

**ANNEXURE L
FOSTER MANUAL**

FOSTER MANUAL



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1. Introduction

Foster parents are a vital part of our Community Cat Coalition work. Every animal that you foster is given a second chance at life – and the more cats and kittens you foster, the more lives you help save.

Foster Parents provide a temporary home for cats/kittens as they recover from surgery or illness, or simply need to put on a little more weight before being desexed.

What you need:

- Transport, time & flexibility – to transport to the vet and to care for them.
- Bedding and a litter tray in a secure area – to keep them safe and contained and away from any pets that you have at home.
- Food, water, bowls & kitchen scales (to weigh food)
- Toys and scratch pole (where possible)

2. Caring for your fosters

2.1. Providing a safe home environment

Set up one room

- Provide your foster cat/kitten with a quiet space they can call their own. This could be a spare bedroom, laundry or bathroom, or a large dog crate in a quiet area of the house.
- A small space helps them feel safe, secure and lets them establish their own territory. It's also easier for toilet training and cleaning.
- Ensure the room is secure with no risk of your foster animal escaping.
- Keep your cat in one room for 2-3 days until it is settled, confident, and using the litter tray perfectly.
- If you have other animals in the house you should confine your foster animal for the entirety of his/her stay to prevent stress or disease transfer between your own animals and your fosters.

Make the room 'cat comfy'

- Set-up the room with water, food, toys, litter tray and scratching post
- Provide a bed or comfy blanket to snuggle in and help your cat settle
- Put the litter tray in a private area away from food and bedding

Cat proofing

- Remove dangerous wires, curtain cords, or items which can be chewed or get tangled in
- Remove breakable/scratchable items as well any household plants as many can be toxic to cats
- Keep toilet lid closed

Try not to scare your new cat/kittens

- Ask family members to keep quiet to avoid scaring your foster animals
- Avoid introducing the whole family at once.
- Let the cat/kittens explore their new room and only meet other family members gradually
- Teach children to handle and pet the cat properly to ensure it is a positive experience for both animal and child.
- Let the cat approach you when they feel ready.

2.2. Daily Routine

Feeding

- 🐾 Kittens should be fed at least three times per day, adults twice per day
- 🐾 Replace uneaten wet food with fresh food at mealtimes
- 🐾 Monitor appetites closely
- 🐾 Fresh water readily available

Cleaning Schedule

- 🐾 Scoop litter box at least 2 times daily
- 🐾 Check for diarrhoea
- 🐾 Litter should be dumped and changed every other day for 2 kittens, daily for more than 2 kittens or if kittens have diarrhoea

Health Check

- 🐾 Look over your cat/kitten every day for any changes or potential medical problems – see the health chart on page 6 for more details.
- 🐾 Weigh kittens and record weight
- 🐾 Check energy levels

Playtime & Mental Stimulation

- 🐾 Cats & kittens should receive 1-2 play sessions daily with interactive toys (or more often if you can)
- 🐾 Remember to discourage play with hands
- 🐾 Interactive toys should not be left unattended with cats/kittens
- 🐾 Safe solo toys such as ping pong balls should be left out at all times
- 🐾 Change up the environment in small ways, e.g. add cardboard boxes, swop toys, move things around.

Handling & Socialization

- 🐾 Socialize kittens a minimum of two 15-minute sessions daily
- 🐾 Timid kittens and cats should have at least three 15 minute sessions daily
- 🐾 Encourage affectionate behaviour
- 🐾 Once settled, cats and kittens should be introduced to visitors so they become used to strangers

2.3. Feeding

Please don't be tempted to feed your foster more than the amount recommended as this will likely result in diarrhoea.

Some cats/kittens may start out on wet food. This could be because they are too young to eat the dry biscuits, or have had teeth removed and need a soft diet. If an animal is sick it is important to have it eating and wet food is often preferred by cats that are unwell. Once your animal has

recovered from illness we ask that you re-introduce the biscuits into the diet and slowly decrease the wet food so that when your cat goes up for adoption it is happily eating a dry biscuit diet.

Always ensure fresh, clean, drinking water is available at all times.

3. Health

3.1. Health checks

Many of the stray cats/kittens have had a rough start. A poor quality diet, no prior veterinary care and a stressful journey and possibly more vulnerable to disease. It is important that you monitor your fosters closely and if you notice changes in behaviour or condition.

Symptoms of illness:

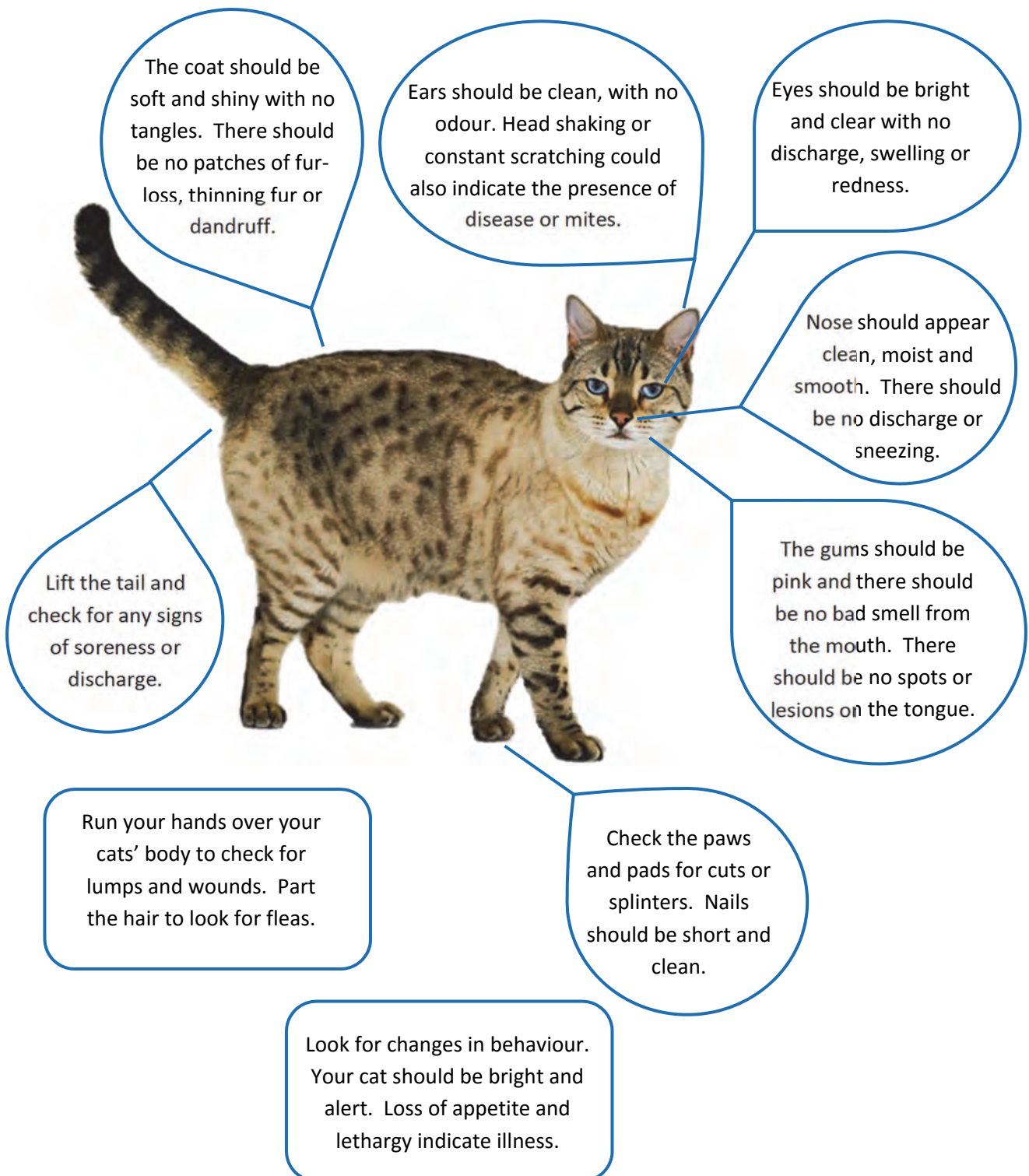
- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Discharge from eyes, ears, or nose
- Lameness
- Itchy skin
- Shivering
- Lesions or hair loss
- Temperature

Contact your Vet clinic if your foster exhibits any of the following symptoms:

- Vomiting – for more than 2 hours or if any blood present
- Diarrhoea – for more than 24 hours or if any blood present
- Straining to urinate or defecate
- Blood in urine or faeces
- Lethargy and reluctance to eat.

Daily Health Checks

Daily health checks are a great way of forming a bond between you and your fosters. It also gets them used to being handled in preparation for their new home whilst simultaneously giving you the opportunity to diagnose any signs of illness or injury at an early stage. The diagram below indicates the key areas to check daily with a description of how they should appear. If you find any abnormalities please contact the foster department to organise a vet check.



3.2. Common Health Problems

Cat Flu

Cat flu is the generic name for any Upper Respiratory Infection and is usually caused by one of two viruses – Feline Herpes Virus (FHV) or Feline Calicivirus (FCV).

Cat Flu is passed on by direct contact between cats, or on unwashed food bowls, bedding, litter trays or people's hands and clothing. Good basic hygiene will prevent cat flu from being spread to other animals. Cats with a low immune system and/or those under stress are more susceptible to catching Cat Flu; this is why it is more common in a shelter environment.

Cat flu is a virus and can't be treated with antibiotics, however these are often prescribed to prevent or treat secondary bacterial infections that can occur.

Cat flu usually starts with sneezing, watery eyes and a runny nose. In some cats it won't progress further than this, in others more severe symptoms can occur. Cat flu generally lasts 1-2 weeks but can be longer in young kittens and adult cats with low immune systems.



Your cat may not feel like eating while he is sick, especially if he has a blocked nose and can't smell his food. To support your cat and encourage eating you can try offering small frequent meals with strong smelling foods

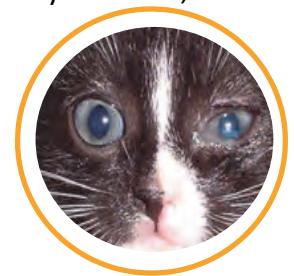
Conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of the conjunctiva of the eye. It can affect one eye or both, and is often seen in conjunction with cat flu but can occur independently.

The eyes may be red, swollen, watery, crusty or containing pus.

Conjunctivitis is usually caused by a bacterial or viral infection; however, it can also be caused by:

- An allergy
- Injury, such as a scratch to the eye
- Foreign objects in the eye
- Congenital defects such as small or absent tear ducts.



The vet will give the appropriate eye medication; this may be drops or an ointment. Eyes are extremely sensitive and the wrong medication could have dire consequences. Do not use eye medication that has been prescribed for another animal/person on your foster.

Diarrhoea

Animals exposed to rapid dietary changes, as well as physical and emotional stress are prone to developing diarrhoea. Diarrhoea can also be a symptom of intestinal parasites or bacteria, and can lead to dehydration and rapid weight loss. It therefore cannot be left untreated.

Sometimes a prescription diet will settle the stomach and the regular food can then be reintroduced gradually without any further issues. In other cases antibiotics may be prescribed or a stool sample sent to the lab for testing.

Quick tips for avoiding diarrhoea:

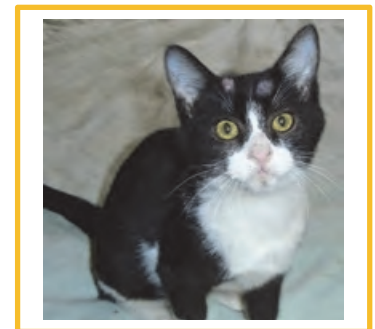
- Avoid sudden changes in diet; if you are transitioning your foster from one food type to another do it gradually.
- Avoid unnecessary stress; settle your cat into a small quiet room and don't overwhelm it with attention.
- Don't overfeed; feeding extra will cause diarrhoea.
- Don't give treats; a consistent diet is important to avoid upset tummies so please don't give treats.

Ringworm

Ringworm is not a worm at all but a fungal skin infection.

Ringworm can be transmitted by direct contact with fungal spores which can be found on an infected animal or anything that animal has been in contact with; bedding, grooming equipment or the environment where the infected animal has been housed.

Ringworm causes irregularly shaped spots of fur loss, often on the face, ears, and paws. It causes little distress and is not an emergency, but it is contagious to other animals and people.



Young cats under a year old are most often infected as well as cats with a suppressed immune system from diseases, overuse of steroids, or stress. Please discuss a treatment plan with your Vet if your foster animal is diagnosed with ringworm.

Yes, ringworm can be transmitted between cats and people. Small children, the elderly and persons with suppressed immune systems (such as those undergoing chemotherapy) are more vulnerable

It is recommended to:

- keep your fosters in one room at all times to reduce the chance of fungal spores being spread to other areas of the house.
- keep a change of clothes specifically for when you are handling your fosters and washing your hands well afterwards,
- discard of any bedding, scratch poles and fabric toys that came into contact with your fosters.
- Bleach all bowls, litter trays, plastic toys and empty ice cream containers which have been in contact with ringworm, before re-use.

3.3. Administering Medication

The majority of cats and kittens that go out to foster will have to be given medication at some point. This is usually antibiotics in tablet or paste form. Often tablets can be hidden in a small amount of wet food, however cats have a good sense of smell and may refuse to eat the food. This means you will have to give the tablet directly to the cat and whilst some cats are easy to pill others can be tricky so below are some tips that should make things easier. Please consult the Vet on the most effective administering techniques.

3.4. Procedure for Emergencies

General Criteria for Emergency situations include:

- 🐾 Continuous weight loss
- 🐾 Continuous diarrhoea/ Vomiting
- 🐾 Bleeding of any kind—nose, urine, stool
- 🐾 Any trauma—hit by a car, dropped, limp, stepped on, unconscious
- 🐾 Difficulty in breathing/blocked airway
- 🐾 Lethargy
- 🐾 High Temperature
- 🐾 Dehydration
- 🐾 If the animal has vomiting or diarrhoea, but is still active, eating and drinking, it can probably wait until the next day to receive help. However, if the animal is lethargic and shows no interest in food or water, it is wise to seek emergency help at the time.
- 🐾 Coughing or sneezing should pose no immediate problems unless accompanied by blood or symptoms such as lethargy or dehydration.

3.5. Kitten Symptoms Cheat Sheet

SITUATION:	WHAT TO DO:
Kittens are losing weight and/or are not very energetic.	Make a vet appointment to have the kittens seen AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. Kittens are so small that any weight loss is significant.
Kittens are having diarrhoea for more than 12 hours	Make a vet appointment to have the kittens seen right away. Diarrhoea can cause dehydration which can be fatal. If the kittens are having liquid diarrhoea, are not eating well and are not energetic, this could be an emergency.





Kittens are not eating, don't seem interested in food but are energetic	Try offering some wet food; warming it up or choosing a strong smelling flavour such as fish will make it more tempting. If your kitten is still not eating after 12 hours, regardless of energy level, please phone the foster department.
Kittens are having very soft stool but are eating and energetic	Monitor for 24 hours; if no improvement or diarrhoea worsens, contact the foster department to make a vet appointment.
Kittens are not losing weight, but are not gaining weight	If the kittens are energetic, eating well and don't have diarrhoea, keep monitoring the kittens. If they still do not gain weight in 24 hours or if their appetite or energy level drops, make a vet appointment.
Kittens are sneezing and have nasal discharge	Make a vet appointment. In the meantime, you can gently wipe away nasal discharge with warm water and a cotton ball. If they're not eating offer warmed wet food
Kittens eyes look weepy and are red or have green/yellow discharge	Make a vet appointment. In the meantime, use a cotton ball or soft cloth with warm water to gently clean the eyes (don't rub!) of any discharge.
Vomiting	If vomit is frequent or foamy make a vet appointment to have the kittens seen AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. If vomiting happens immediately after eating this could be because your kitten is eating too fast.
Kittens have got fleas and/or worms	Administer the correct dosage of flea or deworming medication as per the weight of the cat/kitten.
Kittens have hair loss	Phone the vet to discuss.

4. Behaviour and Training

4.1. Bad behaviour and encouraging Good Behaviour

The best way to handle most undesirable behaviours is to prevent them! Cats and kittens (particularly kittens) are curious and mischievous and will explore and test the environment.

Modify the environment so that they can't cause trouble and access areas you don't want them to:

-  Place tinfoil on bench-tops and tables to stop cats and kittens jumping on them.
-  Put double-sided tape on the side of your couch to discourage scratching.
-  Put pot-plants and break-able items in a different room or well out of reach.
-  Take the toilet paper off the roller to save it from being shredded and hook blind cords up out of the way so they don't end up chewed, frayed and to avoid accidental strangulation.

Distract your cat or kitten if you see him heading for trouble. If your kitten is about to scratch the couch, roll a ping pong ball past him so he chases that instead.

Reward good behaviour. Praise your cat or kitten when you see him scratching his post or give him a couple of his biscuits after he's used the litter tray.

Reprimands and punishment simply do not work. If you catch kitty in the act, he will only misbehave when you are not around. If you punish the cat later, he will not associate the reprimand with the crime (you will also be training your cat to mistrust you). In either case, the misbehaviour will continue and your cat will most likely become nervous and anxious around you.

Aggression

Cats rarely bite or get rough out of anger; it is usually out of fear. Kittens often bite for sheer playfulness and over-excitement so you will need to teach your kittens that hands are not appropriate toys.

The best way to avoid this is to never use your hands for playing but to offer appropriate toys instead. If your kitten begins to play rough with you and exposes his claws or teeth, tone down the play session or immediately freeze and "play dead."

If your cat bites hard or scratches you, sharply scream a high-pitched "OUCH," immediately stop playing, walk away and ignore him. Abruptly ending a play session sends an extremely powerful message.

Scratching Furniture

Scratching is an essential behaviour for cats, not only to sharpen their claws but also as a means of marking territory, stretching muscles, and releasing tension.

Place the scratch pole in the area that your cat spends the most time in. If he/she has already chosen an item of furniture to scratch place the pole beside it and put some strips of double-sided sticky tape on the area he/she has been scratching. You can also calmly interrupt your cat when he/she is scratching something inappropriate and take him/her to the scratch pole, give it a scratch with your fingernails and he/she will most likely copy you.

Spraying

Spraying is usually associated with sexual behaviour in non-desexed cats, but can also be seen in desexed males and females as a way of scent-marking territory

House Training

Place the cat or kitten in the tray after eating or drinking, and randomly throughout the day. Give a gentle pat if it uses the tray and/or give a little treat. Take care not to interrupt it though, wait until it has finished. If you see your cat preparing to toilet elsewhere, distract it and quickly take it to its tray. If the cat has started toileting outside the tray, wait until it has finished and then take it to the tray, praising it if it makes any signs of scratching in there. **Never punish** a cat that has **soiled outside its litter tray**; this will only make it feel anxious and make matters worse.

Why won't my cat use the litter tray?

- **A dirty tray** – cats don't like dirty facilities; clean frequently and/or provide a second tray.
- **The wrong location** – cats like privacy; place the tray in a quiet area away from food and bedding.
- **The wrong size** – a big cat may need a big tray with room to manoeuvre, and kittens a small tray with low sides.
- **The wrong litter** – some cats are fussy; try different litters, use lots or just a little, try the tray lined or unlined, until you find what your cat prefers.
- **Baby mistakes** – kittens get confused; make sure the litter tray is easily accessible and obvious. Soft fabrics that they can 'dig' in will confuse them.
- **Stress** – may cause a cat to toilet inappropriately; give your cat a quiet room and don't overwhelm it with too much attention too soon.
- **Medical problems** – urination outside of the litter tray can be a sign of an illness; if you notice blood in the urine, a change in urine habits (more or less frequent urination, squatting or straining to urinate) you must phone the foster department **immediately** as a blocked bladder is life threatening.

TIP: Wash the litter tray in hot soapy water or 50:50 water and white vinegar. Avoid strong smelling detergents. Clean up any accidents with either an enzyme cleaner or 50:50 white vinegar and water. Household cleaners often contain ammonia which encourages the cat to soil the area again.



Hyperactive Behaviour

Kittens and teenage cats have loads of energy! It is important to exhaust them physically and mentally with regular play sessions otherwise they will find other ways to expend their energy which you probably won't appreciate. There are two types of toys you should provide for your fosters – solo toys and interactive toys.

- **Solo toys** are ones which kittens can be left to play with unattended. These should be impossible for the kittens to consume or become tangled in. For example, ping pong balls, knitted mice, plastic wine corks and toilet paper tubes.
- **Interactive toys** should never be left with an unsupervised kitten. They include wand toys, motorised toys, and anything with string, elastic, or feathers as these can be chewed, swallowed or tangled around kittens. Interactive toys are great for encouraging cats and kittens to exercise and to enact their natural hunting skills.

Note: It helps to rotate the toys so there is always something new and exciting.

Timid Cats

Arriving in a new unfamiliar home quite stressful and unsettling. Do not be surprised if your foster cat or kittens spend their first few hours (or even days) hiding when you get them home.

Top Tips for Timid Cats:

- **Hideaways** – A fearful cat feels more secure if he/she knows he/she can't be seen; set up a hiding place in his/her room, either an 'igloo' type bed with one opening or a cardboard box on its side with one of the flaps hanging down and a cosy blanket inside.
- **Interact at the cats pace** – A fearful cat needs control so don't force attention; let him/her come when he/she feels comfortable.
- **Offer incentives** – Keep treats on-hand to reward positive behaviour. Pieces of cooked chicken or jelly-meat on a spoon work well.
- **Playtime** – Use a wand toy or string toy to encourage your fearful cat to play, this way he doesn't have to come too close.
- **Body language** – Observe and respect your fearful cat's body language. If your cats body language is saying "please don't come closer" and you continue to move toward him/her then he/she will soon learn to dart away.

The body language of your foster cat can help you to understand how he/she is feeling.

A happy cat

These cats are relaxed and happy.

1

Cat is standing, has a relaxed body posture, ears are in a natural position, tail is held upright with the tip of the tail curved, eyes are a normal shape, mouth is closed.



2

Cat is lying down, belly is exposed, body posture is relaxed, body is stretched out, ears are in natural position, eyes may be partly closed, mouth is closed.



3

Cat is sitting, body posture is relaxed, tail is held out loosely from body, ears are in natural position, eyes are a normal shape, mouth is closed.



An angry or very unhappy cat

These cats are not happy and want you to stay away or go away.



1



Cat is lying down, body is flattened, ears are flattened to the head, pupils are dilated, tail is held tightly into body, body is tense, limbs are held tight and close to body.

2



Cat is lying down, body is flattened, ears are flattened to the head and drawn back, body is slightly rolled over to one side, pupils are dilated, mouth is open and tense, teeth are showing.

3

Cat is standing, back is arched, body is held sideways, hair is raised, posture is tense, front paw is slightly lifted off the ground (ready to swipe if needed), ears are lowered and pointing out to the side, mouth is open and tense, teeth are showing, tail is tense.

5. Frequently Asked Questions

Can my foster animals go outside?

NO! They may run away, be sick and spread disease to other neighbourhood cats, may not be fully vaccinated and therefore at risk of contracting diseases from neighbourhood cats and they may mate with un-desexed cats. It is also important to monitor eating, toileting and behaviour.

What do I do if my foster animal escapes?

Call the responsible person for whom you are fostering. Your best chance of finding your foster cat/kitten is within the first 24hrs.

Can I let my foster(s) meet my resident pets?

All fosters should be kept separate from your resident pets. This will help prevent spreading known or unknown illnesses to your resident animals.

Can my own pets get sick from the foster animals?

In short, yes, there will be a health risk to your animals when you foster. However, this risk is minimal if they are kept separate from each other and your animals have current vaccinations, maintain a healthy diet and lifestyle, and are not immune compromised.

My foster has not toileted for 24 hours, what do I do?

If you have just taken a foster home it is not unusual for them not to toilet within the first 24 hours. This is usually due to the stress of being in a new environment. If they haven't toileted for longer than 24 hours please contact your local Vet.

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

As much time as you possibly can! The more time you spend with your fosters, the more you will help with their socialization. You'll also spot symptoms that your foster(s) are not feeling well—with young kittens that could be critical. You need not be home with your foster(s) all the time, but you do need to make a commitment to their well-being. You are responsible for these little lives!

How long will they be in my home?

The length of each foster period will depend on the needs of the individual animal. Typically, a foster assignment is 2 – 6 weeks.

Type of Foster	Estimated Time Commitments
Weight gain kittens	2-6 weeks
Queens (mother cats) with kittens	4-8 weeks
Cat Flu Cats/Kittens	2-3 weeks
Handling (un-socialised) cats/kittens	3-4 weeks
Post-surgery cats/kittens	1-4 weeks

What if I have to leave town and the cat/kittens aren't ready?

Occasionally things come up that require you to leave town before your foster animals are ready to be returned. Please contact the person for whom you are fostering.

How long will the kittens need to be in foster?

Healthy kittens need to be fostered until they reach 800g in weight. Kittens that have been treated for an illness need to be 1kg. Remember, "It's the weight, not the date!"

How long will it take my kittens to get up to weight?

Kittens gain roughly 10-15g of weight daily, or around 100g a week. This means if you have a 500g kitten it will take approximately 3 weeks to reach 800g.

What if I get overwhelmed and can't take care of the cat/kittens?

If you feel that you are unable to give adequate care to your foster animals, contact the person for whom you are doing the foster care work.

Will I need to give medications?

Almost every cat and kitten will need medication for something. It is not difficult and is very important that you are able to give your foster(s) the medication they need.

Will any of my foster kittens die?

Sadly, not all foster kittens survive, even with all the care they receive in a foster home. If any of your kittens die, call the person for whom you are fostering, who will provide you with further instruction.

Am I allowed to adopt my foster?

Yes! You need to let us know that you are interested in adoption prior to returning your feline.

What if a friend or family member wants to adopt my foster animal?

Please let us know the details of the interested party so we can make a note on the animal's records. After your foster animal is returned, passes its final vet check and is de-sexed a member of the responsible person will contact the interested party directly. Please note that the normal adoption process will apply.