Cat Foster Care Manual

Updated January 2019

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

(Call ahead, if possible. Let them know you’re fostering for Pets In Need)

**Sage Animal Hospital**
934 Charter Street
Redwood City
(650) 417-7243

**Report a non-emergency health issue**

**Online form**

**Report a non-emergency behavior issue**

**Online form**

**Fill out a cat personality profile**

**Personality profile**

**Ask or learn about available cats**

**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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type:</th>
<th>Description:</th>
<th>Age:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical foster</td>
<td>Give a cat a safe, quiet place to recover from an illness or surgery</td>
<td>Adult cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialization foster</td>
<td>Help a shy or unhappy-in-the-shelter cat come out of her shell with patience and attention</td>
<td>Adult cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster getaway</td>
<td>Give a long-stay cat a break from the monotony of shelter life</td>
<td>Adult cat</td>
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Responsibilities

Signing up, picking up, and returning

When we have cats available, we'll post them on Facebook and/or contact prospective fosters by email. If you sign up, our Foster Coordinator will send you the necessary supplies via Chewy.com and make a pick-up appointment. When the cat is ready to return to the shelter, our foster coordinator will make an appointment for her return.

Medical appointments

While fostering cats, you may occasionally have medical appointments at our shelter 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 Cat Passport. Bring it each time you bring your foster cat in to an appointment because our medical staff will use it to record the date we need to see you next, if any.

**Marketing your cats**

One of the most important parts of being a foster parent is helping us get your animal adopted! With every cat you foster, you will be asked to fill out a [cat 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 cats on your personal social media accounts (tag us @petsinneed1965) as well as on our [Kitten and Cat Foster Facebook page](#). 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 foster cats. These are the basic supplies you will need. **PLEASE USE ONLY THE FOOD WE PROVIDE.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pets in Need will provide:</th>
<th>Foster will provide:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrier</td>
<td>Litter box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Cat litter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowls</td>
<td>Litter scoop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collar with ID tag</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bedding (towels, blankets)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Washable toys*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*not required</td>
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</tbody>
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**Where to set up your foster cat**

It is a good idea to introduce your foster cat to her new environment slowly. Confining her to 1-2 rooms that contain her bed, litter box, food, and water (with established animals kept away) will help her to feel secure.

**Home introduction**

It is very important to give your foster cat time to adjust. It may take several weeks for her to feel comfortable in her new home. She may hide initially, perhaps even for several days.
Unless necessary, never drag her out of her hiding place. She will appear when she starts to feel more comfortable. Remember: your foster cat has been through some traumatic changes. She may have been lost, abandoned, or forced to break a loving bond with a previous human companion.

**Sleeping arrangements**

Unlike dogs, who can be trained to sleep in one area, cats like to choose their own sleeping spots. To discourage your foster cat from sleeping on furniture, you may wish to provide her with a cozy bed in a quiet corner, away from drafts. Do not be disappointed, however, if your cat does not use it!

**Keeping foster cats indoors**

Foster cats are to kept indoors only at all times. Unless there are secure screens on your windows and doors, keep them closed. Make sure your cat is wearing an identification tag on a breakaway collar at all times. Notify us immediately if your foster cat escapes.

**Cat proofing your home**

When preparing a space for your foster cat, please remember that cats are relentlessly curious, agile, and fearless! Foster cats can be hard on curtains, carpeting and furniture, and Pets In Need will not be able to reimburse you for the damages. Carefully preparing your foster area will keep both your foster cat and your belongings safe. Here is a list of preparations you will need to make before welcoming a foster cat into your home:

- If your cat will be kept in a bathroom, keep the toilet lid closed at all times
- Put away any small items that a cat 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 cat 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
Other pets

Introducing your foster cat to established pets

Established pets frequently do not take kindly to a newcomer. Intelligent handling during the getting acquainted period is important. Try to keep your established pets’ routines as regular as possible, and make sure they receive extra love and reassurance to avoid jealous reactions to the newcomer.

Be patient and give the animals time to accept one another. It may take weeks, even months, until the animals live in harmony. They may become best friends or simply learn to tolerate one another.

Introducing your foster cat to resident cats

Spayed or neutered cats are generally more accepting of other cats than unaltered ones. An unneutered male cat will probably never accept another male. Kittens may be accepted more readily than adults. In time, two altered adult cats can often become firm friends.

Never force an interaction. When cats meet, expect growling and hissing. Keep a squirt bottle handy, but do not interfere unless a fight breaks out. Spraying water will break up almost any fight.

It is important that each cat has her own litter box, water, and food dish. Never leave cats together unsupervised until you are certain that they have accepted each other.

Introducing your foster cat to resident dogs

Keep your dog and foster cat separated until the cat feels secure in her new home. When you are ready, hold the dog firmly on a leash, and allow the cat to move around freely. Proceed using common sense and taking into account both animals’ comfort levels. Never allow your dog to chase, tease, or corner the cat, even in play. Provide the cat with a safe refuge that is high up, or in a separate room away from the dog.

It is a good idea to trip the cat’s claws before the introduction in case she swats at the dog’s face. Never leave the animals together unsupervised until you are certain they have accepted each other.
Foster cats and your family

Children

Although Pets In Need encourages all family members to become involved in caring for your foster cat, do not expect your children to assume all responsibility for this. A cat can be a child’s playmate or friend, but it is important that children be taught proper respect and handling of your foster cat. A cat should be picked up and held with one hand under the chest and the other supporting the hindquarters. Make sure children understand this. Children must also respect the cat’s need to sleep and eat undisturbed. Never leave young children alone with a foster cat.

Playtime

A cat does not require constant attention. A brief daily play period will suffice. Use cat toys, balls, and cat dancers, but never loose yarn or string, which she might swallow. Never roughhouse with your cat because this may encourage biting and scratching, which are difficult behaviors or habits to break.

Socializing adult cats

For adult cats, socialization will involve gaining their trust. This can be accomplished by speaking softly to the cat, and petting and grooming her as she begins to accept you. Unless you are fostering an exuberant youngster who is ready to play the first day, you may have to wait a few days before you try toys with your foster cat. If the cat is shy, she may run from you if you attempt to throw a toy her way. Give the cat some time before you begin to play, then choose a toy that doesn’t involve any fast moves on your part -- perhaps a stuffed toy or a laser pointer. Let the cat play at her own pace.

If your foster cat does bite you and break the skin, please notify us immediately using our online form. We are legally required to document the incident and quarantine the animal.
Feeding and litter box training

Feeding

Please refer to your Cat Passport for exact feeding instructions, and only use the food we give you. Most cats like to snack throughout the day, so a bowl of dry food should be available at all times. Your foster cat will additionally be fed canned food morning and night. Please wash her water bowl daily, and give her fresh water. Never feed your foster cat close to her litter box.

Litter box training

Most cats can easily be trained to use the litter box. Ensure a clean box is always available, and that your foster cat knows where it is. Your foster cat may make a mistake when first acclimating to her new environment. If this happens, neutralize odors by cleaning the area with a 50/50 solution of white vinegar and water. Commercial enzyme products, such as Nature's Miracle, also work well.

It is frustrating when a cat fails to use her litter box. Patience and praise are essential to solving this dilemma. There are many reasons for this problem. Common ones include:

1. Your cat doesn’t like the brand of litter.
2. The location of the box is not private enough, or too near food dishes.
3. The box is not being kept clean enough.
4. The cat is attracted to an area where another cat has eliminated.
5. The cat has a health problem, such as diarrhea, parasites, or a urinary tract infection.
6. The cat is stressed by other animals or young children.
7. The cat can’t tolerate fragranced soaps or disinfectants used to clean the box.

Confining your foster cat to a restricted area that contains her bed, litter box, food, and water when you are not there to supervise may help with litter training.
Medical Information

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

Signs of a healthy cat

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

Symptoms of illness

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

Once they become sick, cats 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 up to 18 hours
➔ Over two days of diarrhea
➔ Eyes that are red, inflamed, weepy, or have yellow discharge
➔ Vomiting undigested food twice in one day. Cat still active and playful
➔ Congestion, raspy breathing, or dry, infrequent sneezing. Cat active and playful
➔ Limping
➔ Hair loss
➔ Worms in feces (looks like rice or spaghetti)
➔ Fleas
➔ Waxy ear discharge

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
➔ Bloody stool or uncontrolled diarrhea
➔ Hovering above the water bowl, but not drinking
➔ Diarrhea
➔ Straining in the litter box, or swollen rectum
➔ Two days without pooping
➔ 24 hours without peeing
➔ Vomiting repeatedly or vomiting and lethargic
➔ Very shallow or labored breathing
➔ Physical injury
➔ Unconsciousness or convulsions
➔ Has eaten something toxic
Poisons and toxins

Because your cats will be living in an environment that you have carefully cat-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 immediately.

FAQs

Can my foster cat interact with my resident animals?

As long as your resident animals are fully vaccinated, your foster cat may be introduced to them. Only allow them to interact under your direct supervision until you are certain they have accepted each other.

Can I let my foster cat outdoors?

Your foster cat must be kept indoors at all times.

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

Let us know as soon as possible and we will find them 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 will my foster cat be ready to come back?

This will vary on a case by case basis. Any amount of time that a foster cat spends in your home will be good for her. We will discuss an approximate return date with you when we assign you an animal.

How much time do I need to spend with my foster cat?

As much time as is mutually enjoyable! The more time you spend with your foster cat, the more social she will become. You will get to know her well enough to help us find the ideal home for her.
Can my children take care of my foster cat?

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

Will I need to give medications to my foster cat?

In many cases, foster cats will need medications. Most medications are given orally (by pill or liquid) or ocularly (in the eyes). A medical technician will show you how before we send your cat home with you.