

# Guide for Cat Foster Families

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## Introduction

Thank you so much for your interest in fostering pets for Caldwell County Animal Care Enforcement. By opening up your home to foster pets, you're not only helping to save lives, but you're also providing the individual attention and love these animals desperately need.

Our foster program is designed to help pets from our shelter get a second chance at finding a home — a chance they may not have received at the shelter. Many of the pets who need foster homes require extra care and attention, which shelters often don't have the staff or resources to provide. But in a loving foster home, every animal can get the individual attention he or she needs to find a forever family.

Foster homes are asked to provide care for the pets, as well as transportation to and from veterinary appointments as needed, and transportation to the shelter for routine medical care. Care for fosters includes feeding according to size and needs, exercise according to energy levels, and lots of playtime and positive socialization.

Although fostering is a lot of work, it is a very rewarding experience. By participating in this program, you are saving lives and helping many different types of pets find the families they've been longing for. Through fostering, we can work together to save lives!

## Why Foster Cats and Kittens?

### Fostering Saves Lives

Caldwell County Animal Care Enforcement is a municipal county shelter, we stay very busy and are usually very crowded. Caldwell County Animal Care Enforcement takes in strays, animals picked up by our enforcement officers, injured animals, and even owner surrenders by appointment. Because of the number of cats and kittens constantly being taken in we need to have fosters on hand to help us with our shelter population. Due to our limited capacity kennels, we are always in need of fosters.

Fostering truly does save lives, it helps us to find homes for these cats more quickly than we would be able to do from the shelter. If we didn't have fosters on hand, our shelter is only allowed to house a small percentage of the cats we take in.

### Learning More About the Foster

When our cats come in as strays it is very hard to learn about their personalities due to the shelter environment being such a stressful and busy place for these animals. When an animal is staying with a foster, they tend to open much more than they would in a kennel. From being in a foster's home we learn about the personality of the cat(s), what

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their favorite toys are, if they do good with other cats or dogs, how they do in a home setting, and so much more! Fosters give us the opportunity to get these cats adopted much faster than they would staying in the shelter.

## Socialization

-The ideal time for socializing kittens is from two to seven weeks of age. As soon as their eyes and ears are opening, socialization opportunities begin. Cats and kittens are individuals, and each will respond differently to socializing techniques. Some cats can be genetically friendly, but feral by experience.

-If dealing with unsocialized, semi-feral cats or kittens, be sure to take things slow and introduce them to new things properly. It may even take the full fostering period to get them comfortable with new things. Having a friendly cat in the house around them will let the cat or kitten know that the home is safe.

## Top Tips for Foster Parents

- ♥ Check in regularly with Animal Services about your foster – return calls in a timely manner.
- ♥ Ask for advice if your cat/kitten has stopped eating or has undesirable behaviors.
- ♥ If your cat seems sick, please note symptoms, and check in with Caldwell County Animal Care Enforcement.
- ♥ Introduce your foster to other animals in the house slowly, if you are fostering a sick cat or kitten keep them separately.
- ♥ Do not use clumping litter for kittens under six months of age – they tend to eat it and become sick.
- ♥ Wash your hands and change your shirt after handling sick animals to prevent spread of illness.
- ♥ Never let your cat run loose outside; guard against escapes from the home.

### Foster families need to provide:

- ♥ A healthy and safe environment for their foster pets.
- ♥ Transportation to and from the shelter and all vet appointments as needed.
- ♥ Socialization and cuddle time to help teach foster pets' positive family and pet relationships.
- ♥ Lots of exercise and positive stimulation to help them develop into great pets.
- ♥ Species and age-appropriate food at least twice daily.
- ♥ A clean and sanitary environment for the foster pet, disinfected twice daily.

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Foster families will be given a checklist and report card to ensure the pet is receiving proper care while in the home.

## How long will the cat need to be in Foster Care?

Ideally, foster pets stay in their assigned foster homes until they get adopted. We cannot guarantee a length of stay but we are willing to work with you if it is not working out and you need to return your foster pet.

\*Please provide us with a reasonable notice to find them a new place to reside. \*

If you have travel plans while you are fostering an animal, you will need to contact us ASAP so we can help you make plans for your foster until you return. Please provide at least one week's notice to ensure that we can find placement for your foster. If your trip is over a holiday, please provide a minimum of two weeks' notice.

You are not required to continue to foster an animal if you feel it's not working out. However, we may not have an immediate alternate foster home for the animal, we will work on moving your foster out as soon as possible, but ask for your understanding and patience. Please call us during business hours if this situation arises.

Please send photos regularly to help staff advertise the cat for adoption. This will help move the foster pet out of your home more quickly.

## Health & Wellness

### Intake Procedure

Your new foster cat/ kitten received vaccines, flea control, and deworming upon coming into our shelter environment, most animals have no reaction to our intake procedure, but if you do notice your foster becoming lethargic or having loss of appetite, please contact us. If the animal does feel slightly off after receiving vaccinations, they should be back to their normal self after about 24 hours.

If you are beginning the foster period after the cat has already been here in the shelter for a couple days, you should not have to worry about any reactions. We do deworm our animals so if you notice any worms in the cats' stool, they should already be dead. If you happen to notice worms that are still alive, please contact us so we can deworm the animal again.

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Depending on the animal you are fostering you may be asked to bring them in for routine medical care. The kennel tech at animal services will go over medical needs with you and will call you to schedule appointments.

While many pets do not require medications, some do, if your foster needs medications, staff will be sure to show you how to administer them before you take the animal home.

## Veterinary Visits

All vet visits must be pre-authorized unless you are willing to pay for the visit yourself. Check with Animal Services staff first as we may be able to treat the injury/ illness at the shelter. If the injury/ illness cannot be treated by shelter staff, Animal Services will make a vet appointment.

Many common medical issues are covered under the shelter's veterinary protocol, and medicine can be administered by Animal Services staff. Please do not administer any unauthorized medicine yourself, as it could overdose or interact with other medicines the cat is taking.

## Spay/Neuter

-Spay and neuter surgeries are scheduled through Animal Services at one of our contracted clinics. If your foster cat is not already spayed/neutered, you may be given a date and time to drop off for the surgery. If spayed/ neutered while in your care the veterinarian will send home discharge and post-op instructions after picking up your foster cat.

-Unaltered kittens 4 months of age and older will need to be separated prior to being spayed/neutered to reduce the chances of unwanted breeding.

## URIs

Upper respiratory infections (URIs) are very similar to human colds. The cat is often congested and cannot smell their food, causing them to stop eating. Tempting your foster cat with smelly canned cat food, baby food (chicken or turkey), chicken broth or even tuna in water will often get them eating again.

You may have to coax them to eat by using your fingers, and even smearing it on their lips or nose. If you have a kitten who has not eaten for 24 hours, please give us an emergency call. If your foster cat has not eaten for more than two days, let staff know immediately – feeding them with a syringe may be necessary. If you don't know how to do this, we can describe it or show you how. Nutri-Cal is a calorie- and nutrient-dense supplement that even sick cats will often accept when not otherwise eating. This can be picked up at the shelter.

Steam from a vaporizer or hot shower often helps clear the nasal passages. Keep the nose and eyes clear of discharge with warm, damp cotton balls. A cat who doesn't feel well appreciates some extra petting and quiet time in your lap. If

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you can coax your foster cat to eat, and she's drinking water, the infection will usually run its course and no additional treatment is necessary.

If any green or yellow discharge is noted from the eyes or nose, the cat may need to begin antibiotics and/or eye meds. Animal Services can provide these to you and give you dosage instructions.

## Signs of Illness and What to Do Next

Animals generally do a good job of masking when they don't feel well, so determining if your foster is under the weather will require diligent observation of the pet's daily activity and appetite levels. It's a good idea to keep track of these levels in a journal. You'll also want to record any of the following symptoms, which could be signs of illness.

**Eye discharge.** It is normal for pets to have some discharge from their eyes when they wake up and some may have more than others, depending on the breed. But if your foster has yellow or green discharge or swelling around the eyes (making it hard for them to open his eyes), or the third eyelid is showing, you need to contact Animal Services to schedule an appointment.

**Coughing and nasal discharge.** Watch for discharge coming from the nose. If the discharge is clear, the infection is probably viral and medication may not be needed but check with the staff to find out if an appointment is necessary.

If the discharge becomes colored, the animal may have a bacterial infection. Be sure to monitor breathing. If the pet seems to struggle to breathe or starts wheezing, call the staff immediately. Also, once you notice nasal discharge, monitor their eating habits more closely to ensure that he or she is still eating.

**Loss of appetite.** Your foster may be stressed after arriving in your home, and stress can cause lack of appetite. But if the pet hasn't eaten after 24 hours, (less time for kittens and neonates), please notify staff. Also, if the pet has been eating well, but then stops eating for 12 to 24 hours, call the staff to set up an appointment. If you feel a change in diet is necessary, please follow the provided food change chart. An abrupt change in diet can cause diarrhea, which can lead to dehydration.

**Lethargy.** The activity level of your foster will vary depending on age and personality. Keeping an activity log and journal will help you notice whether your foster is less active than he normally is. If the pet cannot be roused or seems weak and unable to stand, it's an emergency, please contact us ASAP.

**Dehydration.** Dehydration is usually associated with diarrhea, vomiting and/or loss of appetite. To test for dehydration, gently pinch the cat's skin around the scruff area. If the skin stays taut, the cat is dehydrated. Please call us to schedule an appointment.

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**Vomiting.** Sometimes pets will eat too quickly and will immediately throw up their food. Occasional vomiting isn't cause for alarm, but if your foster has thrown up two or more times in one day, please notify the foster department.

**Diarrhea.** It is important to monitor your foster's pooping habits daily. Soft stool is normal for the first two or three days after taking an animal home, most likely caused by stress and a change in food. If your foster has liquid stool, however, please contact us so that an appointment can be scheduled to ensure that the pet doesn't need medications. Keep in mind that diarrhea will dehydrate the animal, so be proactive about contacting us. If your foster has bloody or mucoid diarrhea, please contact us immediately.

**Frequent ear scratching.** Your foster pet may have a bacterial infection, yeast infection or ear mites if she scratches her ears often and/or shakes her head frequently. These conditions can be treated, please call us to schedule a medical appointment.

**Swollen, irritated ears.** If your foster has irritated, swollen or red or pink ears that smell like yeast, he may have an ear infection called otitis. These pets may need to have their ears cleaned more often to ensure that the infection does not re-occur.

**Hair loss.** Please contact us if you notice any hair loss on your foster pet after getting them home. It is normal for pets to have thin fur around the lips, eyelids and in front of the ears, but clumpy patches of hair loss or thinning hair can indicate ringworm, dermatitis or the early stages of mange. It is important to check your foster's coat every day.

Shelter cats may suffer from upper respiratory which may include watery eyes and blinking, congestion, sneezing and coughing, decreased appetite, and dehydration. Ringworm is also very common in cats. Signs of ringworm may include circular areas of patchy hair loss, itchiness, and crusty skin lesions. Ringworm is treatable, but can be contagious to people. Signs of intestinal parasites include vomiting, diarrhea, and dehydration. If your foster cat is displaying one or more of these signs, please contact us. These ailments can worsen if left untreated.

## Socialization

### Can my Foster Cat Play with my Personal Pets?

There are a few guidelines that we ask foster families to adhere to regarding their personal pets. While foster pets playing with other pets is often fine, we advise that you consult with your veterinarian before fostering to ensure that all of your personal pets are healthy and up-to-date on all vaccines. Animals in shelters are very susceptible to illness and can carry or catch different diseases. If, for any reason, your personal pet becomes ill while you are fostering, we cannot provide medical care for your personal pet.

### Other Cats

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We do get a pretty good idea in the shelter if the cat you have chosen to foster is cat friendly or not. If introducing your foster to your own pet cat, introduce them slowly. Allow the cats to get close to each other by placing them on either side of a closed door so that they can smell each other directly. The next step is to allow them to see each other through a baby gate or a door that is propped open two inches. If the cats are interested in each other and seem comfortable, allow them to meet. Open the door to the rooms between the cats and observe them closely. If the cats hiss at one another it may take several meets and greets to acclimate them.

## Dogs

We do not test our cats with dogs here at the shelter due to it being such a stressful and fast paced environment. It is always best to separate your foster cat from your dog until introduced slowly and properly. (Please see our "How to Introduce Cats to Dogs" packet).

## Behavior

### Litterbox Training

Most cats and kittens naturally use the litterbox all on their own. Some may have trouble aiming or may use the bathroom in inappropriate places if they find their litterbox to be too dirty, small, or not having the right litter substance.

If your foster cat is not using the litterbox correctly, there are several things you can try. First, you may need to contain your cat in a large dog crate with the litterbox, food, water, and toys for a couple of days to "retrain" them. Make sure if you do this you are allowing them supervised time out of the crate to play and socialize.

Your cat may also be requesting a different type of litter. We use pine pellets for most of the cats at Animal Services, and most of them take to it well. Some of them only want kitty litter (clumping or non-clumping), and some of them prefer that we line their litterboxes with Puppy Pads. There's really no one combination that works for everyone.

Lastly, you can try a different type of litterbox. Some cats are extra dramatic when they cover their litter, and may need high-sided or covered litter boxes. Others may prefer extra-large boxes (like under the bed storage containers). Ask Animal Services if you need assistance in picking the correct litterbox/substance/location combination.

### What if my Foster Bites Me?

If any of your foster pets bite you and break skin, causing you to bleed, you need to report the bite to us within 24 hours of when the bite occurred. The law requires that we report all bites. The teeth of the animal, not the nails, must have broken the skin. If you are unsure, then please report the bite anyway.

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## Inappropriate Scratching

Cats naturally need to scratch to help their nails shed the dead and flaking outer layers. This can, of course, be detrimental to your furniture and home. To discourage inappropriate scratching, we recommend having multiple scratching surfaces available to your foster cat – both vertically and horizontally placed. If the cat is still scratching on inappropriate surfaces, move the desired scratcher closer to the place where they are wanting to scratch so that it is in front of or blocking the undesired spot. You can use catnip to encourage interaction with the correct surface as well.

Animal Services staff can also help to trim your cat's nails to help prevent scratching. This is painless and helps to relieve the urge cat's feel to scratch. We can also teach you to trim your foster cat's nails if they are tolerant.

## Jumping on Surfaces

Cats love having vertical space to explore and observe their surroundings. Naturally, they want to climb on high furniture such as tables and counters. To minimize this behavior, we recommend giving your foster cat their own room to stay in when not supervised. Make sure this room has plenty of climbing, scratching, and lounging surfaces, as well as their food, water and litterbox.

If your foster cat jumps on unwanted surfaces in front of you, calmly say "No," and gently remove them from the surface. This will take dedication and repetition. We do not recommend the use of spray bottles or scaring the cats, as this can cause other undesired behaviors.

## Other Concerns

If you have any other concerns about your foster cat's behavior, please contact Animal Services staff. We are more than happy to help walk you through remedies or management techniques for common unwanted behaviors.

## Emergencies

What constitutes a medical emergency? A good rule of thumb is any situation in which you would call 911 for a person. Here are some specific symptoms that could indicate an emergency:

- Not breathing or labored breathing
- Bloody diarrhea, vomiting, weakness, high fever (above 103.5 degrees)
- Signs of extreme dehydration: dry mucous membranes, weakness, vomiting, tenting of the skin (when the skin is pulled up, it stays there)
- Abnormal lethargy or unable to stand
- Unconsciousness or unable to wake up
- Cold to the touch
- Broken bones
- Any trauma: hit by a car, dropped, stepped on

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- A large wound or profuse bleeding that doesn't stop when pressure is applied
- Loss of appetite for more than 24 hours If your foster displays any of these symptoms, please follow the emergency phone protocol. If the animal is vomiting or has diarrhea, but is still active, eating and drinking, you can probably wait until the next day to get help.

## Animal Care Enforcement Contacts:

**\*\*Due to these numbers being our personal lines, please send a text and/or E-mail first if possible and we will contact you ASAP! \*\***

- **Medical Concerns/ Behavior Concerns – Cora Buff**
- [Cbuff@caldwellcountync.org](mailto:Cbuff@caldwellcountync.org) or 828-310-0250

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## Showcasing Your Foster

### Web Presence

If the cat's picture is already on our Web site, you should write a new story about the cat's personality. A good story makes a big difference in the number of calls the cat gets, so be descriptive! Try to include things like:

- Whether the cat likes to be petted or held
- Is a lap cat
- Purrs easily
- Is vocal or quiet
- Is active and playful or calm
- Has good litter box manners
- Uses a scratching post
- Has experience with other animals and children, etc.

Of course, any cute things that they do or anything you want to point out about their fur or appearance is good as well. It can be as long as you want or need, but the typical description is a paragraph or two.

### Write a Short Biography

As you get to know your foster, we ask that you stay in contact with the shelter staff so that we can update the foster animal's biography to reflect accurate information about the animal's preferences and quirks. Some people write their own biography for their foster pets, which we encourage, though they may be edited. We also welcome any quality photos that you take of your foster in your home; we can use the photos and biographies to create a kennel card, accompany their biography, and post them to social media. Please send the info about your foster and photos to [cbuff@caldwellcountync.org](mailto:cbuff@caldwellcountync.org). If you have your own social media we strongly encourage you to post your foster pets on there, make sure to let them know who you are fostering for and how they can obtain information on the animal.

Biographies should focus on the positive aspects of the cat. If the cat has some bad habits, this can be discussed in person at any meet and greets. The bio should generate interest, not turn people away. We don't want to mislead people; however, we really try to focus on the positive. Please email the bio to [cbuff@caldwellcountync.org](mailto:cbuff@caldwellcountync.org).

### Photos

If your cat's picture is not yet on the website, there are several options for getting pictures taken and posted. If you would like to take the pictures yourself, you are welcome to do so. Please email them along with the bio to [cbuff@caldwellcounty.org](mailto:cbuff@caldwellcounty.org).

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You are welcome to take your cat to the shelter during one of our regularly scheduled digital photography sessions as well. We can inform you of these dates and times a couple of days before they are to take place.

## Getting to Adoption

### The Purrfect Picture

You are welcome to post pictures and bios of your foster cat(s) on your own social media accounts to gain interest in them as well. Anyone interested in meeting your cat should be told to call Animal Services to schedule a meet-and-greet. Animal Services may also schedule meet-and-greets for you and your foster cat through our online pictures, etc., so please let us know what days and times work best for your schedule. You can give the potential adopter the details of what makes your foster cat the best cat ever, and really advocate for them to find the purrfect home.

### Home Sweet Home

Giving up a foster cat is sometimes hard and heartbreaking work. All of our staff have fostered (and fallen in love) before, too! Just remember that your job as a foster is to act as a "lily pad to success" for MANY cats/litters, not just one! If you adopt every foster cat you meet, you'll soon have a house full and be unable to foster more. This means you've saved only a fraction of the lives you possibly could have!

Of course, we realize that sometimes the purrfect cat just falls right into your life through fostering. If that is the case, let Animal Services know as soon as possible! All of our adoptions, rescue transfers, etc., are "first come first served." If meet-and-greets or transfer to a rescue has already been scheduled, we cannot put those on hold or cancel after learning that you are considering adopting this cat. Therefore, if you think it is the right fit, you need to notify us before we call you inform you of any scheduled meet-and-greets or transfer plans.

### What if I Want to adopt my Foster?

If you want to adopt a foster animal, you will need to complete an adoption application and follow the full adoption process. If you do decide to adopt your foster, please contact animal services staff right away because once the pet is up for adoption, we cannot hold him/her for anyone, including the foster parent.

### What if I Know Someone Interested in Adopting?

If someone you know is interested in adopting, please contact the shelter and give them the details ASAP, we cannot hold him/her for anyone, but we do want to accommodate referrals from foster parents if we can.

### Staying in Touch

Please email us at [animalcontrol@caldwellcountync.org](mailto:animalcontrol@caldwellcountync.org) frequently so we can post updated pictures to get your foster adopted as soon as possible.

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## Adoption Process

For anyone interested in adopting your foster cat the process is very simple. We will set up a meet and greet time for potential adopters to meet your foster at the shelter. Some fosters like to stay present for the meet and greet since they will know most about the foster cat, but that is completely up to the foster. If you would like to write up a note about the cat's temperament and personality to give to potential adopters to read through, that is also helpful.

If a potential adopter decides to take the animal for a trial period, we will keep you in mind if they end up having to return them. If they decide to adopt directly after the meet and greet we will keep you in mind for a future foster!

**We also try to schedule regular adoption events, you may be asked to bring your pet in to be seen by potential adopters**