

Flathead County Animal Shelter

Foster Manual



"Be the bridge between homeless and home"

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About Us

The Flathead County Animal Shelter is overseen and administered by the Flathead City-County Health Department. We are a managed admission shelter and adoption center, providing humane care and a haven to homeless dogs and cats residing in Flathead County while they await permanent, loving homes. We also care for animals being held for legal and criminal cases. FCAS is the only municipal animal shelter for Flathead County and has been in operation since 1983.

FCAS is responsible for the following:

- 🐾 The sheltering and care of abandoned, stray, impounded, and surrendered cats and dogs of Flathead County.
- 🐾 Assisting with the enforcement of Flathead County ordinances relating to the keeping, restraint and humane treatment of cats and dogs.
- 🐾 The education of the public concerning proper animal care and responsible animal ownership.
- 🐾 The responsible placement of adoptable cats and dogs.

Flathead County Animal Shelter

225 Cemetery Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
P. (406) 752-1310 F. (406) 752-1546
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fcas@flathead.mt.gov

Foster Coordinator

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Sheriff's Office/Animal Control

P. (406) 758-5610 ex.#1

HOURS OF OPERATION:

- Tuesday: *12pm - 5pm by appointment only*
- Wednesday: *12pm - 5pm by appointment only*
- Thursday: *12pm - 5pm by appointment only*
- Friday: *12pm - 5pm by appointment only*
- Saturday: *11am - 4pm by appointment only*
- Sunday & Monday: *Closed. Phone messages checked and calls returned. Stray intake and reclaims available.*
- *Closed on all Federal Holidays*

Program Information

Thank you for opening your heart and home to one of our shelter's orphaned animals. Your generosity will provide young and old, injured and sick, abused and under socialized pets a chance to grow or heal before finding their forever homes. The Foster Program plays an integral part in the shelter's ability to adopt out hundreds of orphans annually.

How the program works

Volunteers of the Foster Team work with shelter staff to determine which pets are most in need of foster care. As an approved foster parent, you'll receive emails from the Foster Team providing a brief description of those pets needing foster homes. When you see an animal that might be a good match for your household and lifestyle, you simply respond to the email. A shelter staff member will contact you to provide more information and determine if the animal is a good match. They will also arrange a meeting between you and the foster pet. If you are fostering a dog, and have dog(s) at home, we will also arrange a meet and greet between the foster dog and your dog(s). Flathead County Animal Shelter provide you with all the necessary supplies for fostering, support you throughout the entire process, and will be available to address any questions or concerns. Foster animals must not leave Flathead County while in foster, and thus foster parents must have a residence within Flathead County.

Reasons to foster

Fostering is a wonderful experience for you and your family-you can feel good knowing you have helped save a homeless pet's life. Even better, you've created space in the shelter to accommodate other homeless pets. Foster animals provide companionship and purpose-your act of kindness is repaid in rewards that are beyond words.

Animals needing foster homes

- 🐾 Puppies and kittens too young to be adopted
- 🐾 Young animals that require more socialization than available at the shelter
- 🐾 Older dogs and cats that will be more comfortable in a home environment
- 🐾 Injured animals and/or those recovering from surgery
- 🐾 Neglected pets in need of tender loving care
- 🐾 Dogs and cats suffering from "shelter stress" in need of a calm home environment
- 🐾 Animals with colds or with special medical needs
- 🐾 Abandoned mothers with litters
- 🐾 Any dog when the shelter becomes overcrowded

Frequently Asked Questions

How long are animals in foster homes?

It completely depends on the animal and the situation. Foster time can range from a couple of days (sleepovers), to several weeks/months if there are behavioral or medical concerns for the animal.

Can I adopt my foster pet?

YES! Foster parents have first choice to adopt their foster pet.

How are foster animals promoted?

Photos and stories/bios are posted on our website, as well as shared on social media. Foster parents can also help promote their foster dog through friends, family, social media or even just by walking in local neighborhoods and speaking to people.

What is the process of adopting an animal out in foster?

- 🐾 All adoptions are scheduled by appointment. Shelter staff will help coordinate between foster and potential adopters' schedules to find a time that works for both parties.
- 🐾 After a meet and greet with both the animal and staff, potential adopters have the option of a same-day adoption, scheduling a second appointment or passing on the animal. If the animal is not adopted, fosters will take them back home unless other arrangements have been made.

If I have my own pets, can I still foster?

Yes, but keep in mind that it's always a health risk to expose your animals to other animals whether it's walking at parks, vet waiting rooms or other common animal areas. The health risk is minimal if your animals are current on their vaccinations, maintains a healthy diet and lifestyle, and are not elderly or very young. Any animals established in your home must be current on core vaccines before you bring a foster pet home.

If you or someone in your house is immune-compromised, consult your doctor before fostering since working or living with animals exposes humans to a group of diseases called zoonoses. Zoonotic disease (there are about 200) is defined as a disease transmitted from animals to humans and also from humans to animals. To find out more about zoonotic diseases, talk to your doctor or veterinarian. Proper hygiene, preventative measures and an understanding of these illnesses can reduce the risk of disease.

FCAS does not do meet and greets with cats. If you are fostering cats and currently have cats at home, please refer to our Cat Introductions guide and follow all acclimation protocols.

If you are fostering dogs and currently have dogs at home, a meet and greet between the foster dog and your dog(s) is required before you take your foster dog home.

What supplies are needed to foster?

Foster parents provide space, training, exercise and love for foster animals. The shelter will provide all other supplies and equipment needed throughout your foster experience. This includes: food, collars/leashes, crates, beds, medication and veterinary services.

Do I need to crate train my foster dog?

No, but it is one of the most efficient and effective ways to house train a puppy or re-train an adult dog. Some dogs do not like crates, and most dogs need to be transitioned or “trained” to use a crate, so it’s up to the foster parent to decide whether to crate or not. Putting the dog in a crate while you are gone will give you peace of mind knowing that they are in a safe place, away from harm, and not doing any damage to your belongings or themselves. For many dogs, a crate can also represent a safe and comfortable place to call their own and provides them with a sense of security. Dogs actually like having a “den” to cuddle up in. Crating should never be used as punishment.

Do I need to have any prior medical knowledge or expertise?

No, but you may be asked to dispense medication to your foster animal so you will have to be comfortable with following veterinarian’s instructions if fostering a sick or injured animal.

What if my foster pet becomes sick?

If you have a medical concern with your foster animal, please contact the Foster Coordinator to determine if the concern needs to be immediately addressed or if it is safe to wait until the next day the shelter’s DVM is in house.

Can I take my foster dog to off-leash dog parks?

No. You are not allowed to take any foster dog from FCAS to an off-leash dog park. While these parks can be fun for some dogs, there are far too many unknowns for it to be a safe and healthy experience for a foster dog. Diseases are easily transmitted and the temperaments of visiting dogs are unknown, thus creating a huge liability to FCAS. Also, taking a leashed dog to a dog park can create barrier frustration and aggression in dogs.

How can I make my foster pet more adoptable?

There are two ways to make a foster pet more adoptable. First and foremost is marketing. If no one knows about your foster pet, or how wonderful it is, then it will be next to impossible to find them a forever home. In addition to supplying great photos and a bio and updating these regularly, giving a foster pet additional exposure by telling friends and family about them will help create a “network effect” and will speed up the process of finding a forever home. Simple steps like taking a foster dog on walks in local parks, outdoor shopping areas and other high- traffic areas will help find potential adopters.

Secondly, our orphaned pets benefit greatly from the exercise (with the exception of those with some medical conditions), basic training, special love and attention you give them. While marketing provides you with applicants, it’s always the animal that “closes the deal.” Providing a foster pet with basic training and manners will increase their adoptability. Shy animals will benefit from your patience, routine and slowly exposing them to new people to build their confidence. Rambunctious adolescents who learn good manners will help show off their trainability and long-term potential. And while puppies and kittens are adorable, they need a lot of love, attention and hand-holding from humans to develop properly and feel secure.

Can I return my foster animal to the shelter if I am unable to continue the foster?

We understand that situations can change and it may become necessary to bring an animal back. We request that a foster parent give as much notice as possible so that we can prepare either a new foster home or make an in-house kennel available.

Are foster animals ever euthanized?

Much energy, love, time and vet care are devoted to all of our animals, and the shelter is committed to finding homes for ALL the adoptable pets within its care. Some pets are in foster care because they're seriously ill or injured. If, after medical attention, these pets are too young or too weak to heal and are suffering, then the shelter staff will humanely euthanize these animals. Fortunately, most pets in foster care heal beautifully. On rare occasions, a pet in foster care may start to exhibit potentially dangerous behavior that was unknown or suppressed when the animal was at the shelter. The shelter may determine that this pet is too dangerous and will humanely euthanize the animal or seek an alternative facility for its care. Your safety is our #1 priority. You must always inform the shelter staff and the foster coordinator if your foster pet exhibits any aggressive behavior.

Requirements and Rules

In order to become a foster parent, you will need to do the following:

- 🐾 Be 18 years of age or older
- 🐾 Complete a Foster Animal Application. The Foster Coordinator will then process and approve all applications, including verifying that landlords have approved the foster and that all established pets are current on their vaccinations.
- 🐾 Agree to and sign the Foster Agreement for every foster experience.

In addition to the requirements and responsibilities outlined in the Foster Agreement, and throughout this manual, foster parents abide by the following rules:

- 🐾 No off-leash dog parks
- 🐾 Foster dogs must be on leash at all times when outdoors unless inside your own secure fenced yard
- 🐾 Any aggressive behavior or medical concerns must be immediately communicated to shelter staff
- 🐾 Foster parents must respond within 24 hours to communication from shelter staff
- 🐾 FCAS approves all foster matches. Staff may also remove a foster animal from a foster home for any reason

Getting Ready to Foster

After being approved by FCAS as a qualified foster home, but before you bring your foster pet home, we suggest you prepare yourself, your family and your home for a new companion.

Be physically and mentally prepared

Fostering is a family affair, so please make sure that everyone in your household is ready, willing and able to provide a loving home for an orphaned animal. Many adults and children have a difficult time adjusting to a new schedule or routine, and also have a difficult time “giving up” an animal to its forever home. Make sure everyone is ready for this new, albeit temporary, addition to your family.

Be realistic about your time commitment to a foster pet. Many people believe that a shelter is a terrible place and animals are always better off in a home. While the shelter can be a stressful environment for many dogs and cats, they do receive excellent care during their stay. In addition to a clean, warm and dry kennel, with plenty of fresh water, food and vet care, most shelter pets are exercised throughout the day. Many dogs go out on sniffer walks and sleepovers. Cats also get lots of attention and stimulation. Don't over-extend yourself when starting out. You may want to begin with a sleepover. And even if you have experience with larger dogs or complicated cats, starting small is a great way to build your fostering experience.

Where to keep your foster dog

Planning where you will keep your dog before you bring your dog home will make the entire process easier for everyone. When you first bring a foster dog home, you'll want to confine them to a single room, such as a kitchen or family room. This room should not be an isolated room, but a room where you spend a large part of your day or evening, as dogs are pack animals and want to be with you. This room is especially important when you're at work or away from the house, as it will be a new environment in which they need time to become familiar and comfortable.

Use a baby gate to block off the entrances to other rooms. By keeping the dog in one room, you're helping prevent “accidents” that may occur because of stress or adjusting to your routine. (Even a house-trained dog might have an accident or two during this adjustment period.) For dogs that are not housetrained, keeping them confined to one room will help start this important training as you must be able to monitor their activities. The shelter recommends you also use a crate in this room for times when you are away from the house. Be sure to review the section for “Exercise, Training and Attention” in this manual.

The Do's

- 🐾 Do keep your foster dog indoors in a location with a crate available.
- 🐾 Do keep your foster dog in a warm/cool (depending on the season) and dry location.
- 🐾 Do keep your foster dog on a leash at all times when outdoors unless in your secured fenced yard. When in a secured yard, you must supervise him at all times. It is very common for a shelter dog to try and escape so always supervise your shelter dog.
- 🐾 Do keep your puppy indoors in a kitchen, bathroom, mudroom or laundry room (you may want to use baby gates to limit access to other parts of your home). Puppies should be around humans for socialization purposes and should not be isolated.

The Don'ts

- 🐾 Do not place your foster dog around other strange dogs as we often do not know the dog's past history. Foster dogs should not be put in a position of possibly fighting with a strange dog, reducing their chances for adoption and increasing their chances of euthanasia.
- 🐾 Do not allow your foster dogs outdoors unless supervised by an adult.
- 🐾 Never take your foster dog to an off-leash park. This is a liability to the shelter.
- 🐾 Taking a foster dog to an off-leash park will result in the removal of the foster dog and end your role as a foster parent.

How to dog-proof a room

Walk into the room in which you plan to confine your foster dog, and ask yourself:

- 🐾 Is there room for the crate (dog's safe place)?
- 🐾 Is there quick access to the outside for bathroom breaks?
- 🐾 Is there anything that can be chewed, such as drapes, a couch or rugs?
- 🐾 Are there exposed electrical wires?
- 🐾 Is there anywhere the dog can hide? Will you be able to get the dog out if hidden?
- 🐾 Are there coffee tables with objects that can be knocked off by a wagging tail?
- 🐾 Are there plants in the room? If so, check the list of toxic plants in this manual.
- 🐾 Where will I set up the crate once all hazards are removed?
- 🐾 Is the crate in a quiet, low-traffic area of the room?
- 🐾 Is there a blanket in the crate to train your foster dog that it's his bed?

Items you may need

FCAS will provide the following:

- 🐾 Food and bowls (if you don't already have bowls)
- 🐾 A crate or bed
- 🐾 Flat buckle collar (yellow) with the shelter's phone number written on it (this collar must be kept on the dog at all times)
- 🐾 Leash
- 🐾 Training tools like a gentle leader (these should only be used during training periods)
- 🐾 Any other age appropriate foster materials

Other items you may want:

- 🐾 Odor neutralizer (like Nature's Miracle) to help clean up housetraining mistakes. If you clean mistakes with soap and water, the dog will still smell the urine.
- 🐾 Brushes
- 🐾 Toys (Do not give your foster dog hooves, rawhide, pig's ears or toys that can become a choking hazard or cause diarrhea)
- 🐾 Training treats
- 🐾 Baby gates
- 🐾 Bitter Apple (to spray on anything you don't want chewed)

Transporting your shelter dog

The safest way to transport your dog from the shelter to your home (or anywhere else), is in a secure crate in the back of a SUV or station wagon. The crate should be secured so that it doesn't tip over or move around. Another option is to use a grill between the back of the vehicle and the back seat. If you have a sedan, then you may be able to secure a crate on the back seat. It is always a good idea to put a blanket down under your crate or in the back section of your vehicle, so that if your dog becomes car sick, or has an accident, the blanket will protect your seats and carpet. If you can't fit a crate into your vehicle, your dog is safest in the back seat. Use either a special harness for your dog that hooks on to a seat belt, or a leash that attaches to the seat belt. Avoid letting your dog ride in the passenger seat next to you. Not only can your view be obstructed, but if you brake suddenly your dog could get injured by hitting the windshield or by the air bag.

You might need a few treats to encourage a dog to jump into a car. If you can get a dog to put his front paws up, then you can lift his back end by supporting his hind quarters (as if he were sitting on your crossed arms). If you need to completely lift your dog, the best way is by putting one arm behind his hind legs and one arm in front of his front legs – essentially a scoop. Another way is to have one arm just behind his front legs, and one hand behind his hind legs. This way the dog's weight is being supported in the same general area of its legs. Keep in mind, most dogs don't really like to be lifted. Remember to always keep a handle on his leash.

Where to keep your foster cat

Foster cats should be kept indoors only and be transported in a secure crate when outside of the home. Upon arrival to your home, even a confident cat may take some time to adjust and should have their space limited for the first two weeks. Make sure that food, water and litter are in places that are low traffic. Limit interactions with new people for the first several days.

To protect a foster pet in a new environment (and to safeguard your belongings!) it is important to pet-proof your home. Doing so will help set you both up for foster success.

Once you have chosen an area where you will care for your foster guests, you should “pet-proof” the area. Pay attention to any small or potentially harmful objects, such as pins, needles, paper clips, nails, staples, thread, string, rubber bands, caustic/toxic chemicals, moth balls, plants and any other items that are potentially dangerous. Some animals may also be attracted to electrical cords. These items should all be blocked so they can’t get at them. Also, to ensure nothing is missed, get down at an animal’s eye-level. Look closely for any small holes or dangerous items that may have been missed at your first pass of pet-proofing

Precautions to take by room: Kitchens/Bathrooms/Utility Rooms

- 🐾 Use childproof latches to keep little paws from prying open cabinets. Be sure to keep all cabinet doors closed.
- 🐾 Keep medications, cleaners, chemicals, and laundry supplies on high shelves or in childproofed cabinets.
- 🐾 Keep trashcans covered or inside a latched cabinet.
- 🐾 Check for and block any small spaces, nooks or holes inside cabinetry, furniture, floors, appliances, etc. where your foster pets may hide. Also make certain that spaces behind washer/dryer units are closed off so your foster animals can’t get in there either.
- 🐾 Always keep your dryer and washer units closed and check them before use.
- 🐾 Keep all foods out of reach and/or in cabinets. Even if the food isn’t harmful to pets, the wrapper could be.
- 🐾 Keep toilet lids closed

Precautions to take by room: Living/Family Room

- 🐾 Place dangling wires from lamps, TVs, etc. out of reach. You can place the cords through PVC pipes if you’re concerned a pet might try to chew them.
- 🐾 Keep children’s toys put away.
- 🐾 Put away knickknacks that are valuable to you or could easily be knocked over. If it is important to you, don’t leave it out.
- 🐾 Pick up any items like strings, pins, yarn, etc.
- 🐾 Move houseplants — many of which can be poisonous — out of reach. This includes hanging plants that can be jumped onto from other nearby surfaces.
- 🐾 Secure aquariums and cages that house small animals, such as hamsters or fish, to keep them safe from curious paws.

Precautions to take by room: Garage/Basement

- 🐾 Most garages contain too many dangerous chemicals and unsafe items to be an acceptable foster site. Foster animals should never be housed in a garage.
- 🐾 Move all chemicals to high shelves or behind secure doors.
- 🐾 Clean up all antifreeze from the floor and driveway. Even a very small amount can be lethal to an animal.

Precautions to take by room: Bedrooms

- 🐾 Bedrooms may not ideal situations for some foster animals. If scared of their new environment, some animals can hide under beds and may be hard to coax out.
- 🐾 Keep laundry and shoes behind closed doors
- 🐾 Keep any medications, lotions or cosmetics off accessible surfaces (like the bedside table.)
- 🐾 Move cords out of reach of chewing.

Whatever room you choose to make your foster pet's new home, make sure that it is easily cleaned. You should be able to disinfect it between foster pets. Carpet and other soft surfaces can harbor disease hosts from pet to pet. It is also difficult to clean up accidents on carpet, especially when they seep into the carpet pad. Areas with tile, hardwood or other impermeable surfaces are ideal places to house your foster animals.

Items you may need

FCAS will provide the following:

- 🐾 Food and bowls (if you do not already have bowls)
- 🐾 A travel carrier
- 🐾 A cat safe collar with FCAS phone number written on it. Your foster cat may not keep the collar on, but try your best to keep your foster cat dressed with this collar.
- 🐾 A litter box and litter
- 🐾 A "Stretch and Scratch" scratching toy
- 🐾 Any other age appropriate foster materials

Other items you may want:

- 🐾 Odor neutralizer (like Nature's Miracle) to help clean up housetraining mistakes. If you clean mistakes with soap and water, the cat will still smell the urine.
- 🐾 Brushes
- 🐾 Toys (Do not give your foster cat any toy that could be a hazard to them)

Transporting your foster cat

When transporting any cat, but especially your foster cat, they must always be secured in a travel carrier. FCAS will provide a carrier to you for the duration of your foster. Never put a loose cat into a vehicle. This poses the risk of escapes or situations that can become dangerous to not only the cat, but to you.

Selecting a Foster Pet

Now that you're ready to foster, it's time to find an appropriate shelter pet to bring home. After being approved by the shelter staff as a qualified foster home, you will start receiving a Foster Request email. This email will describe animals in need of foster homes based on priority. If you see one that looks like a good match, reply to the addresses in the email and the shelter staff will determine if this is a good match for you and your lifestyle.

The shelter staff will contact you directly to schedule a meet and greet with the potential foster pet. The shelter staff may also recommend a different dog based on your lifestyle, experience or situation. After meeting the pet in person, you and the shelter staff will decide if it is a good match. Both you and the shelter staff must feel that it's the right match to proceed! Before you leave the shelter, make sure that the shelter staff updates the information about the pet in the shelter computer system. Also, make sure you have all the supplies, including medication if needed, and ensure that your foster pet has been vaccinated and microchipped.

Introductions

The shelter staff will assist you with introducing your dog to a foster dog. You should bring your dog to the shelter for a meet and greet in the outdoor yards before you bring a foster dog home. Even if your dog has many different canine playmates, you should still bring your dog to the shelter to meet a potential foster dog. Dogs are like people, and sometimes a dog may not like another dog for no apparent reason.

- 🐾 Do be alert and make the reintroductions gradually and calmly. Even if they got along great at the shelter, your dog may be extremely territorial in the home.
- 🐾 If possible, go for a walk around your neighborhood with both dogs and two handlers. Walk the dogs side by side on leashes and allow them to sniff one another and become familiar with each other.
- 🐾 Do give your own dog LOTS of love and praise.
- 🐾 Do leave leashes on the dogs when you are in the home, so that you can get immediate control if needed. You may only need to do this for a short time.
- 🐾 Do talk normally. Letting the dogs know that you are fine; they are fine; everything is fine!
- 🐾 Be patient and go slowly with your foster dog as they may have been through a stressful surgery, abusive situation or a lot of recent changes.
- 🐾 Don't leave your foster dog unattended with your resident dog. Even if they seem to get along well in your presence, you should separate the dogs when you leave your house. After a week, you may determine that this is no longer necessary, but be sure to always remove all toys, food, chews and start slowly.

Some common mistakes

- 🐾 Holding the leash too tensely as dogs may react with defensiveness.
- 🐾 Leaving toys and chews around the house. This can cause resource guarding which can escalate very quickly. Remove all toys and chews before you arrive home with your foster dog.
- 🐾 Feeding your foster dog with your resident dog. It's best to separate them initially, and to supervise always.
- 🐾 Over-stimulating your foster dog with introductions to many people or your neighbors' dogs.

Introducing your cats to foster dogs

Before you introduce your foster dog to your cat, you may wish to wait a few days until you have confirmed or instilled basic obedience in your foster dog. You will need to have your foster dog under control and know which behaviors are appropriate when interacting with a cat.

Allow your foster dog to settle down and get to know your surroundings first before you start introductions to unfamiliar animals. Introducing a cat to a dog is similar to introducing dogs to one another. Take your time and create a stress-free environment.

Begin by keeping your cat in a different room. Allow the dog to become comfortable in his own room. Once the dog is comfortable, let him explore the rest of the house for short periods each day while the cat is in another room. This will allow them to pick up each other's scent.

After a few days, allow the two to meet but keep the dog on a leash. Observe their interactions - a dog that is showing overt aggression, such as snarling, growling, baring teeth, etc., will probably never accept a cat. The cat and dog should be separated by baby gates or kept in separate rooms.

If all is reasonably calm so far, walk the dog around the room on leash, but don't let go of the leash in case the dog decides to chase the cat. On leash interactions give the cat the opportunity to approach the dog if they choose, or to find a route of escape.

During the first few meetings, the cat and dog will probably not interact face to face. A dog is a predatory animal. It's a natural instinct for a dog to want to chase a cat. Assume the dog will chase the cat so you are prepared. Never allow the dog to intimidate the cat by barking or chasing.

Each time the dog acts inappropriately (barking), let him know these behaviors are unacceptable; try using a quick sharp tone, like "Aah-Aah" to get their attention and redirect their energy. On the other hand, if the cat bops the dog on the nose as a warning, that's a good sign and should not be discouraged. When they set up boundaries between themselves, they are beginning to establish a working relationship.

Let them interact with the dog on leash for about 30 minutes, then return the cat back to its safe haven and bring the dog to its dog crate or bed. Give the dog a treat and lots of praise. Increase the amount of time they are together a little each visit.

It's important to be patient and encouraging in their interactions. If you're relaxed, they will be more at ease. Always praise friendly behavior profusely. Don't rush the introduction or force them to interact more than either is willing. Pressing them to accept each other will only slow down the adjustment process. When the cat and dog seem to be getting used to each other, let the dog go, but keep his leash attached to his collar. Let him drag it around the house as he wanders, that way you can control him at any time. The cat will probably hide at first. You should use your best judgment as to when they can begin supervised sessions with the dog off-leash.

Cat Introductions 101

A lot of people expect cat introductions to be difficult. After all, cats have a reputation for being solitary creatures and possessive of their territory and resources, right? Not always! Think about it – feral cats often live in colonies, in a combined effort to exploit resources, protect their members and even communally raise kittens. So, shouldn't our domestic cats be able to live in peace within a family? Absolutely!

A lot of people ask about what age or gender would get along with their existing cat, however there is no magic combination. It comes down to personalities. Consider the cats you already have and what kind of cat would match up best. An older cat would probably appreciate a mellow companion rather than a rambunctious juvenile. You know your cat best – what kind of friend would they want if they could choose?

In addition to considering cat personalities, the other key to success is determining how willing you are to go through a proper introduction. It could be a matter of days or sometimes months before you see your cats living in harmony in their shared environment.

So how do you integrate a foster cat into a family with an existing cat? Remember the acronym S.T.O.P.

Safety: Are the cats in a safe situation where they will not hurt you or each other?

Transform: Change scary situations into ones that have positive associations.

Observe: Pay close attention to how your cats interact with each other and guide their introduction.

Patience: Go slowly. It is better not to rush things. The more patience you have, the less stressed your cats will be.

1. Set up a Safe Room for the Foster Cat. The first thing you will want to do is provide your foster cat with a place in which they will feel safe and comfortable. You can use a spare bedroom, or if you do not have one, the bathroom – any room with a door or that can be blocked somehow. Clean the room well and try to keep your existing cat from spreading their scent in the room prior to the foster cat arriving – this will be the foster cat's home for a little while, and we do not want them to be intimidated by another cat's scent!

In the safe room, you will want to have food, water, litter boxes, toys, a comfortable place to sleep (a cat bed, or soft blankets are fine, too), a perch (cat tree or maybe a dresser from where she can look out a window), and a place where your foster cat can hide (either a box, or a bed to crawl under, etc.). You may also want to install a pheromone diffuser in the room, which contains the F3 facial pheromone. When cats rub up against things with their cheeks, they spread this pheromone on objects and other cats/people – it is a calming pheromone, which can increase a new cat's sense of security.

When you bring your foster cat home, bring them to this room with NO interaction with your existing cats; place a towel underneath the door to prevent new and existing cats from seeing and smelling each other prematurely. Spend some time playing with your foster kitty! Make sure they settle into their room and knows where everything is. Do not forget to play with your existing cats, too (separately, at this point)!

2. The Nose Knows! Did you know that cats rely on their sense of smell more than any other sense? They can detect things about their environment – and the cats that inhabit it – from just a whiff of scent that humans are nowhere near capable of detecting! Cats leave each other “calling cards” through urine marking and pheromone deposits (like rubbing up against doorways and corners); they can tell who is in heat, how long it has been since a male has passed through his territory, and many other tidbits of information. In our situation, we will be taking advantage of the cats' keen sense of smell to desensitize and counter-condition the cats to each other using scent introductions.

The first thing you will want to do is exchange scents (or do a “scent swap”). To do this, take a clean sock and rub it gently on your foster cat's face and cheeks, head, and neck. Take a different sock and do the same with your existing cat. Present the socks with the other cat's scent on it to the opposite cat – in the case of the foster cat, let them smell the sock with the existing cat's scent, and leave the sock in their room with some treats (positive association right here!). Do the same with the existing cat. Watch what your cats do – is there any reaction? If not, that is great! If there is a negative reaction (hissing, fear, or nervousness, for example), you'll want to repeat this process until the sock is just a sock.

The next thing we will do is create a “group scent”, which is a co-mingling of scents from all of the cats in the household, to let the existing cats know that the foster cat is part of their group and can be accepted (this process is generally called “allorubbing”, when scents are transmitted from cats rubbing up against each other; we are just going to do that part for them). Use a soft brush to gently brush the foster cat's cheeks, face, head, and neck, then shoulders. If the foster cat is not used to being brushed, go slowly and gently. Then present the brush with your foster cat's scent on it to the existing cat and watch how they reacts – let them sniff the brush. If they react negatively, leave the brush with them along with some treats so that they can get used to it. If they seem ok with the scented brush, brush your existing cat's face, cheeks, head, and shoulders with the brush; but don't force the brush on them! If they resist brushing, leave the brush with them to get used to. If you can brush your existing kitty, the brush now has both of your cat's scents on it. Take the brush back to your foster cat and let them check it out. If they let you, brush her to incorporate your existing cat's scent onto your new cat. Get the picture? You will want to do this every day

until both cats are fine (i.e., indifferent) to the scent-loaded brush, and then continue doing this until the cats are physically integrating with each other.

3. Gradual exposure + positive associations = kitty confidence. Next, we're going to visually introduce the cats to each other and use counter-conditioning to associate the other cat with good things (either treats, playtime, or affection and attention). In the first step, we will let the foster cat explore the rest of the house while the existing cat(s) is in another closed room so that they are still separated from each other. Let the foster cat explore the rest of the home at least once a day until they appear comfortable and confident in their environment. Make sure to play with the foster cat in the new locations to let them know there is nothing to fear!

Next, you will next want to visually introduce your cats to each other. To do this, we are going to start feeding them on opposite sides of a door to create a positive association with each other (food + other cat = good). You will want to take food away for about three hours prior to doing this so that both cats will be hungry (or feed cats on a schedule). Place food bowls at least three feet from the closed door, on either side, so that each cat can eat simultaneously. Our goal is to gradually move the bowls closer to each other, with the door in between. If the cats do not seem upset when the bowls are close together (no hesitation, hissing, growling, etc.), you can graduate to using a gate with a blanket over it (which uncovers varying heights off the floor) between the food bowls, or open the door wider and wider so that the cats can see each other while eating. If growling or hissing happens, back off – close the door or lower the blanket or separate the food bowls. This is a signal that you have moved forward too fast – and that is ok. There is always another mealtime to try again! Try to stop the exposure before agitation occurs – end the exposure on a positive note. Progress will be made, even if it happens slowly.

You will want to get to a point where the cats can be in the same room together without growling, hissing, “puffing up”, or getting agitated. The best way to do this is to distract them with playtime – catnip mice, wand toys, food puzzles, affection...whatever it takes to keep them distracted from the other cat (it might take two people to keep the cats distracted, one for each cat). Supervise the cats when they are together until there is no need to create this distraction – if the cats can hang out together in the same room without getting upset, you have come a long way! Congratulations!

4. Stuff happens. Now, it probably will not all be a bed of roses. It is likely that there will be some growling, hissing, and perhaps even a kerfuffle or two (you should know how to safely break up a cat fight – put a pillow between the cats or scoop one cat up using a blanket). As we said before, STOP. You may have moved forward too fast – take a step back and try again tomorrow. This is a process that can take a while. But do not give up! Maintain the group scent; use positive associations with treats, food, and playtime; and try to always end on a positive note – before any agitation starts. Baby steps. Kitten steps. Cat introductions are not always easy, but you will get there!

Feeding

FCAS feeds all of our animals Royal Canin, and will provide the food needed for your foster animal. This food is for your foster animal only. If you need more food during your foster experience, please contact FCAS and we will replenish your supply.

Foster animals should be fed separately from any of your existing pets to avoid risks of arguments over food.

At the shelter, animals are fed once a day in the morning. However, in a home environment, it is recommended that foster animals are introduced to the schedule of breakfast and dinner. Staff will inform you of the quantity of food your foster pet should be eating during meal times. Feeding schedules should be consistent.

Do not feed any other food, including “people food” to your foster animal without permission from FCAS staff.

Feeding will depend on the age of your foster animal.

- 🐾 Adults: Feed adult food twice a day (breakfast and dinner) for dogs. Follow feeding schedules put in place by staff for cats.
- 🐾 Adolescents (up to 1 year): Feed puppy/kitten food following the schedule put in place by staff.
- 🐾 Nursing mothers: Free feed nursing mothers puppy/kitten food. Mothers will give all of their calories to their babies, so it is important to provide as much food as possible to avoid the mother becoming undernourished.

Food Allergies

If your foster pet is experiencing hot spots (red patches of skin), itching, hair pulling or other symptoms of allergies, inform FCAS staff immediately. It could be due to food allergies. FCAS will speak to the contracted DVM for alternative foods.

Supplements

Some foster animals will need extra nutrition. FCAS staff, along with the contracted DVM will determine if any supplements or probiotics are needed for your foster animal. Do not give any supplements to your foster animal without permission from FCAS.

Always provide plenty of fresh water!

Exercise and Attention

Exercise

Foster dogs should be exercised every day, rain or shine. The old adage, “A tired dog is a happy dog,” holds true for foster dogs. Most foster dogs will need at least two 30+ minute walks a day to release excess energy. If your foster dog is an adolescent, you may need to step up the activity level to include regular runs/hikes/or brisk walks. A dog that is exercised regularly will tend to sleep when you are not at home - and a sleeping dog cannot do undesirable things, such as bark, chew, etc. Even a 10-week-old puppy that plays inside or in a yard needs numerous daily walks as part of the socialization process. The exception to this is if your foster dog is recovering from an illness or injury, then they may need rest.

Foster cats also need exercise. Playing with you and toys can help enrich and socialize your foster cat, enabling them to thrive as a well-adjusted pet.

Attention and playtime

Lots of human contact is important for animals. Human handling is especially important for puppies and kittens. Attention and playtime is a reward for your foster pet, so be sure to give them several minutes of playtimes several times throughout the day.

As a general rule, children under 16 years old should not be left alone and unsupervised with any animal, but specifically a foster animal. Do not allow children to behave with a foster pet in a manner you would not want the child to behave with a younger sibling. Teach children to leave the pet alone when eating, chewing or sleeping. Never allow a child to remove a toy or other “prized possession” from your foster pet. A child can’t differentiate between a foster dog and a dog they have grown up with, so to reduce the risk of potential injury, you must keep everyone safe.

Common Behavioral Issues

Many of the behaviors we find problematic are really just normal dog and cat behaviors. And remember, many behaviors have been bred into the breed, such as Huskies pulling on leashes or terriers digging. This is true for cats as well. Many breeds of cats, such as Siamese cats are bred to be more active and talkative.

Common Dog Behavioral Issues

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| 🐾 Barking | 🐾 Destructive chewing |
| 🐾 Humping | 🐾 Puppy nipping and rough play |
| 🐾 Digging | 🐾 Submissive and/or excitement urination |
| 🐾 Begging | 🐾 Urine marking behavior |
| 🐾 Attention seeking | 🐾 Fearfulness |
| 🐾 Garbage hunting | 🐾 Resource guarding |
| 🐾 Leash pulling | 🐾 Separation anxiety |
| 🐾 Greeting manners | 🐾 Prey drive |

If your foster dog is exhibiting any behavioral issues, ask yourself:

- 🐾 Is my foster dog getting enough exercise?
- 🐾 Is he being left alone for long periods of time?
- 🐾 Does he have interesting toys to keep his mind engaged and stimulated?
- 🐾 Is he getting enough attention and playtime?
- 🐾 Am I reinforcing bad behavior? Some examples include telling a fearful dog that “It’s ok”, verbally scolding a dog when they are seeking attention, etc.
- 🐾 Does my foster dog have a safe place that is dog-proofed with appropriate chew toys, or am I leaving my own belongings within reach?
- 🐾 Am I providing specific outlets based on its breed?

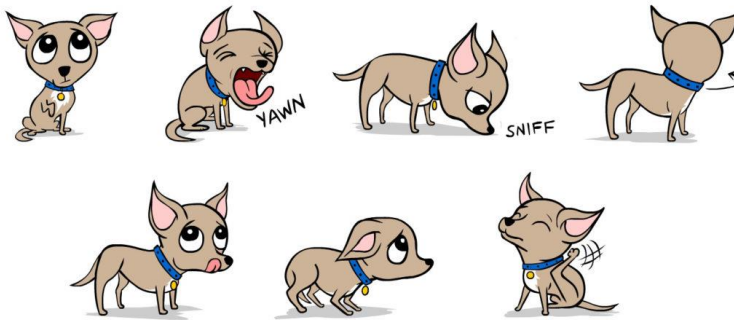
Additional training resources to help deal with these behavioral issues are listed in the appendix of this manual and included in your foster dog packet. You should also talk with shelter staff about any behavior issues. We don’t expect foster parents to be miracle workers. If your foster dog requires more attention, exercise or training than you can provide, the best solution for you and your foster dog might be a different foster home or to be returned to the shelter.

TALKING DOG

Dogs communicate using body language more than they do vocally. Here's a quick guide to get a good idea of what your dog is telling you. Look at the whole of the dog: head, face, body and tail to get a more accurate idea of what the dog is saying.

FEARFUL / ANXIOUS / STRESSED

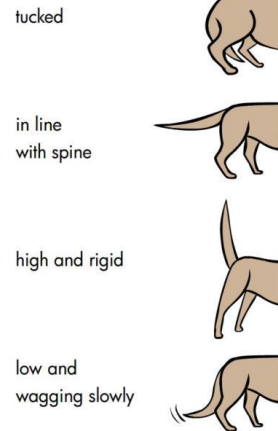
In all cases, respect the dogs need for space and offer signs of appeasement and peace:



If not read correctly, stress, anxiety and fear often lead to behaviour commonly termed "aggressive", as the dog attempts to make it clearer that they are uncomfortable: raised hackles are a sign of fear:

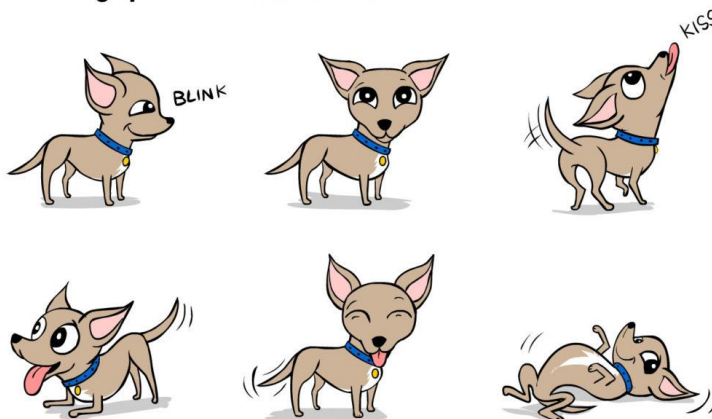


TAIL POSITIONS

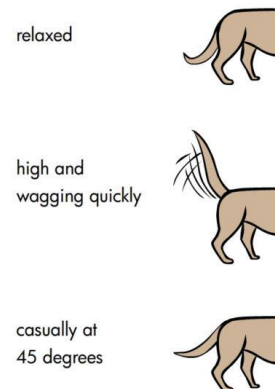


CONTENT / HAPPY / SOCIAL

These dogs pose no immediate threat.



TAIL POSITIONS



Common Cat Behavioral Issues

It's important to remember that your foster cat has recently been through several difficult transitions. They are feeling unsure of things and even though we know a foster home is a fabulous place, they may still struggle with the transition. Patience is key but the following tips will help with some of the common concerns.

Not using the litter box

There are both medical and behavioral reasons an adult cat may stray from using the litter box. Most reasons are easy to resolve. Begin by determining if the cat is spraying or if it is a case of inappropriate elimination. If there is urine on a vertical surface, you have a cat who is spraying. If the urine is on a horizontal surface, you may have a case of inappropriate urination. Notify the LAH immediately of any cases of either. Spraying is likely the result of stress. In a new home (even a great foster home), the presence of another pet or being recently altered all contribute to this behavior. The cat is trying to feel more safe and secure. Begin by assessing the likely cause of the spraying. Confine the cat to a smaller and easily cleanable space and separate from children and other pets. Inappropriate urination or defecation can also be the result of stress, but it may also be a simple dislike for the litter type, litter box location, lack of an appropriate amount of litterboxes, arthritis or a urinary tract infection. To resolve, begin by keeping a clean litter box. Scoop it a couple times a daily and completely dump and sanitize it on a weekly basis. Provide your foster cat with more than one litter box, and if possible, place one in the area that they are using instead. Use an uncovered litter box with unscented cat litter and if needed try other types of litter to find what they like. For example, you can try clumping, non-clumping, pellets, wheat based, or even soil. There is also Cat Attract litter which has enzymes that will encourage the cat to the litter box.

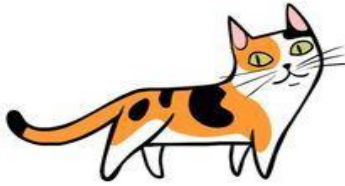
In both cases, be sure to thoroughly clean the affected area with an enzymatic cleaner that was designed for cat urine. Any instances of straining to urinate, blood in the urine or frequent attempts to urinate and not producing a normal amount should be reported to the LAH immediately.

Overstimulation

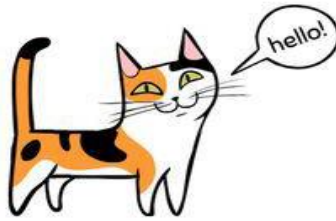
Over-stimulation may present as a cat who strikes, growls or even bites in response to something that excites them. This may be another cat, a dog or may be as simple as petting. Some cats are more prone to this behavior than others. In response to these behaviors, we should seek to reduce the exposure to the things that cause this response. You can remove other pets or limit petting to a location or amount of time that is more comfortable. Once you understand their threshold, you can begin to work on desensitization. You can use treats or wet food to slowly acclimate the cat to these stimuli. Go slow! For example, use a photo of another cat and then treat. Very gradually increase their exposure to the stimuli, being cautious to stop before they are at their threshold. Keep sessions short and do them several times daily.

Some cats can become over aroused in the form of play. You should never encourage your foster cat to bite or kick at your hands or feet. Use wands or dangling toys to encourage the cat to play appropriately and move them away from your body. Keep play sessions short and end before they become too aroused. Always reward positive interactions and behaviors and ignore negative behaviors.

CAT LANGUAGE



INTERESTED



FRIENDLY



ATTENTIVE



RELAXED



TRUSTING



FRIENDLY, RELAXED



CONTENT



CONFLICTED, CAUTIOUS



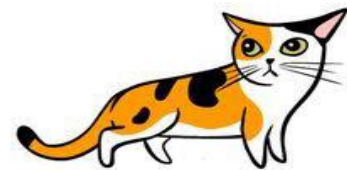
PLAYFUL



EXCITED



"THIS IS MINE"



ANXIOUS



PREDATORY



WORRIED



FRIGHTENED



THREATENED



TERRIFIED



SUPER TERRIFIED



IRRITATED



DISGUSTED

Regardless of the issue, we don't recommend punishment as this is rarely effective in resolving behavior problems. Punishment will not address the cause of the behavior, and in fact it may worsen any behavior that's motivated by fear or anxiety. Punishment may also cause anxiety in pets that aren't currently fearful. Never discipline your foster animal after the fact. People often believe their animal makes this connection because he runs and hides or "looks guilty", but pets display submissive postures like cowering, running away, or hiding when they feel threatened by an angry tone of voice, body posture, or facial expression. Your foster pet doesn't know what he's done wrong; he only knows that you're upset. Punishment after the fact will not only fail to eliminate the undesirable behavior, but may provoke other undesirable behaviors, too.

Medical Concerns

All animals should receive health exams before going into foster care and any known health concerns will be discussed with the foster parent prior to pick-up. However, it is possible for symptoms to develop after the pets are taken home. Because of this, it is very important to keep your foster animals in a separate area, with separate bedding and without contact to your other household animals if there is a medical concern. FCAS is not responsible for treating any other animals in the foster home if something is shared from a foster pet.

It is expected that all veterinary care will be provided by FCAS approved emergency veterinarian under an emergency only. A foster parent may not take a foster pet to any other veterinarian. No medications, prescription or otherwise, are allowed to be given to foster pets unless previously authorized by FCAS veterinarian staff. Failure to follow this rule may result in no longer being a foster parent with FCAS. Any unauthorized veterinary care will not be reimbursed by FCAS.

Common Medical Concerns

Diarrhea

Diarrhea can be caused by a variety of things including a change in diet and stress. Soft stool or diarrhea is to be expected the first couple days after coming to your home. If the stool doesn't improve, it may be indicative of a more serious concern. FCAS staff should be contacted if it persists for more than 72 hours or is accompanied with lethargy, loss of appetite or vomiting.

Vomiting

Vomiting may also be the result of stress or diet change and should be monitored. If the vomiting continues for more than 48 hours or is accompanied with lethargy or loss of appetite, FCAS staff should be contacted.

Fleas

Whenever possible, your foster pet will be treated for fleas before going home with you. Flea treatment should be applied monthly. Contact FCAS for follow up treatments.

Ear Mites

A pet with ear mites will have crusty black debris in their ears. The ears will often be itchy and may have a foul odor. Treatment is simple with medication, though sometimes more than one treatment is required for complete resolution.

Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)

URI's are more common in cats, and is simply a "cat cold." They are generally caused by viruses, but bacterial infections may be involved. Stress can make the cats more susceptible. URI generally appears as sneezing, discharge from the eyes or nose, congestion, coughing, or swollen eyes. Mild cases of URI do not need to be seen by a veterinarian. If the cat has clear nasal discharge and is eating, maintaining weight, and otherwise acting normally, then an appointment may not be needed. Most mild URIs resolve on their own within seven to ten days. FCAS staff should be contacted if the URI has not resolved or if the cat develops lethargy, poor appetite, weight loss, colored nasal discharge, severe congestion, or a fever. Cats must be able to smell their food to stimulate appetite, so keep their nose clear of crusties.

Tips to Encourage Eating

- ♥ Increase the odor – cats generally need to smell what they are eating
 - Warm canned food
 - Add a small amount of tuna or clam juice
 - Add low sodium chick or beef broth (no onions or garlic)
- ♥ Offer single meat baby food (no onions or garlic)
- ♥ Offer different canned foods with a variety of textures and flavors
- ♥ Pet or sit with them – some cats are "social eaters"
- ♥ Keep food fresh

Kennel Cough

Dogs are vaccinated upon arrival to the shelter, but like URI's in cats, stress can cause kennel cough in dogs. Symptoms include a dry, hacking cough and discharge from the nose. Because kennel cough is contagious, if you suspect kennel cough, separate your foster dog from your personal pets immediately. Dogs that are up to date on their kennel cough vaccine will most likely not get sick.

Treatment for kennel cough includes an antibiotic called Doxycycline. Contact FCAS for a prescription. Treatment also includes lots of rest and a break from anything that could stress your foster dog. If you do not see improvement after 3 days, or if the condition worsens, contact FCAS and we will schedule a visit with our DVM.

Minor wounds

If your foster pet develops an irritation or minor skin wound, you can contact the shelter for advice on how to keep the wound clean.

For serious wounds that might need stitches or antibiotics, call FCAS and staff will determine if your foster pet needs an emergency vet visit.

Parasites

Parasites can cause diarrhea, stomach bloating or vomiting. Parasites include tapeworms, round worms, hookworms and mange. Tapeworms will look like pieces of rice coming out of your foster pet's anus or in his stool. Round and hookworms may be vomited, and roundworms look like spaghetti (hookworms are smaller and rarely distinguishable without the aid of a microscope). Mange is an infestation of tiny mites that bite and cause intense scratching, reddened skin and loss of fur. Only rare cases of mange (sarcoptic) are contagious to humans. If you suspect your foster pet has parasites, call FCAS to schedule a vet visit with our DVM. Once diagnosed, parasites are easily medicated and treated.

Parvo

Parvo attacks the intestinal tract, white blood cells and heart muscle. Signs of infection are depression, loss of appetite, vomiting, severe diarrhea, fever and sometimes kennel cough symptoms. The illness is contracted through contact with the infected feces of another dog. This is why you must NOT take your foster puppy out to public places where other dogs have been until he has completed his vaccine series against the disease.

This virus can be deadly. Call FCAS immediately if you believe your foster dog may have this illness.

FIV/FelV

FCAS, in accordance with many local shelters, does not routinely test cats for FIV/FelV. Testing will be conducted at the discretion of the veterinary staff. It will be communicated with the foster family when a cat is known to be positive for either. FIV is generally only transmitted through deep fight wounds and mating. FelV is more easily spread and can include the transmission of saliva through close contact, such as mutual grooming. The virus does not live long in the environment and normal cleaning protocols will eliminate the environmental risk to other cats.

Panleukopenia

Panleukopenia is an illness mostly found in kittens that is very similar to parvo in puppies. Signs of infection include depression, loss of appetite, vomiting, diarrhea and fever. This virus can be deadly and contagious. Call FCAS immediately if you believe your foster cat may have this illness.

Ringworm

Ringworm is uncommon in our animal population. It is a fungal infection and is typically found on the head and legs. The skin will look dry, and the hair will be missing. Ringworm is treatable and typically involves medicated baths and an oral medication. It is highly contagious to other animals and humans and can live in the home for very long periods. Contact FCAS if you suspect that your foster pet has ringworm.

Low Stress Medicating Tips

- 🐾 Hide the pill
 - Cheese
 - Wet food
 - Baby food
 - Liver sausage
 - Pill Pockets
- 🐾 Use your hands
 - Hold the animal's head and gently tilt it back
 - Open its mouth
 - Drop the pill on the back of the tongue
 - Close the mouth and hold it shut while you run your hand on their throat or blow gently on their nose until you feel them swallow.
- 🐾 Use a pill gun
 - This is a tool that will help place the pill in the mouth safely. Ask FCAS for one and instructions on how to use it.

Hospice Care

FCAS has a hospice program for animals that enter the shelter with a terminally ill condition. These animals may have a variety of medical concerns but are still having a good quality of life. FCAS will provide palliative care for these pets and ask that our foster families provide them with a loving and compassionate home.

Hospice pets will need monthly rechecks at FCAS and may occasionally “graduate” from the program and be cleared for adoption. At each of your appointments, staff and veterinary team will assist with creating the best plan for these pets.

It is common for hospice fosters to need subcutaneous fluids and/or medications. The staff is available to show anyone the process. We can also have them come to FCAS to receive fluids as needed.

Monitoring your hospice pet's quality of life is important. Cats and dogs are exceptionally good at hiding pain and discomfort. As their caregivers, we need to look for the subtler signs that they may be ready to go. These signs may include: a loss of appetite, significant weight loss, change in litter box habits, having more bad days than good, difficulty breathing or changes in behavior. Contact FCAS if you are concerned about any of these symptoms. FCAS is skilled at making these decisions and are here to talk with you through the process.

All of fostering, but especially hospice care, is a special process and one that takes immense compassion. Always know that staff are available as well to help you through the harder times of this journey.

Getting Ready for Adoption

Many animals that go into foster are already available for adoption. If not, and you are unsure if your foster pet is ready to be adopted, ask yourself the questions below:

- 🐾 Did your foster pet gain or lose enough weight?
- 🐾 Is your foster pet healthy?
- 🐾 Has the dog recovered fully from an illness?
- 🐾 Is your foster puppy at least 10 weeks old and weaned from its mother?
- 🐾 Is your foster dog or puppy successfully socialized with no major behavioral issues?
- 🐾 Does your foster dog or puppy have good basic manners?

Information that you can provide, like training updates, photos and whether or not your foster pet is friendly towards other animals can help the staff at FCAS find the perfect forever home!

