



Kitten Foster Care Manual

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Foster Care Program Overview

Placement into Foster Care

Why Foster?

When spring comes around, litters of abandoned kittens are constantly being brought to BHS. Some of these litters have mothers and some are orphaned. The best place for young kittens to grow and develop is in the safety of a home environment. They need a human to house them, feed them, socialize them, bring them to regular shelter vet visits, and love them. Once the kittens are 8 weeks old, they are brought back to BHS to get fixed and placed for adoption. It is a critical component of the kitten adoption process and we can't do it without you. We need people to foster kittens, especially in the springtime during "kitten season". No prior experience is necessary. All pet food and litter is provided. Commitments can range from 1 week to 8 weeks in durations. Foster parents have the joy of being able to hand-raise these helpless kittens until they are old enough, and strong enough to be adopted. It is an extremely rewarding experience.

*Note- BHS no longer tests mother cats or kittens for Feline Leukemia (Felv) or Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) unless they are very sick or come from a hoarding situation. This shouldn't be an issue for your own cat because foster kittens should never mingle with the household pets.

Joining Our Foster Team

To become a kitten or cat foster the first step is filling out an online feline foster application that can be found under the foster on the BHS website. Once your application is processed you will receive an email from the foster coordinator to schedule a phone interview. Completion of phone interview and confirmation that all resident pets are up to date on their rabies vaccine are required in order to complete the application process. Once you are approved, you will be emailed a foster manual and added to our cat foster email list. When there are kittens in need of foster an email is sent out to this list and there will be instructions on what to do if you would like to foster the kittens in need.

Food, litter, and toys will be provided by BHS. Bottle babies require Kitten Milk Replacer (formula), which we will also provide. We feed our cats Science Diet food and prefer that you feed this brand of food as well. Once the kittens are 3-4 weeks old, canned and dry Science Diet Kitten food should be offered so the kittens can learn to eat on their own.

Any veterinary appointments outside of the BHS veterinary clinic that were not arranged through the BHS staff are your financial responsibility. We will not reimburse for any medical care received at your own vet.

Bottle Babies need to be seen by the BHS veterinary clinic more often than other foster pets, at least every 2 weeks.

Contact Information and Hours

Baltimore Humane Society
1601 Nicodemus Road
Reisterstown, MD 21136
410-833-8848

www.bmorehumane.org

Shelter Hours: Tuesday- Sunday 12pm-6pm

Clinic Hours: Monday- Friday 8am-4pm

Responsibilities

The ideal kitten foster volunteer will have basic knowledge of animal care and training, as well as the desire to give the babies the time needed for daily care and maintenance. As a foster parent, you will provide your animals with care including food, water, shelter, litter, grooming and trips to get medical treatment when necessary, for kittens this could be every 2 weeks but younger kittens and bottle babies may need to be seen more frequently. Veterinary appointments can be scheduled weekdays between 8am-4pm and take place at the on-site BHS veterinary clinic.

You must be willing to:

- Feed throughout the day- every 2-3 hours for kittens 0-4 weeks of age (Bottle Babies) and every 8 hours for kittens 4-8 weeks of age.
- Socialize, groom, medicate animals if necessary, ensure the animal's safety, and respond to its needs.
- Isolate foster animals from your own companion animals. Newborn kittens are more susceptible to illness.
- Ensure that your companion animals are current on vaccinations and spayed or neutered.
- Observe and report any problems with the animal to the BHS management staff
- Promote your foster animal and actively seek out adoptive homes. Kittens will not be available for adoption until they are at least 8 weeks old and have been spayed/neutered. If someone is interested in adopting a kitten, they MUST fill out an application and they will not be able to adopt the kitten until it is ready for adoption per BHS.
- Comply with the BHS philosophies and policies and act as a BHS representative. Foster homes are considered an extension of BHS and are subject to possible inspection.

Foster animals must stay in the immediate care and residence of the Foster Care Provider. Leaving your foster animal in anyone else's care is prohibited, unless specific arrangements have been made with and approved by a member of the BHS management staff. If you are unable to care for a foster animal for the entire length of the foster agreement, notify us as soon as possible so that alternate arrangements can be made.

Paperwork

Kittens are sent into foster care with a foster contract, foster manual. You will need to bring them with you each time you visit the clinic, when the animals are brought in for surgery and when adoptions are processed. Bottle Babies will need to come in to the BHS Clinic more often, so please be aware of this.

Surgery & Medical Care

You are responsible for bringing your foster animal into the shelter for any necessary medical attention, including spay/neuter surgery, vaccination boosters, or illnesses. All medical issues can be seen, and vaccines administered by appointment at the BHS veterinary clinic. Clinic hours are Monday through Friday, 8am-4pm. You need to bring all paperwork related to your foster to every appointment.

IMPORTANT: Any veterinary appointments outside of the BHS veterinary clinic that were not arranged through the BHS staff are your financial responsibility. We will not reimburse for any medical care received at your own vet.

Spay/Neuter Surgery

BHS requires that all cats and dogs be spayed or neutered prior to adoption. Foster kittens and momma cats should be spayed or neutered while in foster care. BHS foster cats are also microchipped at time of surgery. Kittens can be altered once they reach 2 pounds, which is typically when they are between 8 and 11 weeks old. Mom cats can be spayed once their kittens are weaned. All cats and kittens must be healthy (no sneezing, no runny eyes!) before going in for surgery. BHS may request that the kittens stay at BHS after surgery to be placed on the adoption floor; however you may also be asked to continue to foster.

Scheduling

To schedule spay or neuter surgeries, please call our Spay/Neuter clinic at 410-833-4480. Please be very clear that you are a BHS Foster Volunteer when you make the appointment. Normally, we have you drop the kittens off between 9am-3pm on a scheduled day and surgery will be performed the following day. The kittens will remain with us after surgery and placed for adoption the day after surgery.

Post-Surgery Care

Most cats and kittens will be at BHS during this period but occasionally, we may send a cat or kitten back into foster with you. Adult female cats take about 10 days to fully recover. Kittens take 3 to 5 days to recover, unless problems arise.

Following surgery, foster cats should be kept quiet, with limited activity and limited use of stairs (climbing stairs can pull on stitches).

Some animals may have a decreased appetite for 1-2 days following surgery. Start slowly with a small amount of food. If the cat vomits, take away the food and water until the next morning.

Incision Site

- Keep incision dry for 2 weeks (no bathing, swimming, etc.)
- Check the incision daily.
- Watch for excessive swelling, blood, pus, reddening, painfulness, or anything else unusual.
- Do not allow the animal to lick or chew at the incision. This may lead to infection or other serious complication.
- If your cat is licking excessively at the stitches, you may consult the BHS Clinic about receiving an e-collar to keep your cat from licking.
- Stitches should dissolve within approximately two weeks.

Non-Emergency Medical Care

Foster animals are seen at the BHS veterinary clinic by appointment. Foster animals need to come back approximately every two-three weeks for booster shots. If you have a momma cat and litter, bring the whole crew to every foster vet appointment. If your animal becomes ill, you must call the veterinary clinic and arrange to be seen. Please bring in all of the kittens (and mom if you have her) for any sick visits, even if only 1 kitten is actually sick. Our vets cannot dispense medication to an animal that isn't here.

Emergency Medical Care

If your animal needs medical treatment beyond the scope of what is available at BHS you will still need to be seen by the BHS vet for a referral to another veterinary hospital. **If you have an emergency after BHS hours, please contact Dr. Mary Zink on her cell phone (443-823-0054) for medical recommendations. She is able to receive texts in addition to phone calls.**

Adoption

Promotion

Kittens 8 wks and under should not be promoted on social media. Once they reach 8 weeks and are spayed/neutered, they become available for adoption and will be put on our website and you can promote them on social media.

Adoption Process

All interested adopters must be directed to contact the BHS adoption center at 410-833-8848 ext. 2. They will be required to fill out an adoption application and speak with an adoption counselor. The adoption fee for kittens under 6 months is \$110 and each kitten is spayed/neutered, up to date on age appropriate vaccines, microchipped with free registration and one month free pet insurance. If a bonded pair of kittens is adopted, the fee for one of the kittens is waived. If you would like to adopt your foster please let the staff know as soon as possible. Your kitten will still need to come back to the shelter to be spayed/neutered before the adoption can be finalized. The adoption fee is waived if you adopt one of your fosters.

Supplies we provide to get you Started

Box or carrier

You may want to use the carrier in which you took the litter home. It will provide a familiar-smelling, dark, quiet home for your foster kitties. However, a bigger box may be desirable, as it will allow you to see in, as well as provide plenty of room for the mother and the new, growing litter of kittens.

Small litter box with low sides

Cat litter

Non-clumping litter only.. **The clumping litter may be dangerous if ingested by a kitten.**

Food

Dry kitten food and canned kitten food (**Science Diet brand**) If they won't eat this brand, you can try some other brands of kitten food to see what they like best. For Bottle Babies, we provide powdered **Kitten Milk Replacer (KMR)**.

Heat Source

A microwaveable heating disc with a cover should be used for kittens 2 weeks and under unless the nursery is at least 85°. **BE SURE THAT THE KITTENS HAVE ROOM TO MOVE AWAY FROM THE HEAT** (leave room for mom if she is with them). For instance, if you are using a heating pad, place it under several towels, and make sure that it covers only half of the floor area of their box. The heating pad should be on "low" or "medium" to prevent overheating the kittens. Make sure to cover any electrical cords as well, so that the kittens are not tempted to play and bite on them.

Alternatively hot water bottles, or rice bags can be used as heat sources. These should also be covered by towels, and should be changed regularly to ensure that they stay warm for the kittens to snuggle up against.

Toys

Plastic, disinfectable toys are good to reuse for new litters. Kittens can also amuse themselves with empty toilet paper rolls. Empty 12-pack cardboard soda boxes are good for an inventive number of games. Clean tennis balls, old stuffed socks, caps from soda bottles and paper bags are marvelous toys as well. **Young kittens do not respond to catnip**, but mom will like it. Kittens will also "play" with anything they can find. Drapes, lamp shades and crystal ornaments are as much fun as the toys listed above. Be sure to "kitten-proof" your home. As they grow, their climbing abilities will develop, so anything irreplaceable should be kept out of reach!

Bottles & Nipples (Miracle Nipple is best)

Food bowls (at least 3)

Preferably use stainless steel or ceramic/porcelain bowls, not plastic because it's too porous and doesn't disinfect well.

One bowl for water, one for the free choice dry cat food, and the other for canned food. The larger the litter of kittens, the larger the plate should be so that no one gets crowded out. Paper plates work well for canned food to help ease clean up. The water bowl should be broad based, heavier, and difficult to tip.

Extra Supplies Suggested:

Newspapers or Towels

Keep several layers in the bottom of the box, and they will come in handy when the kittens start to roam around the room and into their litter box.

Clean towels and blankets

Make sure the towels and blankets provided to the kittens are free of holes and strings.

Hand Sanitizer

Kleenex to wipe bottoms

Spray Disinfectant/cleaner

Paper Towels

Big litter box for mother cat

Disposable Scratching pads

Food Scale

A food or postal scale will be very helpful in monitoring small kittens' growth, which averages 4 ounces a week.

Care of the pregnant queen

If you are fostering a pregnant queen during her final week of pregnancy, it is important to remember she may not have a big appetite because the kittens are crowding her internal organs. Feed her several small meals daily, rather than one or two larger meals. Leave dry kitten food and water out at all times. It is virtually impossible to overfeed a nursing or pregnant queen. Food requirements increase up to three times the normal amount.

Confine the queen to a quiet room. Prepare a kitting box. Place it in a dry, warm, relatively dark and out-of-the-way place, and put Mom in it. If she doesn't want to stay in it, don't insist, but you can encourage her by petting her and giving her little food treats. If your nursery room is not that warm, you can keep the box warmer by wrapping a heating pad in a towel, setting it on "low," and placing it under HALF of the box so that the mother and kittens can remove themselves from the heat source if they choose. One word of warning: you might consider wrapping duct tape or a cord protector around the cord, as the kittens tend to chew on it! Until the mother cat delivers, fill her litter box with shredded newspaper instead of cat litter. Many cats will deliver their kittens in the litter box. Newspaper provides a much cleaner environment for the cat and kittens than litter. Mom cannot clean the moist litter granules, which make a damp nest for the newborns. After the kittens are born, you can switch to your normal non-clumping litter.

The birth of kittens

The majority of cats give birth with no problem or need for outside help. Before delivery, the queen may become irritable and restless. She will search for a place to have her kittens. Put her in the designated kitting box. She may choose not to have them there, so it helps to keep the box in a room with as few nooks and hiding places as possible. If she has her kittens outside of the kitting box, let her. When she is completely done with the delivery, move them all into the box. If the cat has had her kittens outside the box, don't worry about the "mess" - when she is finished she will

normally clean up and leave very little evidence of the birth.

Some cats may want you to stay with them, and will try to follow you if you leave. You will probably have to spend some time with this kind of cat soothing her. Often after the birth of the first couple of kittens, she will be very busy and not so dependent on your presence. Other queens will try to get away from you and hide. Give her the space she needs, but keep checking in on her regularly. It is quite possible that you will miss the birth process entirely. You might wake up one morning or come home from work to find the new family born, dry, and nursing.

General care of kittens

Young kittens should be kept in an enclosed room, in a large box or cat carrier, lined with a towel for easy cleaning. It is very important to keep the kittens warm, and a heating pad is ideal for this. The heating pad should be placed under HALF of the towel (so they can move away from the heat if they need to) and set on "low." The more kittens in your litter, the better able they will be to keep warm by sleeping together in a heap. Small litters and singletons need more help keeping warm. Keep kittens away from heaters or cold drafts.

Stimulation

If the foster kittens are under 4 weeks old, you may have to provide some additional "training!" By nature, mom cats lick the "back end" of their babies to stimulate the bowels and bladder on a regular basis. If you are the kittens' new "mom" guess who gets this duty? After each feeding, gently rub the kitten on its low abdomen, as well as the genitals and rectum, with a cotton pad, tissues, or washcloth moistened with warm water. Make sure you rub only enough to get them to eliminate; over-stimulation will irritate the area. Keep an eye out for chafing and lingering dirt. Kittens should (and almost always will) urinate during each stimulation. They should defecate at least once a day. One trick is to slowly count to 60 while you're stimulating a kitten; at that point, you'll know if they're done or if something's on its way out! Normal kitten urine is pale yellow. If it's dark yellow, your kitten may not be getting enough hydration/formula. Normal kitten poop is mustard or brown colored, firm, and formed in tiny little logs, but still squishy, especially as a newborn. Green or yellow watery stool may mean that you're over feeding a kitten. When kittens get to be about 3-4 weeks old, they are usually ready to be litter box trained and you'll be liberated from stimulation duty!

Litter Box Training

When a kitten is about 4 weeks old, it will begin to play in, explore and dig in loose, soft materials, such as dirt or litter. Soon, this investigative digging results in the kitten's eliminating in these materials. Kittens DO NOT have to be taught by either their mother or their human guardians to relieve themselves in soft, loose materials or to dig and bury their waste. This behavior is called "innate" or "instinctive" because the kitten is born knowing how to do it. However, where a cat eliminates can be affected by its experiences. Litter boxes that do not provide an acceptable place to eliminate from the cat's point of view, may cause a cat to relieve itself elsewhere. It is important to provide a litter box that meets the kitten or cat's needs so that it will like the box and use it consistently.

Keeping kittens clean. A mother works hard to keep her kittens clean, grooming them thoroughly to remove any sticky messes they may get into, such as kitten food or feces. Keeping kittens clean in the absence of their mother can be a messy business, but it is extremely important.

A flea comb will get rid of dried feces in the fur. You can also stroke a kitten with a toothbrush or a warm, damp cloth, using short strokes to mimic a mother's tongue. Be sure to dry him well so he can't chill. Sometimes cat litter and dried feces can become caked on the underside of the tail or between the kitten's toes. This may be softened and removed by dipping the kitten's back end into a basin of warm water. Many 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!

Maintaining healthy growth of kittens

Commercially available kitten formula (KMR) should be given at the kitten's body temperature, about 100 degrees. Once the can is opened or the powder reconstituted, unused formula should be kept refrigerated and discarded after 24 hours. **NEVER give a kitten cow's milk (or anything else besides the specified formula). KMR powder is reconstituted by mixing 1 part KMR to 2 parts water. For the first couple of feedings, you may increase the amount of water slightly to dilute the formula and reduce digestive upset. This also helps if kittens are constipated.**

It is best to feed the kittens one-by-one, and on a counter-top - this allows them to feed with all four feet on the counter, and their heads level, much as they would if they were nursing from their mom. Some kittens prefer to nurse standing on their hind legs while holding the bottle. They will require a little support from you in this position. Gently open a kitten's mouth with one finger and place the tip of the nipple on his tongue. If he won't eat, try stroking him. Pull lightly on the bottle to encourage vigorous sucking. Be sure to tilt the bottle up slightly to prevent the kitten from inhaling too much air. Do not force the kitten to nurse, or allow him to nurse too fast. Avoid feeding a kitten while he is cradled on his back - if the fluid goes down the wrong way, it may end up in his lungs. **If the kitten is too COLD, they won't eat.** You must first get the kitten's temperature up to normal before it will be able to eat.

After each feeding, the kitten should be burped. Hold him against your shoulder and gently massage his back or pat it lightly.

Overfeeding is as dangerous as underfeeding kittens! Keep an eye on your kittens at feeding time and monitor how much each is eating. If you see signs of diarrhea, separate them until you find out which one is sick. Your kittens will generally regulate their own food intake. If they need more food, they may whine or suck on their litter mates. A good indication that they are getting enough to eat is the size of their bellies - they should be filled out

after a meal, but not bloated. The next section of this protocol discusses amounts of food required at various stages of kitten hood.

Socializing Kittens

A great amount of time and effort is required to properly socialize kittens between the ages of 4 to 12 weeks. Daily socialization sessions are important in shaping the kitten's future personality and emotional growth.

Combine simple play with restraint exercises. When playing, never use your hands as the toy or wrestle the kitten with your hands. An actual toy or wand should be used to play with kittens so that they don't learn that it's okay to attack hands. Familiarizes a kitten with having its paws touched (front and back), mouth opened and ears touched. Combining this with regular grooming sessions and body massages help prevents skin sensitivity or aversion to touch. Acquaint kittens to different sights, sounds and textures.

It is VITAL to include petting, talking and playing with foster kittens and cats in order for them to build good "people skills". Well-socialized mothers are more likely to have well-socialized kittens. The kittens "feed" off the mother's calm or fearful attitude toward people.

Kittens separated from their littermates too soon often do not develop appropriate social skills. These can include but are not limited to:

- Learning how to send and receive signals to other cats
- What an inhibited bite is
- How far to go in play wrestling with littermates

Expectations and care required at each stage of kitten hood

WEIGHT CHART
AGE WEIGHT
At Birth: 3.0 - 3.7 oz (90 - 110 grams)
Three - Four Weeks: 11.7 - 15 oz (350 - 450 grams)
Eight Weeks: 1.7 - 2.0 lbs. (800 - 900 grams)
Kittens should gain 7 - 10 percent of their birth weight each day (10 - 15 grams).
A kitten must weigh 2 pounds and be 8 weeks old before it is adoptable.

Up to 1 Week of age

Feeding: Bottle feed $\frac{1}{2}$ -1 teaspoon (3-5 cc) of liquid formula every 2 - 3 hours. If the queen is with the kittens, they should nurse vigorously and compete for nipples. Newborns can nurse up to 45 minutes at a time. Be sure to watch kittens nursing at least once a day, if mom cat will permit it. Check that everyone is nursing and that there isn't too much jockeying for position. A great deal of activity and crying could indicate a problem with milk flow, quality or availability. When mom cat reenters the box, there should be some fussing for only a few minutes before everyone has settled down to serious nursing.

Environment: The temperature of the nest box should be nice and warm: 85-90 degrees. Chilling is the number one danger to newborn kittens.

Behavior & Training : At one week of age, the kittens should weigh 4 oz., and should be handled minimally. Kittens will sleep 90% of the time and eat the other 10%

1-2 Weeks of age

Feeding: Bottle feed formula per manufacturer's instruction every 2 - 3 hours until kittens are full but not bloated- usually kittens will consume at least 1/2 tablespoon (7 cc) of formula per feeding.

Environment: Floor temperature of the nest box should be nice and warm: 80-85 degrees.

Behavior & Training : Kittens at 2 weeks of age will weigh about 7 ounces. Ear canals open between 5 and 8 days. Eyes will open between 8 and 14 days. They open gradually, usually starting to open from the nose outward. Short-haired cats' eyes will usually open earlier than those of Persian ancestry. All kittens are born with blue eyes, and initially no pupils can be distinguished from the irises - the eyes will appear solid dark blue.

Healthy kittens will be round and warm, with pink skin. If you pinch them gently, their skin should spring back. When you pick a kitten up, it should wiggle energetically and when you put it down near the mom it should crawl back to her. Healthy kittens seldom cry.

To determine the sex of the kittens, hold a kitten tummy-up in your hand. In females, the vulva is a vertical slit above the anus; they are very close together. In males, the penile opening is above the anus, but they are separated by a raised scrotal sac and thus seem far apart. It is easiest to see the differences between the sexes if you examine all the kittens and then find two who don't have matching equipment. Don't worry if it is still unclear; by the time the kittens are ready for permanent homes, their sex will be obvious.

2-3 Weeks of age

Feeding: Bottle feed formula per manufacturer's instruction every **2 - 3 hours** until kittens are full but not bloated- usually kittens will consume **about 1 tablespoon (15cc)** of liquid formula per feeding.

Environment: Floor temperature of the nest box should be nice and warm: 75-80 degrees.

Behavior & Training : If there is a queen, she will begin to spend larger periods of time out of the nest, though she will not go far from it.

Kittens will weigh about 10 ounces. Their ears will become erect. Kittens begin to crawl around day 18. Kittens can stand by day 21. Kittens will begin to play with each other, biting ears, tails and paws even before their teeth have come in. Their milk teeth are cut during this period. Kittens learn to sit and touch objects with their paws.

Kittens begin their socialization phase - they will be strongly influenced by the behavior of their mother for the next six weeks. To further socialize kittens, increase the amount of handling, and get them accustomed to human contact. It is important not to expose them to anything frightening; children may seem intimidating and should be supervised closely while visiting to ensure gentle handling.

3-4 Weeks of age

Feeding: Bottle feed formula per manufacturer's instruction every **4 - 6 hours** until kittens are full but not bloated- usually kittens will consume **about 1 and 1/2 tablespoon (22 cc)** of liquid formula per feeding. **At this stage kittens may start lapping from a bowl.**

Environment: Floor temperature of the nest box should be 70-75 degrees from this point onward.

Behavior & Training: Kittens will weigh about 13 ounces. Adult eye color will begin to appear, but may not reach final shade for another 9 to 12 weeks. Kittens begin to see well and their eyes begin to look and function like adult cats' eyes. Kittens will start cleaning themselves, though their mother will continue to do most of the serious cleaning.

4-5 Weeks of age

Feeding: **2 tablespoons (30cc)** of liquid formula every **6 hours**. They can usually drink and eat from a saucer by 4 weeks. **Weaning should be done gradually.** Introduce them to solid food by offering warmed canned food, mixed with a little water or liquid formula into a gruel, in a shallow saucer. The gruel should be applesauce consistency. You can begin by placing one kitten by the plate of **canned food gruel**, and hoping for the best - if she starts eating, great! Her littermates will probably copy her and do the same. But without mom around to show them, many kittens do not have a clue about feeding time. The kittens will walk in it, slide in it, and track it all over the place. Sometimes one will begin lapping right away, and in its anxiety to consume as much as it can, it will often bite the edge of the plate. Some will prefer to lick the gruel from a spoon. Some will start licking the spoon after they sniff it, then slowly lower the spoon to the plate and hold it to the food. The kittens need to learn to eat with their heads bent down. Sometimes it takes two or three meals before they catch on. If they do not seem interested enough to even sniff the spoon, try gently opening the kittens' mouth and rubbing a little of the food on their teeth. Hopefully then they will start licking the spoon. If they're still not getting the idea, you can take a syringe (without a needle) and squirt a small amount of gruel directly into the back of their mouths.

If there is a queen present, she will usually begin weaning by discouraging her kittens from nursing; however, some cats (particularly those with small litters) will allow nursing until the kittens are old enough for permanent homes. Some nursing activity is the feline equivalent of thumb-sucking, that is, for comfort only. Even if kittens appear to be nursing, they may not be getting all the nutrition they need from mom. Make sure they are eating food and gaining weight.

Be sure that the kittens have access to fresh water in a low, stable bowl.

Behavior & Training: Begin litter training at four weeks. Use a low box with one inch of non-clumping litter or shredded newspaper. Do not expose the kittens to the clumping variety of litter, as it is harmful if ingested. After each feeding, place the kitten in the box. He may not remember to do this every time, or may forget where to find the litter box, but he will learn quickly. Be sure to give the kittens lots of praise when they first start using their boxes. Most will use it from the start, but like other babies, might make an occasional mistake. It is a good idea to confine the kittens to a relatively small space, because the larger the area the kittens have to play in, the more likely they will forget where the litter box is. Keep the litter box clean and away from their food.

5-6 Weeks of age

Feeding: Feed gruel 4 times a day. Thicken gruel gradually. Introduce dry food mixed with a little water. If you are fostering a litter with their mother, continue weaning. Some kittens will not like canned food. For reluctant eaters, try mixing any meat-flavored human baby food with a little water. The meat flavor is often more appealing to the picky eaters. Be sure the brand you get **does not contain onion powder** as this ingredient can be hazardous to kittens.

Behavior & Training: At about five weeks, kittens can start to roam around the room, under supervision. They will weigh 1 pound and the testicles of male kittens will become visible. The strongest, most curious kitten will figure out how to get out of the nest. The others will quickly follow.

Play with your kittens daily! It is a good idea to wear long sleeves and pants, as they can play roughly and their claws are sharp. If you sit on the floor they will play "King of the Mountain," using your knees and shoulders as vantage points. This game is lots of fun and good exercise for them. Some kittens may be fearful at first; do not force yourself upon them. You can get them used to your presence by sitting in the middle of the room making phone calls; this way they hear your voice but do not feel threatened. Make them an important part of your household activities; accustom them to the sounds of the TV, vacuum cleaner and other household sounds.

6-7 Weeks of age

Feeding: Should be eating **canned and dry food well**. Feed the kittens **at least three meals daily**. If one kitten appears food-possessive, use a second dish and leave plenty of food out so that everyone is eating. Bear in mind that a kitten at this age has a stomach roughly the size of an acorn, so, although they may not eat much at a single sitting, they like to eat at frequent intervals throughout the day.

Behavior & Training: By this time, you have "mini-cats." They will wash themselves, use scratching posts, play games with each other, their toys, and you, and many will come when you call them. Be sure to reintroduce them to their litter box after meals, during play sessions, and after naps. These are the usual times that kittens need to use the litter box.

7-8 Weeks of age

Feeding: Offer **wet food 3 - 4 times a day** (each kitten will be eating a little over one can of food per day). Leave down a **bowl of dry kibble** and water for them to eat and drink at will. If you have a litter with a mom cat, she should only be allowing brief nursing sessions, if any. **DO NOT** feed the kittens table scraps.

8+ Weeks of age

Feeding: Offer **wet food 2-3 times a day**. Leave down a **bowl of dry kibble** and water for them to eat and drink at will.

Behavior & Training: By the end of the 8th week, kittens should weigh 2 pounds each. If all the kittens weigh two pounds, take a deep breath, and prepare yourself to find them homes or return them to the facility where they came from. They are also old enough for early spay or neuter.

Keeping kittens healthy & recognizing common problems

A healthy kitten has bright eyes, a sleek coat, and a plump belly. Younger kittens are content to sleep between feedings. As they approach 8 weeks they begin to spend more time playing. Normal body temperature for a kitten is 100 - 102.5. Unfortunately, kittens do become ill and sometimes die while being fostered, so it is important to take steps to prevent disease and treat it appropriately as soon as it appears.

A note about treating your kitten: In general, if you need to treat a kitten, try to medicate him in an impersonal way. If you hold the kitten in your lap to medicate him, he will associate being picked up with being medicated, and think the worst every time you go to cuddle him. It is better to put the kitten up on a countertop, maybe wrapping him in a towel to administer medication.

Recognizing illness & when to call a veterinarian

If you have a sick kitten, you should always call BHS's vet clinic to discuss the problem with the vet tech or the veterinarian. They may advise you to come in or provide advice over the phone.

One of the first steps you can take to evaluate your kitten's health is to take his temperature. To take the temperature of your kitten, you will need a regular human thermometer and some KY Jelly. Don't forget to shake down the mercury in the thermometer first. The wipe KY on the thermometer and insert just the tip into the kitten's anus. Hold it there for at least a minute and then read. If the kitten's temperature is over 103 or under 99, it is important to call the veterinarian.

If a foster kitten should die, you should keep the body cool but not frozen and transport it to the facility where it came from so that a full autopsy can be performed.

WARNING! Do not use any flea control products on your foster kittens unless directed to do so by BHS staff. Kittens can be easily burned or poisoned by even a small amount of these products. Never use flea collars on any cats or kittens.

Safety and Incidents

- Don't put yourself in a compromising situation; Mother Cats can be very protective of their babies
- Practice safe animal handling and disease control.
- Report aggressive behavior or a bite that breaks the skin.

Checklist for Dealing with a Bite Incident

- Clean and flush the wound immediately with soap and water.
- Report the incident to the Foster Coordinator. They will need to know which cat was involved and the circumstances of the bite.
- See your doctor. Receive tetanus prophylaxis and antibacterial treatment when required. It is not advised to have sutures or wound closure unless unavoidable. Receive rabies immune globulin and/or vaccine if needed.
- Maryland State law requires any cat or cat that bites and breaks the skin to be placed on a 10-day quarantine for observation. Please discuss with BHS Staff how to proceed with quarantine.

When a Bite is Not Reported

- It creates a hazard for others handling that animal. An animal that has bitten once is usually less inhibited in biting a second time.
- If the bite is never reported, we might release a rabid animal into an otherwise healthy population.
- If the animal is rabid, it could mean the death of the bitten individual and post-exposure treatment for those who have had close contact with the victim. This can include parents, spouse, children, neighbors, and pets.

Fostering Under-Socialized (Semi-Feral) Kittens

Under-socialized, neglected, and frightened kittens may be the most challenging to foster. They require specialized care in order to qualify for adoption. Many arrive never having lived indoors among people, with minimal human contact during their critical imprinting stage. These kittens may have never been inside a house, may not be litter trained, and may have never before experienced kindness from a human. They will require a great deal of attention, patience and time from their foster family.

Under-socialized kittens must be closely monitored to reduce the chance of escape or destructive behavior. They frequently require fostering for at least a month while they acquire the social skills that will make them treasured lifelong companions for a lucky family. Feral kittens over four months of age are usually not sent to foster homes. After this age, the possibility for successful socialization is much lower.

Facilities needed

An ideal place is an easy to clean area that is separated from your own companion animals, yet not isolated from normal activities. Under-socialized kittens are housed best in smaller rooms with just a few hiding places (bathrooms are ideal). The kitten can be found more easily this way.

Suggested supplies

Canned food can be used as a treat or for enticement, and should be given when you are able to spend time with the kitten, if possible. Do not withhold food, but make it enticing enough for the kitten to come out of hiding when a person is in the room.

Daily duties

- Handle the kitten: talking, stroking, brushing, lifting paws, checking ears, mouth, eyes
- Reading aloud in the room where the kitten is staying can also be helpful. During this time, you may have treats, or an enticing toy to lure the kitten out of hiding. While you read, act like you are not aware the kitten is there, even when it comes out to see you
- Introduce the cat to a litter box
- Socialize the kitten, when ready, to other people

Behavioral Issues

There is no such thing as a “bad” kitten. It is useless to try to punish a kitten. Their little minds do not grasp deductive reasoning. Try distracting the kitten with something else until he forgets what he was doing. If the kitten is doing something that you do not like or want (like scratching the furniture or not using the litter box) then firmly tell him “no” and then redirect the kitten to where you want him to act out the behavior (such as a scratching post or the litter box). A small squirt from a water filled spray bottle or rattling a noisy can (such as a soda can filled with coins) can also teach the kitten to stop an undesired behavior. Cats are very smart and will learn the desired behavior quickly. Remember that kittens are fragile, so always be gentle with your touch and your voice.

Medical Resources

Disease Management in Foster Homes

Homeless animals enter into care and placement programs from many sources, often without prior preventive health care. Some animals are already sick, injured, stressed, have parasites, or are otherwise vulnerable to developing disease on arrival. Most have potential to either acquire or transmit infectious disease.

Without a systematic approach to infection control that focuses on creating healthy animals, those who care for homeless animals in their home environments risk creating situations that can ultimately lead to decreased welfare for foster animals. Strong environmental, medical, and behavioral health care practices are the foundation of a program placing ever-increasing numbers of healthy, friendly animals into the community.

Guiding Principles

1. Homeless animals always present a risk for transmission and/or development of infectious disease.
2. Basic infection control relies on understanding
 - Disease transmission
 - Application of routine practices for preventing disease transmission as a standard of care
 - Preventive health-care practices that help animals resist disease

Modes of Disease Transmission

Direct Contact – involves direct body surface to body surface — from one animal to another or from an animal to a human.

Indirect Contact or Fomite – contact between susceptible animal and a contaminated inanimate object (a fomite), such as equipment, clothing, or surfaces. Often the result of poorly washed hands.

Droplet – small infectious droplets that do not remain suspended in the air but travel a short distance through the air and deposit on host’s mucosal surfaces. Droplets can also land in the environment and lead to indirect contact transmission.

Airborne –infectious residue from dried droplets or dust remains suspended and able to travel distances through the air. This residue is infectious for long periods of time.

Vector – disease transmission occurs through another animal capable of transmitting disease host, such as a rodent, fly, mosquito, or tick.

Routine Practices in the Home Environment

Routine practices to control disease transmission include:

- Setting up an isolation area for the foster animals
- Practice good hand hygiene before and after handling animals or objects in the isolation area
- Cleaning and disinfecting items in the isolation area using the appropriate agents

Recommendations for Setting Up an Isolation Area

- Isolated from other pets in home
- Surfaces are easy to disinfect (vinyl or tile floor — no carpet)
- Pet-proof
- Stocked with supplies that are dedicated to the area and easy to sanitize
- Area has a good, ideally separate source of ventilation
- Low human traffic

Hand Hygiene

Wash hands before and after handling animals or items in the animals’ environment.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers

- Recommended when hands are not visibly soiled
- Provide for a rapid kill of most transient microorganisms
- Pay particular attention to finger tips, between fingers, backs of hands and base of the thumbs. These are the most commonly missed areas.

Cleaning and Disinfecting Agents

Soaps and detergents are not the same as disinfectants. It’s important to understand how these two groups of products work and to use them appropriately:

- **Soaps and detergents** are cleaning agents that work by suspending dirt and grease and breaking up organic matter. Soaps do not necessarily kill germs. Dish and laundry soaps are common examples of detergents.
- **Disinfectants** are chemical solutions that kill germs. The particular germs killed depend on the ingredients in the disinfectant. While some disinfectants serve a dual purpose and have some cleansing properties, many disinfectants do not effectively remove dirt and

grease. Bleach is an excellent disinfectant. The recommended dilution of standard non-color safe 5.25% household bleach for most agents is 1 part bleach to 32 parts water (1/2 cup bleach to 1 gallon water). Bleach needs to be mixed fresh daily. The recommended contact time is 10 minutes.

Cleaning and Disinfecting Objects and Surfaces in the Isolation Area

Surface/Object	Suggested Procedure	Special Steps
High contact surfaces	Daily cleaning with a detergent Weekly disinfection	
Visibly soiled objects/surfaces	Cleaning with a detergent Disinfection	
Litter boxes and food bowls	Cleaning daily Disinfection weekly	Sanitize food bowls separately from litter boxes
All regular surfaces	Weekly cleaning and disinfection	Increase frequency to daily or more often when infectious disease is present
When new animals are introduced (between animals)	Thorough cleaning and disinfection between animal residents	
Laundry	Remove organic material before laundering Use soap and bleach, machine or sunlight to dry	

Homeless animals entering home-based care programs are a population that are at high risk for developing infectious disease for a variety of unpreventable reasons. Many animals that appear healthy may actually be incubating disease that can soon affect other animals and people in the home. Proper forethought must be given to a home infection control plan to prevent the very homes who are striving to rehabilitate animals in need from becoming unhealthy havens themselves.

Medical Problems

Illness and Disease

Several illnesses are commonly seen in a shelter environment. Diseases have incubation periods before symptoms appear. Your foster animal may have been infected with a disease before going out into foster care, but not show symptoms until after you have brought it home. Be aware of the animal's general well-being as you feed and play with your foster animals. If you have any health-related concerns, please contact the BHS veterinary clinic or Foster Coordinator as soon as you notice a problem. Do NOT wait until a crisis occurs.

If symptoms occur once the animal is in your care, please contact the veterinary clinic immediately so that your animal can be seen and placed on medication if needed. Symptoms should lessen within a few days of starting medication. If the symptoms persist, do not hesitate to contact the clinic and arrange to be seen again. It is extremely important to administer all medications and finish the entire prescription.

The veterinary staff will want to know details, such as the color or consistency of feces, if eating or playing habits have changed, or if their energy level has changed. Clinic may also need to know if it is vomiting, has diarrhea, is active or listless, and whether or not it is eating and drinking. Be ready to state when a problem began, how often it occurs and whether the condition tends to arise at specific times, (e.g., mealtime, bedtime, after exercise).

Symptoms of Health Problems

It is important that foster volunteers be able to interpret changes in an animal's appearance, bodily functions and behavior in order to detect signs of illness. The following are some symptoms that require immediate attention:

- Labored breathing, excessive panting or incessant coughing
- Vomiting of blood or bile
- Severe diarrhea, especially when accompanied by vomiting
- Pronounced limping or paralysis
- Unconsciousness, seizures, uneven pupil dilation or fainting

Symptoms of illness can include the following:

Eyes

- Yellow or green discharge
- Uneven pupil dilation—seek immediate attention
- Swollen conjunctiva, including 3rd eyelid
- White film or cloudiness over eye
- Yellowing on white part of eyes
- Red or blinking eyes—eye irritation, conjunctivitis, injury

Ears

- Dark, flaky debris or dark, waxy discharge with yeasty smell
- Yeasty smell with no discharge
- Painful when rubbed or cleaned
- Frequent scratching at ear

Nose

- Yellow or green discharge
- Scabs or skin loss
- Bleeding from nose
- Excessive sneezing

Mouth

- Loss of appetite—in adults, for more than a few days; in kittens, for more than one day.
- Increased appetite for over a week
- Vomiting
- Coughing and/or gagging accompanied by phlegm. Coughing after pressure is placed on trachea by collar.
- Trouble eating or chewing, painful gums or teeth
- Ulcers or lacerations on gums or lips
- Excessive salivation, especially a change in the amount of salivation
- Altered respiration (labored, shallow or “crackling”)
- Panting, with red skin and/or gums
- Labored breathing with pale or bluish gums—call veterinary clinic immediately

Skin

- Redness
- Lacerations
- Lumps
- Hair loss
- Scabs
- Frequent scratching
- Dry coat: If coat is dry and lackluster, it can be due to illness or improper diet.

Anal/Genital Area

- Diarrhea: Bloody, liquid diarrhea, seek immediate attention.
- No bowel movement for more than 48 hours
- No urination for more than 24 hours
- Discoloration/changes in feces
- Hematuria (blood in urine)

Gait

- Sudden lameness/limping that doesn't improve with rest within 24 hours
- Animal experiences pain upon walking or handling.

Behavior

- Lethargic, weakness
- Restlessness
- Poor appetite
- Increased appetite with weight loss
- Excessive drinking
- Increased urination or accidents in the house
- Straining to urinate or defecate
- Frequent scratching at ears or skin
- Crying, whining, growling
- Head-shaking
- Seizure or convulsions, seek immediate attention
- Decreased activity, limpness, and crying for more than 15 minutes can be signs of hypothermia or hypoglycemia.

Temperature

- Rectal temperature below 99.5°F or higher than 102.5°F at rest.
- Contact the Veterinary Clinic immediately if rectal temperature is 104°F or higher

How to take a temperature:

Normal temperature is from 100° to 102.5°F. You will need a rectal thermometer to take a cat's temperature. Digital thermometers are best. Use petroleum jelly to lubricate the end of the thermometer. If using a digital thermometer, place the thermometer gently into the animal's rectum, and leave it there until the digital model beeps. Leave a glass thermometer inside the rectum for about 1 minute. Caution: The rectum of a young kitten can be damaged if the thermometer is inserted too far.

Common Health Problems in Shelter/Foster Cats and Kittens

Diarrhea

A fairly common ailment among kittens. Diarrhea in kittens is often caused by parasites, viruses, bacteria, food changes, or stress. If the diarrhea is mild and the kitten is otherwise alert and playful, try giving it less food but more often. If it is an older kitten, you may want to switch it to dry food and/or cooked shredded chicken until the stool improves. Kittens are more severely affected by diarrhea than cats because they can become dehydrated quickly. They should be closely observed as diarrhea left unchecked can kill a kitten very quickly. Check for recurrent bouts of diarrhea, blood or mucus in the feces, foreign material in the feces and frequency of defecation. If the diarrhea is severe, lasts more than 3 or 4 feedings, or contains blood or obvious parasites, you should bring the kitten to BHS immediately for an exam.

Poor Appetite

Poor appetite is an early signal of a potentially serious problem. If your foster animal has not eaten in 24 hours contact the BHS Veterinary Clinic

Vomiting

Vomiting may be caused by a kitten that is eating too quickly, is being overfed, or could also be a sign of poisoning. If the kitten vomits 2-3 times in a row, contact the BHS Veterinary Clinic

Stress

Stress is not uncommon for shelter kittens, especially if they have been separated from their mom and/or siblings. Their changing environments add to this stress. A manual alarm clock might be helpful in reducing the stress level as the ticking mimics the mother's heartbeat. Helping kittens remain calm will improve their health.

Parasites

Parasites include roundworms, hookworms, tapeworms, Coccidia, Giardia and bacteria. If large in number, they can cause anemia, diarrhea and death. The eggs of some parasites can persist for months, so it is important to de-worm kittens. If you see parasites in the kitten's stool, contact the veterinary clinic for a check-up and medication.

Upper Respiratory Infections

Upper respiratory infections are highly contagious and spread easily between cats. Cats or kittens that exhibit signs of an infection, such as sneezing, coughing, eye and nose discharge, dehydration, salivation, loss of appetite or are lethargic should be isolated from other animals immediately. In most cases, treatment of the upper respiratory infection will include antibiotics prescribed and provided by the BHS veterinary staff. If not treated, these infections can progress to pneumonia and particularly in kittens, death may result.

Dehydration

A dangerous condition and will need immediate attention. Dehydration is indicated by dry skin, lack of skin elasticity, dry mucus membranes or darker yellow-colored urine. To detect dehydration gently grasp the loose skin above the cat's shoulders or along its rib cage, lift the skin and let it drop back into place. If the skin drops back slowly or remains bunched up, the cat may be dehydrated. (Not always accurate in infant animals.) You may also check condition of the gums - dry, sticky and/or pale gums could indicate dehydration.

Administering Medication

It is essential that medications be given for the full amount of time prescribed, even if the cat or kitten begins to look and act better.

Administering Liquids

Tilt the cat's head back, open the mouth and slowly dribble the liquid from a syringe or dropper onto the back of the tongue (always administer liquid medication from the side of the mouth). If the cat coughs or sputters, decrease the amount of head tilt. If the medication is bitter tasting, the cat may foam at the mouth.

Administering Pills

The cat's mouth is opened by pulling its upper jaw upward. The upper jaw should be grasped behind the long canine teeth with the lips folded in so that they will be inside the mouth. Your forearm is pushed against the head as the upper jaw is pulled up. If the cat does not open its mouth, you can squeeze its lips against its canine teeth and gently force it to do so.

The pill is held between the thumb and forefinger of your other hand. The third finger is placed on the incisors of the lower jaw to hold it down while the pill is dropped on the back of the tongue. The mouth should be held shut until the cat has swallowed the pill. Pet "pillers" are available at pet stores, and are safer than using your fingers to place the pill in the back of the cat's mouth.

Baytril tablets may be crushed between two spoons and combined with a drop or two of water. Put the entire thing into the cat's mouth and hold it closed until he swallows. Or, combine the crushed powder with approximately ¼ tsp of wet food and feed to the cat before his regular meal. Be sure he eats all of the medicine-laced food before his regular dinner is served.

Administering Pastes

The easiest way to administer a paste is to place the appropriate amount as a ribbon on your finger, open the cat or kitten's mouth, and smear the paste on the roof of the mouth. If the paste is pre-measured in a syringe, it may be placed on the cat's tongue.

An alternate method is to place the paste on the cat or kitten's front leg, where it will be licked off. This alternate method is not as accurate a dose as giving the paste directly. Use the alternate method only for medications that do not have to be measured accurately.

Eye Drops and Ointment

It may be necessary to get the help of an assistant. Cats may be wrapped securely in a towel to help administer any medication.

Drops

Tilt the head back slightly, gently holding the eye lid open. Bring the bottle of drops over the eye and drop in the prescribed amount.

Ointment

Tilt the head back slightly, gently holding the eyelid open. Squeeze a small amount of ointment inside the lower eyelid. Close the eye to distribute the ointment evenly over the eye surface.

Ear Drops and Ointment

Grasp the tip of the ear with one hand and hold the earflap perpendicular. With the other hand, drop in the prescribed number of drops or the amount of ointment. Continue to hold the ear firmly (to prevent head shaking), and massage the base of the ear to work the medication down inside the ear canal.

Thank you!!

As a Foster Volunteer, you have given the animals you have cared for and loved a very special gift—a second chance at a full and wonderful life. Thank you!

Any questions? Issues? Concerns? Don't Hesitate to Call!

- A special thank you to The Pennsylvania SPCA for sharing their documents. Learning how to send and receive signals to other cats

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