



## Foster Care Handbook





Dear Foster,

Welcome to Foster Care. You are part of a very special Foster team. You will be the first ones notified when a shelter animal needs a temporary home. Our Foster Care and Shelter Staff, as well as Volunteer Mentors, are here to assist you. We offer a private Facebook page where you can ask for advice, post pictures and/or videos of your foster animals. We are all here to support you when concerns arise. Know and utilize our resources!

If you have never cared for a foster animal before, you are about to experience the joys of helping to save lives. The rewards of fostering are innumerable. You will be taking part in changing the world for the animals in our care, and it will likely change you as well. By becoming an active part of our foster care program, you are extending our shelter walls; offering our animals a new chance at healthy, happy lives in forever homes. You are part of an amazing team!

Remarkable turnarounds and progress are possible with your help. We are counting on you to be their mentor, socializer, and advocate. Thank you for offering your home, love, and time to help save more lives by joining our Foster Care Team.

Warm Regards,

Foster Care Team  
Humane Society of Southern Arizona

## Welcome

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### Foster Care Staff

Kim Ward, Animal Services Supervisor  
Julianne Carmona, Foster Care Coordinator

### Hours

Monday-Saturday  
Office Hours: 8:30am-5:00pm  
Normal Appointment Hours: 9:00am-4:30pm

### Foster Care Contact

(520) 327-6088 ext. 148  
[foster@hssaz.org](mailto:foster@hssaz.org)

### Admissions Lobby

(520) 327-6088 ext. 102, 103

### Volunteer Department Contact

(520) 327-6088 ext. 134, 126 or 122  
[Volunteer@hssaz.org](mailto:Volunteer@hssaz.org)

### Foster Animals Include

- Puppies and kittens that are too young/underweight for adoptions
- Animals that are suffering from illness, injury, or recovering from surgery
- Animals that are severely overweight or underweight
- Evidence fostering for cruelty cases under investigation
- Animals in need of socialization

Most fosters will focus on dogs and cats, however, from time to time you may see requests to foster pocket pets or birds, ferrets, rabbits, farm animals, and other types of pets.

A Foster Care Update email is sent out to our Foster Volunteers with the animals that are available for Foster Care. If you are interested in fostering any of the animals on the list, please reply to the email letting us know who you would like to foster. Our animals are sent out "first come first serve" for fostering and must be picked up the same day that your email is sent.

### Training Requirements and Opportunities

All Foster Care providers are volunteers and must complete volunteer requirements, including submitting an online application and attending a Volunteer Orientation, as well as successfully completing a Foster Care Class.

We also provide the following classes to enhance your foster care experience and provide you with a strong knowledge base:

- Dog Handler Class
- Cat Care Class
- Bottle Baby Feeding
- Anxiety and Fear in Dogs
- Taming Feral Kittens
- And more...

## **Preparations & Emotional Considerations**

Before taking on the responsibility and commitment of taking on a foster animal, please consider your time availability, your ability to provide adequate facilities, and your emotional involvement in a foster animal.

### **Time**

The time commitment for foster care may range from one night to over a year. On average, a foster parent will commit between one and six weeks to a foster animal. Long-term care (months or even over a year) may be needed under certain circumstances. The time spent caring for and socializing your foster animals in your home varies according to the foster animal's needs. Please also consider the possibility of additional time for vet checks and/or emergency care, record keeping, and return of the foster to the shelter during business hours.

We ask that you only take on the number of animals that you can house comfortably. If you find that you are "in over your head" please contact the Foster Care office to discuss the situation and, if necessary, arrange a return appointment. We are always here to support you.

### **Adequate Support System**

Please have the approval of your family members prior to taking home a foster pet. If you will require help from any family members, please be sure the family members are appropriately informed and educated about the required care.

### **Emotional Considerations**

Foster Care can be fun and rewarding, but it is also a lot of work. The intensive care required for some fosters may be emotionally as well as physically demanding.

You will develop an emotional attachment to your foster animals, and you must face the reality that, in spite of our best efforts, not all foster animals will thrive. HSSA has created life-saving programs and a comprehensive set of guidelines, allowing us to save nearly 95% of the pets who enter our care. HSSA never euthanizes a pet for lack of space or length of time. However, as an organization, we have determined that sometimes the best course of action, and most importantly the most compassionate decision for the pet, is to humanely end their suffering. Pets that are terminally ill, suffer from severe injuries or medical conditions, or are too dangerous to safely place back in the public, are humanely euthanized. As every pet owner knows, it is never an easy decision, but one that is always made in the best interest of the pet. We do everything in our power to treat health and behavior problems that may befall all the animals in our care, but you must be prepared for the fact that some issues are not within our ability - or in the best interest of the animal - to treat.

In addition, you may find that even a happy ending can be bittersweet. Consider returning a litter of kittens that you bottle-fed since birth: they are all adopted within days, but you do *need* to say goodbye. Some fosters find this too difficult and opt to adopt their foster pets: before you make this sort of decision, be sure to read the section of this handbook entitled "Foster To Adopt." You may also discuss if this is the right decision for you with the Foster Care or Volunteer Staff.

***Please keep in mind that compassion fatigue workshops are available to volunteers on a regular basis.***

## Health and Disease

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Animals can carry diseases that can be transmitted across species (zoonotic) and diseases that are only transmitted between members of the same species (non-zoonotic). ***Please abide by our health and safety protocols to protect yourselves and your resident pets.***

### **Protecting Resident Pets**

When bringing any new animal home, please keep in mind that it may be carrying an illness that could affect your resident animals' health. HSSA cannot treat your owned pets for any illness they might incur from your foster pets. Therefore, we strongly recommend that you keep your fosters and your resident pets separate at all times. If you chose to take on the liability and mix foster animals with your owned animals, we suggest a two week separation period when new fosters first come into your home. This period will help to provide the opportunity for many common infectious diseases incubate and to surface.

You should *never* leave your resident pets and fosters alone together for any amount of time, especially unsupervised. Also, please do not take your foster pets to any public areas such as dog parks, stores, etc.

All resident pets should be fully vaccinated before a foster animal enters the home. If you have an immune-compromised animal, you need to be extra-cautious in your decisions to foster certain animals.

### **Protecting Yourself**

Zoonotic diseases are always of concern to those who handle or work with animals on a regular basis. You need not come into direct contact with an infected animal to contract a disease. Many zoonosis are transmitted via bodily fluids, and they can travel on skin, shoes, clothing, tools, litter boxes, and dishes (i.e., fomites). Here are some guidelines to help prevent the spread of contagious diseases (if you have children, please be sure they follow these guidelines as well):

1. All fosters should **wash hands frequently** when handling animals.
2. Please use protection when cleaning feces and other animal bodily fluids.
3. One of the most effective and efficient methods to disinfect is with a 10% (10:1 dilution rate) fresh bleach-and-water solution. Spray the items with the fresh solution and allow it to remain on items for 10 minutes and then rinse them well. All areas (floors, walls, furniture, etc.) and materials (bedding, toys, litter boxes, food and water dishes, etc.) that have come into contact with foster animal(s) must be bleached before you expose new foster animals.
4. Use ceramic, glass or stainless steel water and food dishes. These are easier to disinfect.
5. If possible, use disposable litter boxes. If you must use a plastic litter box, it must be disinfected in a bleach solution as described above before use by the next foster animal.
6. It is always a good idea to let your physician know that you work with shelter animals. They may have recommendations for your health.

HSSA will provide needed vaccinations, deworming, and parasite tests for your foster animals. Please contact the Foster Care staff if you suspect that your foster animal has parasites. An appointment will be set to assess and/or treat the animal.

## **General Care**

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Your foster animals will have varied needs, according to which animal(s) you take into your home. Here are some tips for the general care of all foster dogs and cats:

### **Feeding and Grooming**

We ask that you feed only high quality foods. No table scraps, please. Food will be provided by HSSA whenever possible. For drinking, fresh water should be available at all times. Never offer cow or goat's milk, as dogs and cats cannot properly digest it.

If you have a foster that requires brushing or bathing, please do what is needed to keep the animal clean, comfortable, and safe.

### **Traveling**

HSSA will provide an animal transport carrier for foster animals. Not only is this a safe way to transport your foster animals to and from the shelter, the plastic carrier may also serve as a familiar home and crate-training tool for your foster.

### **Confinement Area**

Be sure to house your foster(s) in an appropriate area. Try to use a space that is easy to sanitize (ex., tile flooring). If you are fostering a litter of puppies or kittens, a safe enclosure such as a children's wading pool, hand-made "whelping" box, playpen, folding exercise pen, or even a well-padded and insulated bathtub is desirable. This type of enclosure will allow you to make observations while providing plenty of room for a mother and her growing litter. Please do not keep very young kittens in an area with couches, recliner chairs, tables, etc. They can easily fall & sustain injury.

### **Toys**

We all love toys, but do keep in mind that the wrong toy can harm your foster animal. Please be sure to keep any toys that can be easily dismantled and swallowed out of reach of your foster animal. We have had deaths due to accidental ingestion. Remove any small, loose parts or button eyes, just as you would for a human baby. Discard any toys that become excessively worn. Do NOT feed rawhide bones, they can cause stomach blockage in the dogs that then requires abdominal surgery to relieve.

For kittens/cats, toy mice and balls make them happy and can be reused if washed in a bleach solution between litters. Safe puppy/dog toys include sterilized Kong-type toys, Nylabones, hard rubber balls, and tugs. Raw carrots are nutritious teething toys for puppies.

As with human children, puppies and kittens will play with anything they can find. Drapes, lampshades, table doilies, electrical cords, and crystal ornaments may look like as much fun as the safe toys listed above. Take special care to puppy-proof and/or kitten-proof all areas in your home where fosters will have access. As your foster animal(s) grow, their climbing abilities will improve, so anything irreplaceable should be kept well out of reach.

### **Socialize Your Foster Animals with People**

One of the most important parts of your job as a foster parent is to convince your foster animal(s) that humans are kind and loving. Some animals will adjust quickly to you and their new environment, but to some, you may seem like a strange and frightening giant! Be patient and allow your foster(s) time to acclimate to new surroundings. This may mean extra physical attention, or simply allowing the animal to explore on its own. We are always here to lend advice.

The principles of socializing are the same for all domestic dogs and cats: love them and they will respond. An outgoing, affectionate kitten or puppy can be cuddled and played with freely. The less social animals will need some encouragement. Socialization is critical, as puppies and kittens have important socialization periods when they are weeks to months old. If they are not well socialized during this time, they may develop aberrant social behavior later.

- Try sitting on the floor with a timid puppy or kitten held against your chest, supported underneath and facing outwards, so it can't see how big and scary you are. Stroke it and speak gently, telling it how cute and brave and fabulous it is. Continue this for about 30 seconds; then put the kitten or puppy down before it starts squirming. You want this to be a pleasant experience. The puppy or kitten will not be impressed, but if you cuddle it often enough, it will learn to love time spent with you.
- Sometimes, holding a pair of young animals together helps—they seem to reassure each other.
- If your puppies or kittens are fearful and run away from you when you approach, try sitting or lying on the floor near them and let them come to you. This is a lot less intimidating to them than seeing a pair of big scary feet walking towards them.
- There is no such thing as a bad puppy or kitten. Even if your litter doesn't enjoy being held and cuddled, they may tolerate being stroked. As long as they don't cower under the sofa, they will likely make someone a wonderful pet. Moreover, some of the most aloof puppies and kittens will grow up to be the most friendly and loving adults.
- Always remember that it is useless to punish a naughty kitten or puppy. If one of your kittens misses the litterbox, or scratches and bites, it isn't being spiteful or bad, it's just a baby who doesn't understand. Instead of punishing the animal, try distracting it with something else until it forgets about the bad deed it was doing—it doesn't take long!
- The less socialized adults may present more of a problem. Be ever-patient with scared animals. Be calm. Talk quietly. Move slowly. Sit low. The more approachable you are, the more likely a scared animal is to come out of its shell.
- Try handing feeding meals to work on trust with your foster animal.

## **Exams & Vaccinations**

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An appointment will be scheduled the first time you pick up your foster for their next round of vaccinations and exam. Most vaccinations are given every 3 weeks. When arriving for an exam, please enter through the Foster Lobby and wait to be seen. During this time, please keep your animals inside their carriers.

## **Foster To Adopt**

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Yes, we want all of our foster animals to find loving, forever homes. But before you do decide to adopt your foster pet, please ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this my first foster pet? If so, is it a puppy or kitten? Please keep in mind that puppies and kittens are highly adoptable once they return to the shelter. In the case of puppies and kittens, we strongly suggest fostering a few different litters over time before deciding to adopt.
- Did I take on a single animal or a litter? If you take home a single puppy or kitten, you are much more likely to get attached than if you try a small litter.
- Can I continue to provide foster care if I adopt this foster? Yes, but if we lose you as a foster home, we lose the ability to give many other animals a new chance at life. Please remember this in making your decision.



- Is there something that may prohibit this animal from being adoptable? Does it have behavioral or health issues that decrease adoptability? If so, then maybe your foster is indeed in need of your forever home.

Some of our experienced fosters have weighed in with tips to help with the return of animals to the shelter for adoption. They suggest viewing your foster period as a time when you are watching a pet for a friend or relative. For first timers, they also suggest trying multiple foster animals before choosing to adopt.

If you do decide to adopt, please be aware that you must go through HSSA's adoption procedures. This includes the completion of all paperwork, spaying/neutering, and paying any applicable fees.

### **Steps to Adopt your Foster:**

1. Return your animal on the scheduled return date.
2. The animal will be left at the shelter in order to get altered.
3. Fill out an Adoption Application.
4. Go to the Volunteer Office to check if you have any discounts. If so, have a coupon printed and take with you on the adoption day.
5. Staff will contact you when your animal has been altered and ready for pick up.
6. Your new pet will need supplies to get them safely home. They can be purchased from PAWSH to further support the animals not yet adopted or they can be brought from home if you already have them.
  - a. A puppy or adult dog needs a collar, leash and kennel for them to travel in.
  - b. A kitten or adult cat needs a kennel for them to travel in.
  - c. Pocket pets need a carrier/kennel to travel in.

### **Returning for Adoption**

Your foster is (in most cases) 3 months old and 3 pounds and is now ready to get spayed or neutered. The tips below will help you and your foster.

#### Tips for returning

- You may bring a blanket or toy from home to leave with the foster. Familiar smells help the foster feel more comfortable while waiting to be altered.
- Fill out the Foster Return Form before returning your animal. You can pick them up during your 9 week vaccination appointment or when you pick up the animal.
- Please bring borrowed materials back to foster care, unless you are taking another animal home that day.
- Please remain in the lobby until the animal has been signed back in by Foster Staff.
- Keep your foster in the carrier until a Foster Care staff member has asked you to take them out.
- Please remain in the lobby, unless otherwise asked, while your foster animal is being examined and returned.

## Foster Supply Checklists

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When you are taking home a foster animal, please use the checklist below to ensure that you have all the supplies for the animals you are taking. Please let Foster Care know what you need and they will collect the supplies for you.

### Adult Cats

- Appropriately-sized ceramic or stainless steel bowls
- Litter box
- Litter
- Litter scoop
- Blanket and approved toys
- Kennel
- Grooming supplies

### Adult Dogs

- Appropriately-sized stainless steel or ceramic bowls
  - Great Danes & other very large-breeds need bowls raised off of ground\*
- Poop bags
- Puppy pads or towels for small dogs (optional)
- Blanket and approved toys
- Leash
- Collar
- Crate
- Grooming supplies

### Puppies

- Appropriately-sized stainless steel or ceramic bowls
  - Heavy bowls or puppy troughs are best for active puppies
- Puppy pads or towels
- Plastic swimming pool\* and/or enclosed gate "X-pen"
  - Helps with sanitation for the un-potty-trained puppies
  - From time to time, HSSA has baby gates available for fosters
- Lots of blankets and approved toys
- Leash
- Collar
- Grooming supplies

### Bottle Babies/Very Young Puppies: Additional Supplies

- Terry-cloth washcloths/infant washcloths, for toileting & cleaning
- Bottles and approved puppy formula
- Avoid:
  - Cool, drafty areas: puppies can lose heat quickly
  - Areas with lots of clutter/electrical cords: puppies may ingest items, chew cords, and fall off of high areas
  - Areas with carpet/upholstery/bedding you cannot discard: if ringworm develops, these are extremely difficult to decontaminate
  - Harsh cleaning products
  - Swinging doors: puppies can be crushed in cracks in doors, by quickly opened doors, and even stepped on

## Kittens

- Appropriately-sized ceramic or stainless steel bowls
  - Very shallow bowls for very young kittens
- Litter box
  - Cut down sides for very small kittens
- Litter: *clay, only! Clumping or pine litters could be ingested and block intestinal tracks! Please ask if you are unsure about the litter you plan to use.*
- Litter scoop
- Blanket and approved toys
- Collar
- Grooming supplies

## Bottle Babies/Very Young Kittens: Additional Supplies

- Towels, terry-cloth washcloths, infant washcloths, tissues or cotton balls for bedding, toileting & cleaning
- Bottles and approved kitten formula
- Heating disc
- Food Scale
- Avoid:
  - Cool, drafty areas: kittens can lose heat quickly.
    - Re-warm cold kitten first & then feed
  - Areas with lots of clutter and high perches: small kittens may get up and fall, breaking bones. Before 6 weeks, kittens are not as agile or coordinated.
  - Areas with carpet/upholstery/bedding you cannot discard: if ringworm develops, these are extremely difficult to decontaminate.
  - Clumping or pine litters: kittens may ingest these & develop severe gastrointestinal problems.
  - Shampoos and soaps: the chemicals in them can be life-threatening to small kittens! Use water only or ask for special shampoo. (Dawn will also work)
  - Harsh cleaning products: phenols are toxic to cats (these are found in most household disinfectants).
    - Use Rescue (ask Foster care for some, you will just have to provide a container)
  - Doors: Be aware that your foster can find themselves in hidden area where you cannot see them.

Be aware that foster puppies and kittens will return to the shelter every three weeks starting at 3 weeks of age for kittens and 4 weeks of age for puppies deworming. They will all come in for vaccinations, weigh-ins, and deworming starting at 6 weeks of age. Please make an appointment with the Foster care office in advance. For these appointments you may go directly to the Foster office.

Since we are a non-profit we will do our best to supply materials. HSSA will always provide any medications your foster animal(s) need.

\*When available

## Cleanliness

Puppies and kittens without a mother can be very messy. It is important that you do your best to keep them as clean as possible. One way to accomplish this is to stroke each puppy or kitten with a warm, damp cloth, using short strokes to mimic the mother's tongue. A flea comb may be used to remove dried feces or food from the fur. Be sure to dry the puppy or kitten well so it won't get a chill. Check each puppy or kitten frequently and thoroughly from one end to the other—sometimes dried feces can become caked on the underside of the tail or between their toes. Dried feces may be softened and removed by dipping the puppy's or kitten's back end into a basin of warm water and carefully combing through the coat with the flea comb. Many puppies or kittens will not even notice that they are partially wet, but some will protest violently and scramble to escape, so beware of sharp little claws.

## Emergency Protocols

There are many symptoms to indicate an animal is not feeling well. Always be observant of your foster animals. Symptoms of illness may include: diarrhea, vomiting, loss of appetite, lethargy, weight loss, runny eyes or nose, sneezing, and coughing. If the animal is lethargic and shows no interest in food or water, please call the Foster Care office as soon as possible. For kittens under three weeks, vomiting and diarrhea constitutes an emergency. If you suspect that your foster animal may be getting sick, please don't wait until after hours or your next scheduled appointment.

### **Call us during hours of operation if you can!**

If a foster animal should begin to show symptoms of illness while in your care, please follow the procedures below so that the animal will receive the care it needs.

### **During Business Hours**

Foster Care staff are available Monday-Saturday 9am-4:30pm. The shelter is open Monday-Saturday 9-6, Sunday 12-5. If you suspect your foster needs medical care during these hours:

1. **Monday-Saturday:** Call (520) 327-6088 ext. 148. If you do not receive a response, contact the Operator at ext. 100 and have a Foster care staff member paged.  
**Sunday:** Call (520) 327-6088 ext. 103 and ask to speak with a supervisor.
2. Please be prepared to give the staff member information including your name, the animal's name, control number, age of the animal, the symptoms of illness and information regarding bathroom habits, food and water consumption.
3. **Please call before dropping off your foster.** If you are asked to bring the animal in, a staff member will arrange a specific time to see the animal.

**After Business Hours:** If you find yourself in an after-hours emergency situation, please refer to the emergency numbers provided on the sheet entitled "Mentor Contact List". They will assist you from there. If an adult animal is vomiting or has diarrhea, but is still active, alert, eating, and drinking, you can probably wait until the next day to receive help. Please contact a mentor if the animal is lethargic and shows no interest in food or water. For kittens under three weeks, vomiting and diarrhea constitutes an emergency and a mentor should be called.

**Foster animals can only be medically treated by the Medical Team at HSSA. Do not take a foster animal to any outside medical personal. (Rare exceptions will be made at the discretion of HSSA)**

**Unexpected death while in Foster Care:** It is a sad fact that young puppies and kittens, through no fault of your own, and despite our best efforts, sometimes die. We call this failure to thrive. Certain very sick adult fosters may also be at risk of dying. If an animal in your care should happen to die, please be sure to call the Foster Care office immediately. It is imperative we have the opportunity to examine the animal to determine the cause of death. We will handle disposal of the animal's remains for you. Please be aware that HSSA offers an excellent Pet Loss support group to help anyone dealing with pet death, which may be helpful if you are faced with the loss of a foster animal. The loss of an animal is never easy and you may need to take a break but, please remember your participation is vital to the foster care program. This program saves the lives of thousands of animals every year.

**Thank you for choosing to help further our vision, "A community in which all pets are cared for and loved" by opening your home and providing extraordinary care to pets in need through Foster Care.**