Kitten Foster Care Manual

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Pets In Need
871 5th Avenue
Redwood City, CA 94063
650-367-1405
www.PetsInNeed.org
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Communication

In order to cut down on emails and phone calls, our communication process relies on online form submissions on our website’s Foster Resources page and a private Facebook foster group. Here is a quick guide to how we’d like you to communicate with us.

Get urgent medical help, 8am - 4:30pm
PIN Foster Hotline
(650) 421-3009

Get urgent medical help, 4:30pm - 8am
Sage Animal Hospital
934 Charter Street
Redwood City
(650) 417-7243
(Call ahead, if possible. Let them know you’re fostering for Pets In Need)

Report a non-emergency health issue
Online form

Report a non-emergency behavior issue
Online form

Fill out a kitten personality profile
Personality profile

Ask or learn about available kittens
Facebook group

Share photos and stories with our foster community
Facebook group

Ask our community for general foster advice
Facebook group

Contact Pets in Need Foster Coordinator
jpearson@petsinneed.org
Types of Fosters

Most kittens are ready to be spayed or neutered and made available for adoption when they weigh 2 pounds (usually when they are around 8 weeks old). Here are the various types of kittens you may be able to foster.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type:</th>
<th>Description:</th>
<th>Age:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bottle babies:</td>
<td>Kittens that are without a mother need constant care and feeding.</td>
<td>4 weeks and under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mom w/babies:</td>
<td>Mom does most of the work. You support her and socialize the kittens.</td>
<td>Newborn to 6 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kittens (eating on own):</td>
<td>Kittens need socialization and weight gain. At 2 pounds they can be spayed or neutered and adopted.</td>
<td>5 to 8 weeks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responsibilities

Signing up, picking up and returning

When we have kittens available, we’ll post them on our Facebook group and/or contact prospective fosters by email. Before you bring your kittens home, our Foster Coordinator will send you most of the necessary supplies via Chewy.com and make a pick-up appointment.
When the kittens are ready to be spayed and neutered (usually around 8 weeks old), our foster coordinator will make an appointment for their return.

**Medical appointments and weight tracking**

While fostering young kittens, you will have medical appointments at our shelter every 2-3 weeks for vaccinations, worming, and flea control. Our foster medical appointments are Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 3:30 to 4:30pm.

At the time of pick up, you will be given a document called a Kitten Passport for every kitten in your care. Bring it each time you bring the kittens in to an appointment because our medical staff will use it to record the date we need to see you next.

The Kitten Passport is also a weight tracker. Please record each kitten’s weight in grams on the included chart every morning and evening.

**Marketing your kittens**

One of the most important parts of being a foster is helping us get your animal adopted! With every cat you foster, you will be asked to fill out a *kitten personality profile* -- please be truthful when writing these descriptions.

We understand that fostering is an exciting and photogenic experience! Feel free to share photos and videos of your foster kittens on your personal social media accounts (tag us @petsinneed1965) as well as on our [Kitten and Cat Foster Facebook group](https://www.facebook.com/PetsInNeed1965FosterCare). If any of your friends want to adopt, please contact the Foster Coordinator as soon as possible. While the final decision is ours, we want to accommodate referrals from foster parents if we can.

**Providing a Safe Home**

**Supplies**

Besides time, a safe home and a warm lap, it doesn’t take much to raise kittens. These are the basic supplies you will need. For bedding, fleece blankets works best. Please don’t use terry cloth towels, which can catch on little claws. **PLEASE USE ONLY THE FOOD, FORMULA, AND CAT LITTER WE PROVIDE.**
Pets in Need will provide:

- Carrier
- Food and formula
- Bowls and bottles
- Low-sided litter box
- Cat litter
- Litter scoop
- Warmie
- Flea Comb
- Scale
- Cat litter

Foster will provide:

- Bedding (old t-shirts, fleece)
- Scratching post*
- Washable toys*

*not required

Where to set up your foster kittens

Your foster kittens should be separated from all other animals in your household and kept in a small, quiet, easy to clean area with a door, such as a bathroom or spare room, where they have access to their food, water, and litter box. Kitchens and laundry rooms may also be used. Because kittens cannot regulate their body temperature, this area should be warm and draft-free. Never put the kittens in a garage.

Using a warmie

Included in your kitten kit is a microwavable heat pad which will provide your foster kittens with up to 10 hours of warmth. Instructions for use are included at the end of this manual. Please read them carefully and follow them exactly. Never overheat the warmie. Always wrap it in a blanket in the kitten area. If the kittens can crawl, we recommend putting the heating pad underneath only half of the carrier or bed, so they can get away from the heat source if they want to. **Never use it with an animal that is unconscious or in a small area where the animal can’t move away if overheated.**

Kitten proofing

When preparing a space for your foster kittens, please remember that cats are relentlessly curious, agile, and fearless! Also, they grow and develop quickly. A kitten that is happy to
snuggle in her bed one week may be climbing the curtains the next. Here is a list of preparations you will need to make before welcoming kittens into your home:

- **If your kittens are in a bathroom, keep the toilet lid closed at all times**
- Put away any small items that a kitten could swallow
- Remove cleaning supplies, medications, and toiletries
- Hide any breakable items, block electrical outlets and remove toxic plants
- Place electrical wires out of reach
- Block off any spaces that the kittens could crawl into and hide in
- Keep trash cans covered, or inside a latched cabinet
- Close off spaces behind washers and dryers
- Keep washers and dryers closed at all times
- Keep all foods out of reach

### Home introduction

When you introduce your kittens to their new environment, allow them to make the first move. Place the carrier on the ground, remove the door, and allow them to come out when they’re ready. Make sure the litter box is in a space that is easy for them to find. Place their food and water as far away from their litter box as possible. Larger litters may need multiple food and water bowls and litter boxes.

Introduce yourself by spending some time sitting in the room with them. If they do not want to be handled (running away, hissing, and/or hiding), please do not force them to interact with you. It will take some time before they are completely comfortable with you.

### How to disinfect

**Litter box:** Using gloves, dispose of used litter in a plastic bag, and put it in a sealed trash can outside. Wash the litter box with warm water and a little bit of soap at least once a week.

**Your hands:** Always wash your hands with soap and water before and after handling kittens.
Your foster room: Disinfect the foster area weekly during the kittens’ time with you. Remove all organic material (food and fecal matter) and use any household cleaner. If your kittens have been sick, we will provide a special solution for you to clean with.

Between litters, please deep clean and disinfect the entire room and all supplies and bedding.

Care of Orphaned Kittens

Without mom in the picture, you’ll be responsible for every aspect of your kittens’ care. The good news? It’s fun and rewarding.

Stages of kitten development

❖ Kittens are born with closed eyes and tiny folded-down ears.
❖ At 5 days, the stump of the umbilical cord dries and falls off.
❖ At 7 days, the kittens’ eyes open and ears begin to unfold.
❖ By approximately 2 weeks, the kittens begin to crawl and interact with each other.
❖ By approximately 3 weeks, kittens can walk and play. Teeth begin to emerge.
❖ By 4 weeks, kittens are ready to play with people and toys. Claws are now retractable.
❖ By 5 weeks, a kitten will be using the litter box.
❖ Between 5 and 6 weeks, kittens will begin self-grooming.
❖ By 7 weeks, kittens eyes will begin changing from blue to their permanent color.
❖ By 8 to 9 weeks, kittens are ready for adoption.

Feeding

Kittens are fed different amounts and types of food according to their ages. Please remember that these are averages. As long as a kitten is bright, alert, and responsive and gaining weight, don’t worry. Here is a quick overview of typical feeding schedules:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age in weeks:</th>
<th>What to feed:</th>
<th>How to Feed:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newborn</td>
<td>30ml of formula per 115g of kitten body weight daily, divided in equal portions for each feeding</td>
<td>Every 2-3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>30ml of formula per 115g of kitten body weight daily, divided in equal portions for each feeding</td>
<td>Every 2-3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>30ml of formula per 115g of kitten body weight daily, divided in equal portions for each feeding AND gruel (½ can wet food mixed with ¼ can formula per kitten per day)</td>
<td>Every 3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>30ml of formula per 115g of kitten body weight daily, divided in equal portions for each feeding AND gruel (½ can wet food mixed with ¼ can formula per kitten per day)</td>
<td>Every 4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>30ml of formula per 115g of kitten body weight daily, divided in equal portions for each feeding AND gruel (½ can wet food mixed with ¼ can formula per kitten per day)</td>
<td>Formula every 8 hours. Introduce gruel, feed fresh 2x/day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 weeks</td>
<td>Approximately ¼ can wet food and ¼ can kibble per kitten per day</td>
<td>Wet food available at all times, feed fresh 2x/day. Water, kibble available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8 weeks</td>
<td>Approximately ¼ can wet food and ¼ can kibble per kitten per day At 7 weeks, transition from RC Babycat to Science Diet Kitten (Day 1: 100% Babycat, Days 2+3: 50/50, Day 4: 100% Science Diet Kitten)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How to make formula

Combine two parts water with one part KMR (powdered kitten milk replacement), and mix until clumps are gone. After each feeding, discard uneaten formula immediately, and thoroughly clean the bottle and nipple. Please only use the formula we give you.
How to bottle-feed a kitten

1. Warm the formula by placing the filled bottle in a bowl of hot water for a few minutes. Before feeding the kittens, always test the temperature of the formula by placing a few drops on your inner wrist. It should be slightly warmer than your body temperature.

2. Ensure that your foster kitten is warm before offering food. Do not attempt to feed a kitten who is chilled; this can have serious health consequences.

3. Wrap the kitten in a towel or blanket and position him so that his belly is toward the floor. Kittens should not be fed on their backs or in an upright position.

4. Turn the bottle upside down and allow a drop of formula to come out. Next hold the bottle at a 45-degree angle and place the nipple in the kitten’s mouth and gently move it back and forth. This movement should encourage the kitten to start eating. Never squeeze the bottle. If the kitten doesn’t latch on and start 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 let more air return to the bottle.

When the kitten is full, he will either stop suckling, or bubbles will begin to appear around his mouth. After each feeding, hold the kitten upright with its tummy against your shoulder and pat it gently until it burps. Your foster kittens will regulate their own food intake.

How to make gruel

Mix 1/2 can of wet food with approximately 1/4 can of formula per kitten. You can make the gruel in bulk in advance and refrigerate it, but warm it before offering it to the kittens. Watch closely to make sure all the kittens are eating, and always discard leftovers. Please only use the food and formula we give you.

How to wean kittens

When your kittens are approximately 3.5 to 4 weeks old, you will start introducing solid food. You will know they are ready because they will chew on the bottle and act insatiable. Spoon gruel from a small bowl or saucer into the kittens’ mouths with your finger until they get the idea. Don’t be surprised if their first inclination is to walk through
the bowl rather than eating from it. Some kittens are reluctant to give up the bottle -- just keep trying.

Caring for independent eaters

By 5 weeks, the kittens should have dry food available at all times. By 6-7 weeks, they should be eating independently. Dry food should be their primary source of food, but offer wet food frequently as well to encourage calorie intake and growth. Replace their water twice a day and wash their dish daily. Please only use the food we give you.

Stimulating and cleaning a kitten

Orphaned kittens less than two weeks old need to be stimulated for elimination. Using a cotton ball, tissue, or gauze pad moistened with warm water, gently stroke the kitten’s anus and genital area until it eliminates.

Be very gentle when you do this, and don’t worry if no urine or stool is produced after every feeding. By the time the kitten is three weeks old, it should be able to eliminate without your help. Normal kitten stools are yellowish brown with a jam-like consistency.

At every age, kittens can be messy. Feces, urine, milk, food, and mucus can irritate the skin and sap the body of vital energy. Make sure to clean and dry your foster kitten gently with a warm washcloth and towel after each feeding, or when feces, urine, or mucus is on their fur.

Socializing your kittens

While kittens are playful by nature, they are not born knowing the appropriate way to play with people. In addition to handling and cuddling them, help them become good pets by teaching them how to play nicely. Discourage biting behavior by doing the following:

➔ Have an adequate supply of toys on hand always. Toys such as the “cat dancer” or cat wand are wonderful because they create distance between the toys and your hands and encourage play with appropriate items.

➔ Throw toys! Some kittens like to fetch or carry items around.

➔ Provide the kitten with a stuffed animal that he or she can kick, bite, and wrestle.
Never swat, blow on, or scruff a kitten for mouthing. Kittens will not understand this type of correction and you will only agitate the kittens further.

If your kitten does bite you and break the skin, please notify the Foster Coordinator as soon as possible. We are legally required to document the incident and quarantine the animal. In most cases, we can arrange for the kitten to serve his “bite quarantine” period in your home.

Working with shy kittens

Try to spend as much time with them as possible so that they become desensitized to your presence. Sitting on the floor with your kittens when you feed them will ensure that they associate your presence with a positive experience. Next, try hand feeding them canned food, making sure that you offer a large enough chunk that you don’t accidentally get nipped by a hungry kitten! Once they are eating comfortably from your hand, you can try stroking them while they are eating. Eventually, you want to be able to hold them while they are eating.

Introducing your kittens to strangers

Please try to ensure that your kittens do not bond solely to you by making sure that they have contact with strangers and other family members as well. If you live alone, we recommend that you invite people over specifically to spend time with the kittens.

Introducing your kittens to children

Always supervise children carefully - kittens are very fragile and can easily be injured by accident. Also, kittens are very impressionable at this age and a bad experience can leave a permanent mark. Ask children to sit on the floor and give them a toy such as a cat dancer to gently move across the floor. You may place the kitten in the child’s lap, but don’t force the kitten to stay and never allow the child to chase the kitten.
Fostering a Mom with Kittens

In order to feel safe, mother cats need privacy, quiet, and minimal activity. Stress can cause cats to become aggressive or stop taking care of their babies. If you have other pets (which we don’t generally allow), you must be able to prevent them from approaching the door of the foster room.

Setting up for success

Please set up your foster room before you pick up your mother cat and kittens from us. The room should have one or two larger safe spaces or nests, boxes on their side, a cat carrier with the door removed, or an empty litter box with towels. Mom will want to choose somewhere to keep her kittens.

Home Introduction

When you first let mom out, do not pet her or make too many advances. Leave her alone with the kittens, with the foster room door closed, to explore her new home. Adult cats can take a while to adjust to new places and mom cats are no exception. They may take a few days or more to come out of hiding.

Litter box

Ideally, the litter box will be as far away from the food, water, and bedding as possible. Once the kittens start exploring, you will need to add a low-sided litter box for their use. Please only use the cat litter we give you.

Handling and socialization

Proceed slowly with an adult cat you don’t know - let her come to you, pet her only as much as she is comfortable with, and stop petting at the first signs of discomfort (swishing tail, ears laid back, moving away, hissing, or growling).
Co-parenting with a mother cat

For the first few weeks of life, mom should do everything necessary for the kittens. After that, you can start sharing some of the kitten care duties with her, if she is willing.

Grooming

Mother cats do a lot of grooming and licking during their kittens’ first 2-4 weeks of life. Anogenital grooming stimulates elimination, and the mom consumes the fecal matter and urine to keep the nest and babies clean. Later, when the kittens are able to leave the nest, the anogenital licking subsides, and the kittens will begin depositing feces and urine nearby. At this point, provide a shallow litter box for their use. You do not need to intervene, but there will be more cleaning to do during this phase.

Nursing

Kittens begin to nurse 1-2 hours after they are born. Though born with their eyes closed, they can find their mother by her warmth, and she should make this easier by lying near them on her side. The nursing/suckling relationship has three distinct stages:

1. In the first stage, mom initiates each nursing episode, waking the kittens by licking them and then encircling them with her body. After a little searching, kittens latch on and nurse.
2. In the second stage (2-3 weeks postpartum) kittens can see, hear, and interact with the mother inside and outside the nest. The kittens will initiate some nursing episodes, and the mother will generally cooperate by lying down next to them.
3. In the third stage (5 weeks postpartum), the kittens initiate virtually all nursing, but the mother becomes gradually more evasive. You can help the weaning process by encouraging the kittens to eat canned and, later, dry food. We may bring the mother back to the shelter at this point to be spayed and adopted.

When to separate kittens from their mother

If all members of your feline family are healthy and well socialized, there is no reason to separate kittens from their mother before the kittens are weaned. However, sometimes there are medical and behavioral reasons to separate mom from kittens earlier. These might include:
1. Mom is not taking care of babies. Warning signs include refusing to nurse, not responding to kittens’ cries, staying away from kittens that are under 5 weeks old, and not grooming them.

2. Mom is under-socialized, difficult to handle, or preventing the foster parent from handling the kittens. Since we don’t want kittens learning this behavior, we may separate them once they are eating on their own, at 4-5 weeks of age.

3. Mom is taking care of babies, but there are medical concerns for the mom or the babies, which warrant separation.

**Medical Information**

Since cats can’t tell us how they’re feeling using words, we rely on our fosters to observe our mothers and kittens carefully. Early diagnosis generally makes treating common cat illnesses quicker and easier.

**Signs of a healthy cat**

➔ Alert
➔ Interested in their surroundings
➔ Good grooming habits
➔ Good appetite
➔ Drinks moderately

**Symptoms of illness**

➔ Lack of interest in surroundings
➔ Lack of activity
➔ Lack of appetite
➔ Increased or decreased thirst
➔ Weight loss
➔ No grooming
➔ Pale gums
➔ Sneezing and/or coughing
➔ Discharge from eyes and nose
➔ Greasy coat or hair loss
➔ Diarrhea
➔ Waxy ear discharge
Health Issues

Because kittens’ immune systems are not fully developed, they can be more prone to serious health issues such as Panleukopenia, FIP (Feline Infectious Peritonitis), FELV (Feline Leukemia), and FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus). For this reason, it is essential that you keep your resident animals both fully vaccinated and completely separate from your foster kittens.

When to contact us

Once they become sick, kittens can go downhill quickly. If you even suspect a problem, please don’t hesitate to reach out to us.

Immediately report these symptoms using our online form:

➔ Loss of appetite for 8 hours or not gaining weight over 3 weigh-ins
➔ Stool that is discolored, has an odd smell, or shaped like a cow-patty (normal kitten stools are yellowy brown with a jam-like consistency)
➔ Hair loss
➔ Worms in the feces
➔ Ear mites
➔ Eyes that are squinty, red, inflamed, weepy, or have yellow discharge
➔ Vomiting undigested food once. Cat still active and playful
➔ Congestion, raspy breathing, or dry, infrequent sneezing. Cat active and playful
➔ Limping

Immediately report these symptoms by phone:

**Pets in Need foster hotline (650) 421-3009 (8am to 4:30pm)
**Sage Animal Hospital (650) 417-7243 (4:30pm to 8am)

➔ Noticeable lethargy
➔ Kitten is cold to the touch
➔ Pale gums
➔ Unconsciousness or convulsions
➔ Stool that is white, light yellow, black, contains mucus or a lot of blood
➔ Hovering above the water bowl, but not drinking
➔ Diarrhea and lethargy
➔ Straining in the litter box, or swollen rectum
➔ Vomiting more than once. Vomiting once and lethargic.
➔ Very shallow or labored breathing
➔ Physical injury, difficulty walking, jumping, or running
➔ Has eaten something toxic

Poisons and Toxins

Because your kittens will be living in a small room that you have carefully kitten-proofed, it is extremely unlikely that they will ingest or come into contact with any toxic substances, human food, or medication. If they do, call us or Sage Animal Hospital immediately.

FAQs

Can my foster kitten interact with my resident animals?

All foster kittens should be kept completely separate from your resident animals. This will help prevent the spread of known or unknown illnesses to your resident animals.

Can I let my foster kitten outdoors?

Foster kittens should never be allowed outdoors. Please guard against escapes. They can and will push out window screens windows, escape from balconies, and take advantage of open doors and windows.

What if I have to leave town while I’m fostering?

Let us know as soon as possible and we will find your kittens another foster home. Please do not have them stay with a friend or hire a pet sitter; all fosters must go through our training.

When a kitten weighs 2 pounds, is it automatically ready to come back?
The kitten is ready if it weighs 2 pounds *and* is not on any medication for an upper respiratory infection. At that time, please email the Foster Coordinator to discuss.

**What if one of the kittens weighs 2 pounds but the others do not?**

We strongly prefer that all your kittens return together. If one is much larger than his siblings, email the Foster Coordinator to discuss.

**How much time do I need to spend with the kittens?**

As much time as you possibly can! The more time you spend with your kittens, the more social they will become. You will also spot symptoms when your kittens are not feeling well. Early diagnosis can be critical with animals this young.

**Can my children take care of the kittens?**

Fostering is a wonderful family experience that teaches children the importance of caring for and respecting animals. To keep our kittens safe and healthy, please be diligent about providing guidance, instructions, and rules. At no time should children be the primary care provider for foster kittens -- this is the responsibility of the parent.

**Will I need to give medications to my kittens?**

In many cases, foster cats and kittens will need medications. Most medications are given orally (by pill or liquid) or ocularly (in the eyes). A medical technician will show you how.

**Will any of my foster kittens die?**

Happily, the overwhelming majority of our foster kittens survive and flourish, thanks to the dedication and care of our foster parents. That said, kittens are fragile and they don’t all survive. If any of your kittens die, call the Foster Hotline or email the Foster Coordinator for further instructions.