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## Fostering Kittens

Welcome to the Guilford County Animal Shelter foster program! Here is some information you will need to get started!

### *Supplies needed (some are optional)*

- Small carrier for transport
- Heating pads that do not automatically shut off, Snuggle Safe discs recommended (for very young kittens without mom or singles)
- Litter pans that can easily be sanitized / Yesterday's News or pine litter
- Non-plastic food/water bowls that can easily be sanitized
- Kitten food (both canned and dry, depending on age)
- Kitten milk replacement or kitten formula
- Syringes or bottles for young bottle-feeding kittens (can be provided by GCAS)
- Medication if needed (will be provided by GCAS)
- An area to keep foster kittens separate from other pets
- Toys!
- Plush bedding that cannot fray, i.e. fleece

Three basic needs: feeding, stimulating, and keeping warm.

### *Feeding*

#### (bottle-feeders)

- Always wash your hands before and after handling the kittens. Make sure the kitten is lying on its stomach to feed. You may have to give the kitten a couple of minutes to get used to the nipple or syringe. Formula should be body-temperature warm; test the temperature before giving it. KMR formula is made with 1-part powdered formula to 2 parts water. Kittens should eat 2 tablespoons or 10 cc of formula per 4 ounces of body weight in a 24-hour period. Kittens less than 2 weeks of age should eat at least every 2 hours. Kittens 2 to 4 weeks of age should eat at least every 3-4 hours, but do not wake them if they are sleeping for feeding time. Hold the bottle at a 45-degree angle to prevent air from entering the kitten's stomach. Do not feed milk not specified for kittens, nor overfeed. This will cause medical issues!

#### Kittens eating on their own

Kittens that have just been weaned will need to be offered fresh canned kitten food 2-3 times a day. If they are not yet interested in the canned food they should be offered "kitten slurry". This consists of warm water, kitten milk replacement, and canned kitten food that is stirred into a soup consistency. You can adjust the

ingredients as needed to make sure they are eating. They will be messy eaters so please keep them clean by wiping them with a warm wet cloth.

At 5 weeks old they should be offered dry kitten food with the canned food. You can help their interest in this by mixing some canned with dry, then slowly decrease the amount of canned food you add.

Fresh water should be available at all times.

### *Stimulating*

A newborn kitten cannot evacuate its bowel or bladder on its own. After feeding, gently message and stimulate the genitals with a sterile cotton ball or clean cloth dipped in warm water. You will need to do this until the kitten begins to use the litter box. They may not have a bowel movement EVERY feeding, and may even skip a day, so don't worry unless there are other signs of concern! (Refer to General Health page)

They should be able to start using a litterbox at about 4 weeks old. You may need to start off with a shallow foil pan if a regular litter box is too high for them to climb in and out of. Use Yesterday's News, pine litter, or shredded paper.

### *Keeping them warm and safe*

The area where you keep the kittens should be warm, dry, and clean. A small crate with a cat bed and heating pad will work. Put the heating pad on the lowest setting and put it under the crate. Make sure they have room to move off the pad if they become too hot. The first 2 weeks is critical to keep the babies warm. Use a heating pad that does not automatically shut off.

For older kittens that no longer need the heating pad and are moving around well, keep them in a small bathroom or laundry room in the home, away from other pets. The kittens have not been fully vaccinated, and without the full medical history of these animals we want to make sure your pets and the kittens are safe from contagious illnesses.

## **Fostering mom and kittens**

Fostering moms with kittens can be very different from fostering just a litter or a single kitten. The mom will do most of the work for you! Your job as a foster is to provide a calm environment where mom and kittens feel safe and secure. It is VERY important that these families are kept in a room of their own without interference from family pets – even a dog just sniffing through the door can be terrorizing for a mom cat who is trying to protect her babies.

**The environment** – set up is similar to that of the litter, but with a larger area. A large carrier can provide the perfect place for a mom cat to keep her babies. Food (wet and dry) should be

available at all times. The litter boxes should be kept as clean as possible, especially once the kittens start using it.

**Introduction** – Once a mom cat is in the foster home, she should be left alone in the carrier with her babies. Adult cats often take longer to settle into a new environment and she will need time to come out of hiding and explore without you there. Once she is more settled you can spend increasing amounts of time in the room, but let her come to you. Do not approach a mom cat as she may become protective of her kittens. Allow her

to begin each interaction and stop petting her at the first sign of discomfort (swishing tail, hissing, growling, tensing up, or moving away).

**Playtime** – as mom cat becomes more comfortable and as the kittens get older, make sure to spend time with mom separately from the kittens – even mom cats like to play! Have a place where mom can get away from her babies if she needs a break.

## General Health Care

You will receive scheduled dates for them to come back to us for things like booster vaccines and dewormers. Some kittens will be too young for preventatives, so the medical record will just include a physical exam. Please call ahead and make an appointment with the foster coordinator or a veterinary health care technician for regular check-ups and preventative care. If a problem arises that needs to be seen right away during our regular business hours, please give us a call to schedule an emergency visit. **If it is an after-hours emergency please take them to Happy Tails Emergency Clinic, 2936 Battleground Ave. Greensboro NC (phone # 336-288-2688). Call them first to determine if it is truly an emergency.** If you take them anywhere else for veterinary care you will be responsible for payment of services. **Always have paperwork with the fosters.**

### **An emergency vet visit may include any of the following:**

Fever (103.5 or above, rectally), respiratory distress (choking, wheezing, open-mouth breathing, shortness of breath); green secretions and/or bad odor from nasal area; not eating or drinking for more than a few days; extreme lethargy for more than a day or two; obvious distress, pain or pronounced behavior changes.

For kittens less than 2-3 weeks, open mouth breathing, not nursing or taking the bottle, and crawling away from the litter/mother are bad, often hopeless signs. Call your coordinator immediately.

## Things to look out for....

### URIs

Upper respiratory infections (URIs) are very similar to human colds. The cat is often congested and cannot smell her food. Tempting your foster cat with smelly canned cat food, Hills A/D food (purchased at a veterinarian's office), baby food (no onions in ingredients), chicken broth or even tuna in water (last resort as too much can cause diarrhea) will often get her eating again.

You may have to coax her to eat by using your fingers, and even smearing it on her lips or nose. If your foster cat has not eaten for more than two days, call your coordinator to schedule an appointment.

Steam from a vaporizer or hot shower often helps clear the nasal passages. Keep the nose and eyes clear of discharge with warm, damp cotton balls. A cat who doesn't feel well appreciates some extra petting and quiet time in your lap. If you can coax your foster cat to eat, and she's drinking water, the infection will usually run its course and no additional treatment is necessary.

Ask your coordinator about using the home remedy of betadine/normal saline solution as eye/nose drops to help decrease the severity of a URI. We often have pre-mixed solution available for foster parents to pick up.

### Dehydration

Watch carefully to see if your foster cat is drinking water. You may have to monitor the level of the water bowl and keep track of litter box activity. You can check for dehydration by pulling the skin up just a little lower than the back of the neck. It should be taut and snap back down. If it stands up or takes some time to go back down, the cat may be dehydrated.

If your foster cat is extremely lethargic, has a fever (over 103 degrees F, rectally, constitutes a fever), and/or a bacterial infection, let your coordinator know immediately.

If nasal discharge is thick and yellowish-green (vs. clear and watery), this may be an indication that a bacterial infection has set in, and antibiotics may be necessary. In this case, contact the foster coordinator immediately.

### **Panleukopenia**

This is a very contagious and potentially fatal disease. Symptoms to look for are lethargy, loss of appetite, vomiting, diarrhea and/or blood in the stool. If you see any of these symptoms call us immediately. We can treat Panleukopenia if you are willing to try, but often the kitten will be found deceased if they are very young.

**\*\*\*Make sure that food/water bowls are cleaned daily. Clean the room/area thoroughly every 5-7 days or as needed. Wash litter boxes, clean walls and floors near the litter boxes, and wash all bedding and toys with bleach. This is especially important before bringing home a new foster!**

### **Other Common Issues**

Let your coordinator know if you notice any of these:

- Loose stool or diarrhea, usually caused by parasites that may or may not be visible in feces; these can sometimes be treated with wormer picked up at the shelter or a vet visit.
- Continual vomiting or occasional vomiting that lasts more than a day.
- Extreme lethargy for more than 2 days.
- Eyes that are red and inflamed or have an extreme amount of discharge and swelling, vs. small amounts of discharge, usually in both eyes (common with a URI). This can often be treated with eye ointment picked up at the shelter.
- Any crumbly wax-like substance in the ears (possible ear mites). Ear mite medicine can be picked up at the shelter.
- Fleas or flea dirt (black pepper-like substance in the fur). Fipronil is usually applied if fleas are noticed at the shelter. If you see flea dirt, we will find out if Fipronil was already applied. Occasional baths with Dawn dish soap and a flea comb will suffice to get rid of fleas on a very young kitten. Do not use a flea shampoo or other product without asking your foster coordinator or a veterinary healthcare technician.
- Failure to thrive: Sometimes kittens that are very young will take a turn for the worse and die quickly with no warning. If you have a foster that dies, please call us and we will have you bring that kitten in to be examined by veterinary health care staff, to determine if there is a risk to your other kittens.
- Allergies: Cats can have allergic reactions to medications. If a sudden, adverse reaction happens after giving a new medication, such as wheezing or eyes being more inflamed, stop the medication and call the foster coordinator.

### **Socialization**

The ideal time for socializing kittens is from two to seven weeks of age. As soon as their eyes and ears are opening, socialization opportunities begin. Socialization after this age range is still possible, but becomes more difficult. Attempting socialization after 12 to 14 weeks of age will have more limited success.

Cats and kittens are individuals and each will respond differently to socializing techniques. Some cats can be genetically friendly but feral by experience.

Try to avoid raising solo kittens. Not only do we want them to socialize them to humans, but also they learn how to be a cat, gain a social identity and are likely to tolerate feline companions later if raised with a sibling or littermates. Even if kept as an only cat in adulthood, a solo-raised kitten is more likely to display undesirable behaviors to his human companions.

Eye contact should be quickly broken. Staring at a kitten is threatening. When fearful or stimulated, a cat's eye will dilate. Be aware of the eyes, since you may see them dilate as a first (fear) reaction, but as the kittens get familiar with you, the pupils will quickly return to a normal size.

Keep the kitten in a room with no inaccessible hiding spots. Making frequent visits to the room and just sitting gets kitty used to your presence.

Next, using a stick or dowel with feathers attached to one end, provide visual stimulation and distraction. A second stick or dowel with a soft fabric on it can be used to touch. As kitty gets comfortable with your presence, try moving closer each time.

Do this when kitty eats, perhaps just laying your hand nearby, progressing to being able to hand feed and later to touching kitty. At this point, when you are able to touch, use a finger to make small 1¼-inch clockwise circles all around kitty's shoulders, head and upper back. Make the circles small and quick and leave the body after each time.

## Showcasing your foster

### Web Presence

If her picture is already on our Web site, you should write a new story about the cat's personality. A good story makes a big difference in the number of calls the cat gets, so be descriptive! Try to include things like:

- Whether the cat likes to be petted or held
- Is a lap cat
- Purrs easily
- Is vocal or quiet
- Is active and playful or calm
- Has good litter box manners
- Uses a scratching post
- Has experience with other animals and children, etc.

Of course, any cute things that she does or anything you want to point out about her fur or appearance is good as well. It can be as long as you want, but the typical description is a paragraph or two.

If the cat has some bad habits, this can be discussed during the first phone conversation. The web story should generate interest, not turn people away. We don't want to mislead people; however, we really try to focus on the positive. Please e-mail the story to the coordinator.

Check the Web site a day or two after you have sent your info. You know the cat best and will catch any errors on the site. If you don't see the cat listed or if there are mistakes, just send an e-mail with any corrections.

### Photos

If your cat's picture is not yet on the Web site, please feel free to take pictures and send to the foster coordinator. They can be e-mailed in .jpg format with your story.

### Adoptions

When your foster is ready for adoption, friends, co-workers and relatives may want to adopt. If they are qualified adopters, we are more than happy for that to happen. Shelter staff always have the final authority to approve all adoptions. You are welcome to adopt your foster, following the same procedures as everyone else. We may also have you contact and set up meet and greets with potential adopters that contact us directly about your foster. If they decide to adopt, you can schedule a time to meet here, where they can fill out the paperwork, pay the fees, and take the animal. They must have the animal ID number in order to complete the adoption. If you are unsure of the correct numbers for them, contact the foster coordinator.

Adopters should arrive at least one hour before closing time to allow enough time for the process and not keep staff after closing time. Please ask adopters to avoid starting the adoption right at opening time as well since it's a very busy time for staff

**Even if there are no potential adopters, fosters need to come back to the shelter for our adoption floor when they are 8 weeks old. Contact the foster coordinator to set up an appointment. PLEASE CONTACT THE FOSTER COORDINATOR ABOUT ANY ISSUES YOU ARE HAVING, ESPECIALLY IF YOU NEED TO BRING YOUR FOSTER/S BACK UNEXPECTEDLY! ALSO, BRING ALL PAPERWORK THAT YOU RECEIVED WITH THE ANIMAL.**

**When you are ready to foster again, give us a call!! We always need your help!**

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### Important phone numbers

Happy Tails Emergency Clinic 336-288-2688

GCAS main line 336-641-3401 or 3402

Foster coordinator 336-641-3407 email [abolton@myguilford.com](mailto:abolton@myguilford.com)

This packet is based on material generously shared by Seattle Animal Shelter on ASPCApro.org website

**Please sign and date below acknowledging that you have received the appropriate foster information and have read and understand them.**

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Signature of foster parent

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Date

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Staff Witness

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Date

