, though it varies with each situation. Our staff will give you an estimated time frame when we call for placement. If things aren't working out for any reason, please let us know and we can arrange for your foster animal to come back to the shelter.

PREPARING TO FOSTER

Supplies

We provide all the necessary supplies for foster animals, including food (dry, canned wet, and formula), crate, litter, puppy pads, heating source, medication, and small animal supplies. We're more than happy to provide extra items that are in stock such as toys, bowls, and beds.

Preparing your space

While you may want to give your foster animal free roam of your home, providing a smaller space can be less overwhelming in a new environment. A smaller area can also reduce the chance of potty-training accidents. Designate a specific area such as a bathroom or bedroom to house your foster animal. A non-carpeted floor is easier for clean-up, but you can also lay down puppy pads, a tarp, or towels for ease when disinfecting.

It may sound silly but look around the space from the foster animal's perspective to see if there are any items that can be chewed on, or cracks and crevices that might be explored. If housing your foster animal in a bathroom, remove any chemicals or cleaners under the sink. Accessible areas should also be free of hazards such as bug repellents, mouse traps and other pest control products, as well as any people food and house plants (which cats like to chew on) that might be poisonous to pets.

Existing pets in your home

If you already have family pets, consider their reaction to a new animal in the home. While most do well with a temporary friend, be mindful of your pet's previous reactions toward other animals. You are the expert of your pet's personality and can help ensure that the experience is enjoyable, rewarding, and safe for everyone.

As part of the foster care requirements, all family pets must be free of parasites and up to date on vaccinations, including DHPP/rabies for dogs and FVRC/rabies for cats.

Since the animals under our care often come with little background information, we recommend keeping your pets and the foster animal separate for a 10- to-14-day period. In some cases, the foster animal will need to be isolated from your pet(s) throughout the foster period for the safety of both pets.



BRINGING A FOSTER ANIMAL HOME

Time to decompress

Take it slow when the animal first arrives. It's very tempting (especially for kids) to try to hug or play with the animal, but new pets have no idea where they are, who they are with, or what is happening. It takes time to build a positive relationship and for them to be comfortable. Adult animals will need more time, while younger animals adapt more quickly.

Limit new experiences and keep introductions to a minimum at first. Sometimes, too much stimulation can cause a dog to behave unexpectedly toward a person or animal. Likewise, simply moving to a new environment is stressful for many cats. Establish a daily routine of regularly scheduled feedings and play times.

Animal Introductions

Cat to Cat Introducing cats on neutral ground is difficult, so keep the foster cat in a separate space so it can become familiar with the surroundings. Immediately giving a new cat free roam can be overwhelming, especially if there are other animals in the home. Gradually allow the foster cat opportunities to meet your cat as you expand the space available to the foster cat.

Cat/Dog Because you're unfamiliar with the foster pet, start with slow and steady exposure. Keep the animals separated by a gate or in separate rooms. Very gradually increase their exposure to allow each animal ample time to see and smell the other animal. Continually monitor their interactions and comfort level.

After the animals are more accustomed to each other, allow the cat to roam freely in a small area while keeping the dog on a leash. One person should watch the dog and reward for calm behavior while another person does the same for the cat. If the dog is too focused on the cat or vice versa, step back to slow and steady exposure.

Dog to Dog Leash each dog and walk them in a neutral area. Alternate which dog leads and allow each to sniff the dog in front. If their body language is positive, allow them to walk side by side and have a few short interactions while providing verbal praise.

When entering your house, keep both dogs leashed and allow your dog to go inside first to watch the foster dog enter. Keep them leashed and walk them through the home, then give each dog their own space to settle into and decompress.

Over the next few days, increase the interaction between the dogs while on leash to help them to bond and acclimate to sharing a home without feeling overwhelmed. If either dog seems distressed, separate them, and allow more space and time to decompress.

People introductions

Supervise young children at all times during the foster period to ensure animals are treated gently. While the whole family can participate in playtime and grooming, the foster adult must always be the primary caretaker. Be vigilant with visitors and extended family members, as foster animals may need additional time to adjust to those outside of the household.

DAILY CARE: DOGS & PUPPIES

Dogs

Foster dogs should be fed a diet of dry dog food, unless otherwise specified. Feed them once or twice daily, with the amount based on the animal's age and weight. Make sure the dog always has access to fresh, clean water. You can give your foster dog treats (barring any known allergies, of course) to help you bond. Most dogs like to chew on things, so try Greenies, Nylabones or Dentabones. Keep in mind, not all dogs like to share, so only give these treats when your foster dog is confined to his/her own area.

The following chart should be used as a reference for the daily feed amounts of adult foster dogs unless otherwise specified. Puppies have a different feeding schedule that should be discussed with the Foster Specialist.

WEIGHT OF DOG	CUPS
50 lb	3 1/4
60 lb	3 2/3
80 lb	4 1/2
90 lb	5
100 lb	5 1/3
110 lb	5 3/4
120 lb	6
130 lb	6 1/2
140 lb	6 3/4
160 lb	7 2/3

It's unlikely that foster dogs will be perfectly house-trained when you take them home. At the very least, be prepared for an adjustment period until your foster dog gets used to your schedule. Because dogs have a better chance of being adopted if they are potty-trained, please help your foster dog with this skill. Take him outside to go potty three to six times daily. Most dogs will give cues such as standing near the door or sniffing the ground and walking in small circles to indicate that they need to go out.

Crate training, done in a positive way, can be an effective component of house-training. A crate can be a safe place for foster dogs to have "down time" and can also limit their access to the entire house until they know the rules. It's also recommended to crate your foster dog when you're not home if there are other animals in the home or if you don't have a closed off space for the dog. A crate will be sent home with every foster dog.

Foster dogs need play sessions and walks as an outlet for their energy. The frequency depends on the dog's age, energy level, and specific situation. Try a variety of toys (balls, squeaky toys, rope toys, etc.) to see which ones your foster dog prefers. You can also offer a food-dispensing toy for mental stimulation. You hide treats in the toy and the dog must figure out how to get the treats out. It's important to note that foster dogs are not allowed to go into dog parks or any area where dogs are not permitted.

Foster dogs must be kept indoors. When they're taken outside, you must always supervise them, even if you have a fenced yard, to make sure they don't try to escape or have any negative interactions with other people or animals. Your foster dog is only allowed to be off leash in a fenced backyard. When walking or hiking, the dog must be kept on a leash. This means off-leash dog parks or other off-leash areas are strictly off limits. We don't know how your foster dog will act in these situations, or how other dogs will react, and we need to ensure the safety of all animals. We also don't know if other dogs encountered are sufficiently vaccinated or carry diseases, so it's best if your foster dog doesn't meet any unknown dogs.

Puppies

Puppies should be independent eaters by four to five weeks of age. Dry foods should be their primary source of food, but wet food should be offered frequently as well to encourage eating and maximize growth. Replace the water in their water dish twice a day and wipe out the dish as needed.



During the puppy stage, they should be socialized and be exposed to new situations and environments. However, since their immune systems are not fully developed, these new experiences should occur within your home or fenced yard. Keep experiences positive for the puppies with lots of treats and toys as they learn about new sounds, smells, places, and faces. Do not leave the pup alone with any toys that could be easily ingested or cause harm such as tennis balls, small squeak toys, and knotted rope toys.

Puppies are susceptible to illness, so foster puppies must be kept indoors. During bathroom breaks, they can go into your fenced yard or on puppy pads. Puppies should not be taken to risk of disease.

Watch for signs of illness including frequent crying, restlessness, weakness, coldness, diarrhea, dehydration, shallow or labored breathing, paleness or blueness in color. Notify the Foster Specialist immediately if a puppy is losing weight, is cold to the touch, or is having trouble breathing.

DAILY CARE: CATS & KITTENS

Cats

Foster cats should be fed dry cat food, unless otherwise specified. Feed them once or twice daily, with the amount based on the animal's age and weight. Make sure the cat always has access to fresh, clean water. You can give your foster cat treats (barring any known allergies, of course) to help you bond.

The following chart should be used as a reference for the daily feed amounts of adult foster cats unless otherwise specified. Kittens have a different feeding schedule that should be discussed with the Foster Specialist.

WEIGHT OF CAT	CUP
4 lb	1/4
6 lb	3/8
8 lb	1/2
10 lb	1/2
12 lb	5/8
14 lb	2/3
16 lb	3/4

You can help your foster cat be more adoptable by paying close attention to his litter box habits. Make the litter box as inviting as possible by placing it in an easy to reach spot that's also quiet with low foot traffic so cats aren't startled when trying to take care of business. Scoop out the box at least once daily and empty it completely for cleaning every two weeks. If your foster cat isn't using the litter box, notify the Foster Specialist so you can work on resolving the issue before it becomes a habit.

Play time provides stimulation, encourages socialization, and releases excess energy, so provide your foster cat with at least one or two play sessions per day. Try a variety of toys (balls, squeaky toys, feather toys, etc.) to see which ones your cat prefers. Cat toys don't have to be fancy or expensive; cats often enjoy playing with something as simple as a paper bag or a box with holes cut in the side. Don't leave the cat alone with any toys that could be easily ingested or cause harm such as string toys, yarn, and feathers dangling from a string and wand.

Foster cats must be kept indoors. If your foster cat seems very curious about going outside or is constantly at the door waiting for the right moment, take extra precautions to ensure that the animal doesn't accidentally sneak out when you're coming or going. If you feel unable to manage any behavior, contact the Foster Specialist for guidance.

Kittens

Kittens should be independent eaters by six to seven weeks of age. Dry foods should be their primary source of food, but wet food should be offered frequently as well to encourage eating and maximize growth. Replace the water in their water dish twice a day and wipe out the dish as needed.

During the kitten stage, they should be socialized and exposed to new situations and environments. Keep experiences positive with lots of treats and toys as they learn about new sounds, smells, places, and people. Do not leave the foster kittens alone with any toys that could be easily ingested or cause harm such as string toys, yarn, and feathers dangling from a string and stick.

While in your home, foster kittens will most likely still be learning how to use a litter box. It's important to keep the litter box in an easily accessible and clean place to encourage use. As a tip, keep the litter box close by so kittens have enough time to get to it when they need it.

Kittens are susceptible to illness, so foster kittens must be kept indoors. If any family pets have access to the outdoors, they cannot interact with the foster kitten. Always use a carrier to transport kittens to and from appointments.

Watch for signs of illness including frequent crying, restlessness, weakness, coldness, diarrhea, dehydration, shallow or labored breathing, paleness or blueness in color. Notify the Foster Specialist immediately if a kitten is losing weight, is cold to the touch, or is having trouble breathing.

Mother cat and kittens

Mother cats need to be in a calm, stress-free environment so they know their kittens are safe. Situate the foster family in a private, quiet room away from the daily activities and any other pets in the home.

Set up a fostering room in advance. Place a litter box as far away from the mother cat's food and water bowls as possible and provide a couple of different safe places where she can care for her kittens. A dark area equipped with a whelping box is ideal.

A whelping box needs to be large enough for the mother cat to lay on her side slightly away from all of the kittens inside. The sides should be high enough to prevent the kittens from wandering away, but low enough for easy accessibility for the mother cat. Line the box with puppy pads and then newspapers to help absorb moisture, and top with an easy-to-clean blanket. Keep all materials dry. Do not use straw, hay, or shavings.

When bringing the cat family home, put them in the fostering room and close the door, allowing the mom to explore on her own. Give her a couple of hours before you enter the room and do not be alarmed if it takes a few days for her to stop hiding.



Mother cat's care

The mother cat should fully care for her kittens for at least three to four weeks before she begins to wean them. She will groom and lick her babies frequently for the first two to four weeks. As the babies become more mobile, they will start to leave the nest and deposit urine and feces nearby, which is a good time to introduce a couple of low-sided litter boxes (disposable ones work best).

To ensure the mother cat has enough to eat, give her access to wet and dry food at all times. Food intake for a nursing mother can be two to four times the amount normally consumed.

Observe the mother cat's behavior daily and watch her interactions with the kittens to spot any problems, including maternal neglect. Contact the Foster Specialist with concerns.

Newborn kittens

Fostering neonatal kittens requires an around-the-clock commitment to support these fragile babies. Following are some general guidelines about bottle-feeding and care.

Making formula

Mix two parts water with one part formula until all clumps are gone. You can pre-mix enough to last for 24 hours and refrigerate the unused portion. Just remember that mixed formula lasts only for 24 hours and must be discarded after that time. Heat only enough formula for each feeding and throw away any uneaten warmed formula after each feeding. Do not re-use formula that has been warmed as it may contain harmful bacteria.

Warm the formula by placing the bottle in a bowl of hot water for a few minutes. Test the temperature of the formula by placing a few drops on your inner wrist to be sure it is not too hot. It should be slightly warmer than your body temperature.



Bottle-feeding tips

Before feeding, gently wrap kittens in a towel or blanket so they are warm and feel safe. If the kitten allows it, the forelegs should be free to allow "kneading," which is essential to muscle development and aids digestion. The kitten's belly should be positioned toward the floor.

Latching on to a bottle nipple may take a few tries for the kitten. Ensure the nipple used has an adequate flow of milk: formula should drip out one drop at a time and not a stream. Turn the bottle upside down and allow a drop of formula to come out. Place the bottle nipple in the kitten's

mouth and gently move it back and forth, holding the bottle at a 45-degree angle to keep air from getting into the kitten's stomach. This movement should encourage the kitten to start eating.

If the kitten does not latch on and begin to suckle, wait a few minutes and try again. If the bottle appears to be collapsing, gently remove the nipple from the kitten's mouth and allow more air return to the bottle.

Aspiration

If liquid bubbles out through the kitten's nose or he starts coughing, there may be formula in his lungs. Pat the kitten very gently on the back to elicit a cough or sneeze, or hold him in an inverted position, tail overhead, for a moment to remove the formula from his lungs. Notify the Foster Specialist if this happens to determine if antibiotics or a vet visit is needed.

Stimulation for elimination

Bottle-fed kittens will need stimulation to encourage urination and defecation. After each feeding, wipe the kitten's back end with a baby wipe or warm wet cotton ball. Kittens should urinate after every meal and defecate at least once each day. When a kitten is first introduced to formula, it is normal for him to go up to 48 hours without a bowel movement.

Keeping kittens warm

Kittens less than two weeks old can be kept in small carriers or playpens covered by a blanket to maintain heat and reduce draftiness. As they grow and become more mobile, they will need more space to roam and play. Newborn kittens cannot regulate their body temperatures, so always keep a warm SnuggleSafe disc with them. To prevent thermal burns, the disc must be covered by a blanket and puppy pad that the kitten cannot burrow under.

A kitten's ideal body temperature is 100 to 102 degrees. If a kitten feels cold to the touch, contact the Foster Specialist immediately. A kitten that is cold and unresponsive should be warmed by placing the kitten on an approved heating pad wrapped in two or three layers of towels. Turn the kitten side to side every five minutes. To stimulate blood flow, gently massage the kitten with hand-rubbing.

Weaning kittens

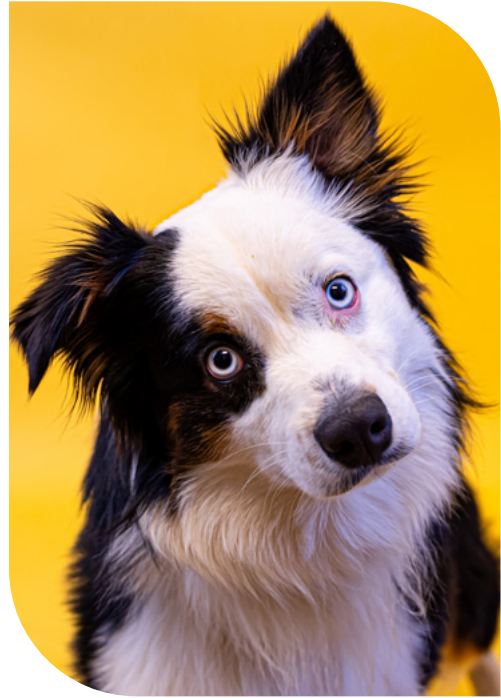
Begin weaning kittens at about four weeks old. Start offering warm gruel (two parts wet food, one part formula) at all times, along with dry kitten food and water. Discard any gruel uneaten after four to six hours and provide a fresh batch. To make gruel, mix ½ can wet food with ¼ can formula per kitten. Add a little water if the kitten prefers. You can make gruel in bulk and refrigerate it, but it must be warmed for the kittens.

Supplement with a bottle every eight hours to ensure kittens are getting the needed nutrients, but always encourage them to eat gruel before offering a bottle. To introduce kittens to the gruel, offer it with a spoon or fingertip on the kitten's tongue. By the end of five weeks, kittens will be happily eating dry and wet food on their own.

Weigh the kittens daily to ensure weight gain. During the weaning stage, introduce kittens to the litter box with a goal of them going on their own at about four weeks old.



MEDICAL & EMERGENCY PROTOCOLS



Routine veterinary care

Cats and dogs need routine veterinary care such as vaccinations, de-wormer, flea and tick prevention, and heartworm prevention. Kittens and puppies receive vaccines and de-wormer every two weeks from the age of four weeks to 16 weeks. Adult cats and dogs receive vaccines annually. Foster animals need check-ups at the shelter every two to four weeks depending on their age, health, and reason for foster.

The Foster Specialist will fully apprise the foster adult of any known medical condition(s) of the animal(s) present. However, new or underlying conditions may arise during the foster period. The Foster Specialist will discuss necessary treatment, veterinary care, and the frequency of necessary check-ups. All veterinary care must be completed through our veterinary medical team unless otherwise approved. The County is not liable for any veterinary care, treatment, or expense provided by an outside source.

Common illnesses

If you notice any signs or symptoms of illness or believe your foster animal is not feeling their best, contact the foster team to schedule a check-up. General signs of illness include diarrhea, vomiting, lethargy, eye or nose discharge, and coughing.

Cats & kittens

Upper respiratory infection (URI) is a fancy word for a kitty cold. Kitty colds are contagious to other cats and kittens, but not to dogs or people. Symptoms include green or yellow eye and nose discharge, sneezing, irritated eyes, lethargy, and congestion.

Urinary tract infection (UTI) is an infection of the urinary tract. Symptoms include frequent urination, straining while trying to urinate, and blood in the urine.

Ringworm is a fungal infection that presents as a round, red lesion on the skin with fur loss. This is contagious to other animals and people, so it's important to thoroughly clean and cover your skin with long sleeves, long pants, or gloves when handling an animal with ringworm.

Diarrhea is most noted by loose or soft stool. This can be caused by numerous things including a change in diet, stress, intestinal parasites, and more.

Fleas and ticks are insects that feed off the blood of animals and people. These insects can also transmit diseases such as Lyme disease. Every foster animal receives monthly flea and tick prevention as well as treatment if needed.

Dogs & puppies

Kennel cough is an infection of a dog's upper respiratory system like a kitty cold. Kennel cough is contagious to other dogs and puppies, but not contagious to cats or people. Symptoms include coughing, eye discharge, and nose discharge.

Urinary tract infection (UTI) is an infection of the urinary tract. Symptoms include frequent urination, straining while trying to urinate, and blood in the urine.

Diarrhea is most noted by loose or soft stool. It can be caused by a change in diet, stress, intestinal parasites, and more.

Skin allergies are typically seen by red, irritated skin with thinning or a lack of fur. A dog may be seen scratching their skin, rubbing their face, or rubbing their back on the ground to relieve their itchy skin.

Arthritis is inflammation of the joints. Most seen in older animals, it usually affects the hips and elbows. Symptoms include difficulty getting up or down, stiffness while walking, and lameness in one or more legs.

Heartworm disease is transmitted by mosquitoes that deposit roundworms into the blood stream. These worms travel to the heart where they can grow up to 10-12 inches long. If left untreated, this disease can result in heart and lung failure. Symptoms include persistent coughing especially after excitement or exercise, lethargy, weight loss, and shallow or labored breathing.



Criteria for emergencies

We have a full-time veterinary medical team and partnerships with certain emergency veterinary offices, so outside medical care must have prior approval. Carefully review the following situations to determine the appropriate course of action.

Emergency: Call daytime or after-hours primary contact immediately.

- Lost foster, bites that break skin, severe lethargy/non-responsive, difficulty breathing, cold to the touch, broken bone/sudden swelling, severe cut, seizures, vomiting blood, repeated attempts to vomit unsuccessfully, toxic plant, food, or substance ingestion.

Urgent: Call daytime phone or text after-hours primary contact (we'll follow-up the next business day if after hours).

- Severe/leaking diarrhea, vomiting more than twice, limping, minor injuries, not eating, losing weight.

Medical Concern: Email AnimalFoster@GwinnettCounty.com or call daytime phone.

- Sneezing, coughing, eye/nose discharge, congestion, hair loss or skin lesions, fleas, intestinal parasites, bloody stool, diarrhea, vomiting, cats urinating outside of the litter box.

Emergency contacts

Office Hours:

(Monday – Friday, 9:00am – 5:00pm): **678.226.7225**

After-Hours:

(Saturdays, Sundays, Holidays, and Monday – Friday, 5:00pm – 9:00am)

Contact staff in the following order and please allow sufficient time for a response.

1. Rescue Specialist: **678.245.2447**
2. Assistant Manager: **470.378.0563**
3. Kennel Supervisor: **678.232.1954**
4. Last Resort: Call the Gwinnett County non-emergency line at **770.513.5700** to be connected to an on-call Animal Control Officer for assistance.

Non-emergency contact

Call **770.339.3200** or email AnimalFoster@GwinnettCounty.com

FINDING FOREVER HOMES

Spreading the word

While we are responsible for finding forever homes for our animals, you can help by telling friends, family, and co-workers about your foster pet and even sharing social media postings. However, there is one exception to this rule: If you are fostering an animal in Protective Custody, you cannot share pictures of them or otherwise describe or discuss them on social media, via email or word of mouth, nor can you bring the animal out in public.

Meeting potential adopters

Fosters typically provide transportation to and from the shelter so the foster animal can meet with potential adopters. We'll discuss and coordinate the specifics to schedule visits that are as convenient as possible for both the Foster and the potential adopter.

Saying goodbye

Few things are more fulfilling than a foster animal finding their forever family. It's one of the most rewarding benefits of fostering pets. But releasing an animal that you have lovingly fostered, even to a wonderful new home, can be emotionally stressful. This is completely understandable.

Many foster families receive photos and updates of fosters enjoying their new homes. You were part of building a successful life and helping the pet find a loving forever home and that is tremendously satisfying.

Sometimes a foster home turns into a permanent home. "Failed Family Fosters" happen often. It's a great outcome for all involved. Just keep in mind that fostering an animal does not automatically qualify you to adopt the animal at the conclusion of the foster period. Standard adoption protocols must be followed.

We hope you enjoy your experience as a foster parent and that you feel a great deal of satisfaction watching an animal flourish under your care. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns you may have.

