



Feline Fostering Fact Sheet

So you want to foster a cat or kitten but you're not sure where to start? This fact sheet should contain all the essential information you need to make sure you're ready for the commitment of fostering. Fostering helps prepare animals for adoption by giving them a chance to live in a home where they can fully express their personality, work to overcome fears or recover from trauma so we're very grateful that you're interested in fostering a cat with SSPCA.

Firstly, are you at least 21-year-olds, live in accommodation that allows pet cats, have transport to collect and drop off your foster cat and have the available time, affection and commitment to successfully foster a cat? If you've answered no to any of the above questions then, unfortunately your foster application will be declined.

If you are also planning on keeping your foster cat in a cage please also note that your application will be declined. All animals need and deserve room to roam around and exercise.

Duties of the Foster Parent:

- Regularly feed, clean, socialize, love and groom the cat;
- Introduce basic training and care for the cat as if they were your own;
- Ensure the safety and general wellbeing of the cat;
- Observe and report any problems with the cat to the Office Administrator (2710088) who will confer with the veterinarian;
- Return the cat to the shelter upon request or according to any special arrangements made by SSPCA staff, i.e. for vaccinations or adoption viewing.

The table below give an indication to the time commitment which may be required for different ages and conditions of the foster cat:

Type of Foster	Time Period Required
Orphaned newborn or unweaned kittens	4 - 10 weeks (experienced carers only)
Weaned kittens	1 - 5 weeks
Mother cat and kittens	2 - 8 weeks
Cats/ kittens with physical or medical problems	2 - 12 weeks (this can vary greatly depending on the problem and only experienced carers only)
Cats/ kittens with behavioural problems	3 - 12 weeks (this can vary greatly depending on the problem and only experienced carers only)

If you have pet cats or dogs in your home, review their veterinary records and update any vaccinations that may have lapsed (proof will be required). Your pets will also need to be sterilized, up to date with worming and flea free. If your own cat or dog is under current veterinary treatment then you may not be allowed to participate in the foster program, depending on the circumstances.

Preparing Space For Your Foster Cat:

Foster cats and kittens are to be kept indoors or in a secure outdoor enclosure at all times. They are not allowed to go free-roaming outside. Outdoor enclosures must be escape proof, provide adequate shelter from the elements, and have a covered bed, litter tray and free access to fresh clean water. They should also be sufficient size for the cat or kitten to move freely about in.

Outdoor enclosures are not suitable for kittens under 8 weeks of age. When keeping a cat indoor they should be confined to one room of the house until they become familiar with it. Their litter tray and water bowls should also be kept in this room. When they start to venture into the house they will have a familiar "safe" room to return to should they become frightened or stressed. All windows in the rooms that the cat has access to should be kept secure. The flooring should be made of a material which is easy to clean and disinfect, such as hard wood, ceramic tiles, linoleum or smooth concrete.

- The room needs to be pet friendly and safe.
- Everything in the room should be easy to wash and disinfect or replaceable.
- Remove anything that might fall on the kitten (even a book can cause serious injury).
- Be aware that kittens can climb into tiny holes and crevices and get stuck.
- Remove any chemicals or cleaning agents.
- If using the bathroom ensure the toilet seat is closed.
- If using the laundry room, ensure that the cupboards, washing machine lid and clothes drier are kept closed and that disinfectants and detergents are not able to be accessed by the foster animal.
- It should contain everything the cat or kitten will need to eat, drink, eliminate, sleep and play.
- Have at least one bowl for water, one for wet food, and one for dry food. It is best to provide more bowls if you have several kittens so no one has to compete for access to food.
- Put the litter trays as far away as possible from food, water and bedding. Be sure to provide enough trays so that each kitten has a clean place to eliminate - one tray for every 2 kittens.
- A secure sleeping area, such as a cat carrier with the door removed or a box on its side, will help the kittens feel safe - this is especially important for shy kittens.
- Provide safe, disposable or easily sanitised toys to entertain the cat or kitten when you are not with them.

When you first bring your foster cat or kitten home with you, please make sure you provide a quiet space where they can have a bit of alone time if needed, especially if you have other pets in your home. Always introduce pets to each other slowly so no one becomes overwhelmed and know that there can be an adjustment period when another animal is introduced. You may wish to keep the foster cat completely separate from your other pets to prevent any unnecessary stress to all animals involved.

Kitten Feeding:

Should you foster an unweaned orphaned kitten the shelter will provide feline replacement milk which should be given at the kitten's body temperature (about 100 degrees). Once the powder is reconstituted, unused formula should be kept refrigerated. During their first week kittens should be fed every 2 hours during the day and every 3 hours overnight (10 feeds per day). Particularly during the first week or if a kitten is experiencing diarrhea, it is often necessary to add 25% of additional water to the formula. Between 1 - 3 weeks, kittens should be fed every 3 hours during the day and every 4 hours overnight (7

feeds per day). Kittens can only eat very small amounts often to keep their energy levels up for proper growth and health. Carers who are unable to attend to very young kittens should take adult cats or older kittens that are more able to last through the day and night without frequent feeding. Between 3 - 5 weeks old they can be fed every 5 hours during the day and every 6 hours overnight, still with the replacement milk (5 feeds per day).

When they reach 5 weeks old their baby teeth should be growing so you can start to wean them on to wet food. You can either give them wet food or dry food mixed with replacement milk or water. Between 5 - 8 weeks old they should be getting fed every 6 hours (4 feeds per day). If you only have dry kitten food you should pour the dry food into a shallow dish, add the feline milk replacer and let it soak into the food for about 10 minutes. Mash the dry food with a fork into the milk replacer to make gruel out of the food. Alternatively if you have wet kitten food then you can pour this into a shallow dish and mash the chunks slightly to make it easier to chew, as between 5 - 8 weeks old their baby teeth are still growing. As they are being weaned and starting to eat solid foods, they will need a fresh supply of water. Cats evolved from desert dwellers, so they don't usually drink lots of water daily. The average kitten who is eating solid foods needs between 60 - 120 ml of water each day in addition to the water that is already contained in their diet, so make sure they have plenty of clean fresh water throughout the day.

When collecting your foster cat from SSPCA, they will provide you with cat food, unless you've agreed to provide the foster cat with food. Ideally (if they're already weaned) they should be getting a mixture of wet and dry food. You should not be giving chicken bones to cats as the bones can splinter and get stuck in their throats. There are lots of human foods that can make your cat very ill as any food not specifically designed for cats can affect their digestive system, causing vomiting, diarrhoea or loss of appetite. Foods that cats can't eat include:

- Alcohol
- Cheese and milk
- Chocolate
- Coffee
- Dog food
- Energy drinks
- Fat trimmings
- Garlic
- Grapes
- Green tomatoes
- Onions
- Potatoes
- Raisins
- Raw eggs, raw meat and raw fish
- Tea
- Xylitol (a sweetener used in a lot of sugar-free foods)
- Yeast

Kitten Grooming:

A mother cat works hard to keep her kittens clean. She will constantly be grooming them thoroughly to remove any sticky messes they may get into, such as food or feces. Grooming them also stimulates circulation and the digestive system. If you're fostering an orphaned kitten a daily grooming session gives you the chance to closely monitor each kitten and gets them familiarized with being handled. If the kitten is not very dirty you can use a flea comb to get rid of dust and dried feces in the fur. You can also use a warm, damp washcloth to clean them a bit more thoroughly. Use short strokes to mimic a mother's tongue.

Be sure to dry the kitten well and as soon as possible so that they don't get chilled. As the kittens get older, from 4-5 weeks of age, they can be allowed to roam a larger area of your house, but they should still be closely supervised and kept in a secured area when not confined to their nursing area.

Remember these kittens are still very vulnerable to infections and should be separated from other pets if possible, and only be allowed to interact with fully vaccinated, healthy animals.

Emotional and physical closeness to you is as important to a foster cat or kitten as food and warmth. Handle the kittens often, letting them snuggle. You'll be surprised how this early cuddle activity will stay a basic instinct as the animal grows into an adult. Playing with the foster cat or kitten with a variety of toys is also important; for kittens this will help them develop motor skills and also help them bond to you.

Toilet Training:

Young kittens don't pee and poop on their own; mama cats stimulate them to go to the bathroom by licking them. If you're fostering an orphan kitten, you'll need to help them by stimulating them at each feeding. Use a soft, absorbent, disposable cloth (tissues or toilet paper work great), avoiding harsh products like heavy paper towels which could irritate the kitten's skin. While some people opt to dampen the cloth with some warm water, this step isn't necessary as long as the cloth is soft. The body position for stimulating kittens can also vary. Some people prefer to sit the kitten upright on a table, some prefer to hold them upright with their bottom facing the floor, and some prefer to turn them on their back. Find the position that works best for you and the kitten.

Hold the kitten steady with one hand, and gently rub the genital region in a circular motion with your tissue. The kitten should soon begin to pee but continue to stimulate the kitten until she is no longer peeing. Depending on the kitten's age, this may take anywhere from 10 to 40 seconds. If the kitten needs to poop, stimulate their bottom the whole time that they are pushing. Stimulating helps encourage them to use their muscles to pass stool, so continue until the kitten has finished their business. You should be stimulating the kitten at every feeding, to help keep them on a healthy and regular schedule, and monitor the urine and stool for any concerning symptoms. Urine should be clear / light yellow in colour and should occur at every feeding. Bottle fed kitten poop should be well formed, mustard yellow in colour, and should occur at least 1 - 2 times a day. Even if the kitten's skin feels dry after peeing or pooping, you still want to wipe them down with a fresh wet cloth or a baby wipe afterwards to keep them clean. Kittens have sensitive skin and are susceptible to urine scald, a form of moist dermatitis caused by urine residue that burns and irritates the skin. If the kitten does get urine or faecal scald, keep the area clean at all times and apply a light ointment to help them heal.

Once your foster kitten has reached 3 weeks, it's appropriate to introduce them to the litter box. Every kitten develops at a different pace, so be patient with the kitten and continue stimulating until you're confident they are using the litter box with regularity. Kittens learn and explore in the same way human babies do - with their mouths. This means that you'll need to choose a litter that is safe for kittens so that they don't consume something toxic or dangerous. Kittens should not be given litter products that contain fragrances, harsh chemicals, or clumping properties. While clumping litter might be the standard for adult cats, it's a risk to kittens if ingested, and should not be provided until the kitten is at least 2 - 3 months old and well accustomed to the litter box. Instead, opt for a natural, pellet-based litter that is less likely to be inhaled or ingested by a young kitten.

Kittens require an open-top, shallow litter box that is easy for them to access and locate. Eliminate obstacles such as tall or covered boxes and provide something that is easy for them to walk in and out of until they're big enough for an adult litter box. For very young kittens under 8 weeks old, you can even use a cardboard tray (such as those used for canned kitten food) to provide a shallow lip for the tiny kitten to walk over. Equally important is the placement as kittens tend to be drawn to corners or other areas away from their main home base, so start by placing the litter box in a corner that is clean from

clutter. A puppy pad or newspaper placed under the box will make clean-up easier, as they can be messy learners.

When litter training kittens, you want to make it extremely easy for them to find a litter box at all times. Kittens have a natural drive to cover their waste, and will look for the most convenient space to do so. This means you'll want to keep them near a box throughout the duration of their transition, and avoid providing any messy areas such as piles of laundry where the kitten might develop bad habits. Ideally, a 3 - 8 week old kitten learning to use a box should be confined to one room so that they can easily find the litter box at all times. For older kittens acclimating to a larger space, it's best to offer multiple options so that the kitten is always within 10 feet of a litter box. If the kitten uses an area outside of the box, immediately clean and disinfect the area to avoid scent soaking or scent associations. Do not use ammonia based cleaners as this will encourage the cat / kitten to go back to that spot. If a kitten is frequently using the same location, place a litter box in the location.

No one wants to use a dirty toilet, and cats are no different! Clean the box of faecal and urine soaked litter throughout the day (2 - 3 times) to encourage them to continue forming good habits. A clean litter box is more pleasant for you and for them, and will keep them coming back every time they need to use the bathroom. There should be one litter tray for every two kittens or one cat. The trays are to be completely emptied then cleaned and disinfected in hot water and detergent every 3 days. Dry the litter tray in the sun when possible. Always monitor for recurring diarrhoea as it can lead to dehydration and become serious rather quickly.

Illnesses:

If worming or other medication is prescribed whilst the cat is in your care, you will be provided with the appropriate medication and you must record the administering of the medication. Only give the foster animal medications which are prescribed specifically for them by the SSPCA veterinarian.

Due to the shelter environment and the fact that kittens have very fragile immune systems, kittens are prone to catching colds and other illnesses. These illnesses range from mild to life-threatening in nature. Treatment depends on the type of disease, the welfare of the animal and the time required for recovery. Because of their age, their unknown histories and small body size, if a foster kitten becomes sick they will usually deteriorate at a rapid rate (i.e. they can be normal one day yet become very sick in a matter of hours). Healthy kittens have a lot of energy when they are awake. They are playful and will only spend a short time in your lap. The eyes and nose should be generally free of any discharge and the stool should be firm and well-shaped.

Cats eat a lot, but the amount they drink depends on how much wet food they consume (the more wet food, the less water). Cats may sneeze occasionally and they may also scratch a little; these are normal cat behaviours so it is not always obvious when the cats are sick. In nature, cats will hide any sickness so they don't appear vulnerable. Signs of impending illness include:

- Lethary - not wanting to come out for attention, sleeping a lot, hiding
- Inappetance or reduced food and water intake of more than 24 hour duration
- Recurring diarrhoea
- Sneezing or coughing
- Drooling / excess salivation
- Open mouth breathing
- Weepy eyes – clear, green or yellow
- Closed eyelids
- Nasal discharge – clear, green or yellow
- Lameness or unwillingness to move about freely
- Any lumps or painful regions on the body and/or legs
- Scratching anywhere on the body

- Areas of hair loss

If you notice any of the above signs in your foster cat please call 2710088 immediately and we will advise you of what treatment they may need.

Diarrhoea - there are three types of cat stool: normal, soft and diarrhoea. Normal faeces will be firm and well-shaped. Diarrhoea is completely liquid and it may appear that the kitten is excreting plain water or there may be some colour to it. If you notice a foster kitten is experiencing recurrent diarrhoea then make an appointment as soon as possible as diarrhoea can lead to dehydration and become serious rather quickly, even fatal.

Coccidia is a disease more common in kittens especially when there is overcrowding. These parasites burrow into the lining of the intestine causing vomiting, especially in the mornings: offensive diarrhoea, often blood stained; anaemia and unless treated, the kitten will become increasingly listless and may die. Kittens with this disease need to be isolated, treated daily and kept as clean as possible to stop them re-infecting themselves with the contaminated faeces.

Giardia is a common protozoan that lives in the small intestine of all animals. Clinical signs can be unapparent, continuous, or persistent with diarrhoea and weight loss. Several examinations are sometimes needed to identify the organism. Treatment is with oral medication to all exposed pets.

Worms (roundworms & tapeworms) are common in kittens and they should be dewormed once they're over 4 weeks old. Roundworms look like spaghetti and will come out in the litter box or in vomit. Tapeworms are white and segmented. Occasionally you will see the whole worm, but more often you will see what looks like dried rice stuck to the kittens' hindquarters. If you see any worms, please call 2710088 for assistance.

Ringworm - Normally the fur around the lips, on the eyelids, and on the ears is a little thin. This is nothing to worry about. However, if you notice hair thinning or completely coming out in patches, please make a veterinary appointment. Fur loss is the first indicator of ringworm, which is a fungus that can be spread to humans and other household pets. The young, the elderly, and people and animals with suppressed immune systems are most susceptible. While it is not fatal, ringworm is itchy to people and very hard to get out of your home. Wash your hands and any clothing that you wear in the fostering room with the cats before touching your pets. Unfortunately ringworm can take months to treat and cats can become potential carriers of this zoonotic disease. Cats with ringworm must be returned to the SSPCA immediately and you will not be able to foster cats for the rest of the season. SSPCA will not cover costs for treatment of your family or other pets if they contract ringworm from foster cats.

Vomiting is not serious unless it happens more than once. If your foster cat keeps vomiting, call SSPCA right away. If the cat has ingested something poisonous, the faster it is treated, the better the outcome.

Eye Discharge - It is normal for cats to wake up with a little dark crust in their eyes. If you notice that your foster cat has yellow or green discharge coming from their eyes all the time, make a veterinary appointment. You can treat the symptoms of the eye infection by wiping the eyes with a warm, wet towel until it is time for your appointment.

Sneezing / Nasal Discharge - Occasional sneezing is quite common in small kittens. If the sneezing becomes frequent, examine the discharge coming from the sneeze. If it is clear, the infection is probably viral and medication may not be needed but it is important to monitor the kittens in case the problem

gets worse. If the discharge becomes coloured (e.g. green or yellow), it is time to make a veterinary appointment because the kitten may have a bacterial infection. Be sure to monitor the kittens' breathing as well. If the kittens seem to be struggling to breathe or are breathing with their mouths open, call SSPCA immediately for advice. Also, be sure that the kittens are still eating, as a kitten won't eat what he or she can't smell. Warming up the food can help make it smell more appetising.

Lethargy - Healthy cats and kittens are normally active when they are awake. Sick cats may have low energy and want to just sit in your lap. Each cat is different, depending on their socialisation level, but if you notice a drop in the cats individual energy level, it is best to make a veterinary appointment. Some under-socialised cats will have a tendency to move less because they are frightened, so it may be difficult to monitor their energy level. If you are not sure whether your cat is lethargic or just being quiet and still, please call SSPCA for advice. If a cat can't be roused or seems weak, this is an emergency!

Fleas, lice & ear mites - Many of the kittens we receive were born outdoors so they may come to us with fleas. If fleas are noticed at time of veterinary examination, the kittens receive a flea treatment. Kittens with fleas will scratch themselves a lot. If you see fleas on your foster kitten contact SSPCA so that we can organise treatment for your kitten.

Lice are a different matter. You will not see the actual adult lice. Instead, you will see white dots on the kittens' fur. If you can brush the dots off, it is dandruff. If you cannot remove the dots, then it is probably lice. Make a veterinary appointment and the veterinarian will treat the lice. Lice are species-specific and you cannot catch them.

Kittens with ear mites will scratch their ears and shake their heads a lot. Inside the ears you will see a dark discharge resembling coffee grounds. Make a veterinary appointment to get the kitten treated.

Toxoplasmosis is a disease caused by a parasite which is specific to cats. It is of particular concern because of the risk to pregnant women and their unborn child. Because of this risk, pregnant women are not allowed to participate in the kitten foster care program. Litter boxes should be cleaned daily as this reduces the risk of transmission. Always wear gloves when handling cat litter trays.

Feline First Aid:

Bleeding - Keep the cat quiet and calm and put on a tight bandage. Improvise with strips of towel or clothing if necessary. If blood is seeping through, apply another tight layer. Only use a tourniquet as a last resort. If you cannot put on a bandage, press a pad firmly onto the wound and hold it in place.

If you have bandaging materials, layer these as follows: Firstly, place a non-stick dressing on the wound and cover with swabs or a cotton bandage. Then place a layer of cotton wool over this and cover again with cotton bandage. Secure this top layer of bandage to the hair with surgical tape, and cover all of it with adhesive bandage or tape. Do not stick Elastoplast to the hair and never leave a bandage on for more than 24 hours. If the wound is severe, call SSPCA to arrange a veterinarian appointment.

Tail injuries - Call SSPCA if your cat's tail is limp, has been trapped in a door, or pulled hard. Such injuries can cause serious bladder problems.

Broken bones - Deal with any serious bleeding but do not apply a splint – it is painful, and can cause the bone to break through the skin. Confine the foster cat to a well padded carrier for transportation to the shelter.

Burns and scalds - Run cold water over these for at least five minutes then contact SSPCA. Do not apply ointments or creams, although you can cover the wound with a saline-soaked gauze pad while awaiting treatment. Remember to keep the patient warm.

Poisoning - Try to find packaging from the substance swallowed and have it with you when you phone SSPCA. If chewing of plants is suspected, try to find out the name of the plant, and cut a sample. Call SSPCA immediately and do not make your cat vomit unless the vet says to do so. Take any packaging or plant cuttings with you to the shelter, unless the cause is unknown.

Coat contamination - If a substance such as paint or tar has got onto your cat's coat or paws, prevent your cat from licking it as the substance may be toxic. Use an Elizabethan collar if you have one. You may be able to clip off the small areas of affected hair, but never use turpentine or paint remover on your cat. Contact SSPCA as bathing may be necessary and sedatives may be required to do this thoroughly.

Fits - If your cat is having a fit, do not try to hold or comfort the animal, as this provides stimulation, which may prolong the fit. Darken the room and reduce noise. Remove items which may cause injury, especially anything electrical. Pad your furniture with cushions and call SSPCA immediately.

Fights - If your cat is wounded after a fight, but seems otherwise well, make a routine appointment with SSPCA as antibiotics are usually needed. Fight-wounds are often not detected immediately. The first indication may be an oozing smelly wound from a burst abscess. If the cat has a fever it means it's fighting the infection.

Eye injuries - Do not allow the rubbing of a sore eye with the paws (use an Elizabethan collar if you have one). Contact SSPCA immediately if there has been trauma, if your foster cat has a closed or discharging eye, or for any sudden eye problem. If chemicals have entered the cat's eye, flush out with water repeatedly (preferably from an eye bottle) and call SSPCA with the packaging of the chemical close at hand.

Drowning - Wipe away material from the mouth and nose and hold the cat upside down by the hindlegs until any water has drained out. Give resuscitation if breathing has stopped. Clear their airway by extending their neck back, pull their tongue forward and check to see if there is any obvious obstruction. If this does not initiate breathing, hold their mouth closed and blow into their nose about 20 times per minute. Be extremely careful not to get bitten if the cat suddenly regains consciousness.

If your pet has a pulse: Give 5 rescue breaths: hold their mouth shut and breathe into their nose as though you were blowing up a balloon. Do this at a rate of about 20 breaths per minute for up to a minute or until they begin to breathe normally on their own. Remember your lungs will be much larger than a cat's so do not over-inflate their lungs by blowing too hard. Use a face shield to protect yourself.

If your pet does not start breathing: then CPR will give them the best chance: CPR should only ever be performed on an animal that is not breathing and does not have a pulse.

- If you cannot feel a heartbeat, push on the chest just behind the front legs at a rate of 100-120 times per minute.
- Push down approximately a quarter to a third of their chest depth.
- Give two breaths into the nose for every 20 compressions of the chest.

- If there are two people rotate every 2 minutes as it is tiring.
- Continue 20 compressions:2 breaths, 20:2, 20:2 etc.

Realistically if your pet does not recover within 20 minutes it is very unlikely they will do so.

Always get veterinary advice as quickly as possible. Even if your pet seems to recover, always call SSPCA to arrange an appointment, as complications afterwards are common.

Electric shock - If a high voltage, non-domestic (for example, power lines) supply is involved, do not approach and call the police. In the home, turn off power first. If this is impossible, you may be able to use a dry non-metallic item, like a broom handle, to push a cat away from the power source. If breathing has stopped, give resuscitation and call SSPCA immediately.

Heatstroke - Heatstroke is rare but can happen if a cat has been trapped somewhere such as a greenhouse on a hot day. Affected animals are weak, panting, dribbling and distressed. Put the cat somewhere cool, preferably in a draught. Wet their coat with tepid water (not cold water as this contracts the blood vessels in the skin and slows heat loss) and phone SSPCA. You may offer the cat a small amount of water.

Stings - Pull out the sting by pressing below the poison sac, then bathe the area in water or either a solution of bicarbonate of soda for a bee sting or diluted vinegar for that of a wasp. Soothe with ice. If the sting is in the mouth or throat, contact the vet as it may swell and interfere with breathing.

Thank you for reading this Feline Fostering Fact Sheet and we hope it's provided you with all the necessary information you require to successfully foster a cat or kitten with SSPCA.

We look forward to hearing from you to begin your fostering programme with us.