

Feline Foster Care Manual



Animal Services & Adoption Center

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Welcome to Foster Parenting

Foster parents provide temporary care for kittens, puppies, dogs, cats and sometimes other companion animals. Some may only need a few weeks of care while others may stay with you for a more extended period of time. By providing your time, energy, and home to an animal in need, you are helping to prepare the animal(s) for adoption into a permanent home as well as assisting us mitigate inevitable cases of shelter overcrowding.

The Office of Animal Services' Montgomery County Animal Services and Adoption Center (MCASAC) is here to help ensure your enjoyment and success in being a foster parent. MCASAC will provide training, all necessary supplies, and our fully trained staff are just an email away. The staff at MCASAC would like to take this opportunity to thank you for opening up your hearts and home to an animal in need, giving them (and the animal who took his/her space at the shelter) a second chance. We could not do this without you!

About this Manual

Please do not feel overwhelmed! We want your foster experience to be fun for you and your family. This manual on cat and kitten care has been created for your use as a reference during your fostering experience. We realize that you will have a lot of questions along the way and that is okay!

We recommend you take the time early on in your foster journey to become familiar with this manual. Please be sure to refer to the *Foster Policy Manual* for questions regarding policies and procedures, as this manual will focus specifically on cat and kitten care.

We appreciate your attention to this manual as we have limited staff. While we make every effort to respond to all emails in a timely manner, we have a lot of other tasks to perform at the shelter. Please take the time to refer to this manual prior to emailing your questions to staff.

Contact Information and Hours

Montgomery County Animal Services and Adoption Center
7315 Muncaster Mill Road
Derwood, MD 20855
Phone: 240-773-5900
www.montgomerycountymd.gov/animalservices

Hours of Operation

M/T/Th/F	12:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
Saturday – Sunday	12:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Wednesday	CLOSED

MCASAC is closed for most State Observed Holidays.

Closings due to inclement weather will be announced on the MCASAC Foster/Volunteer Facebook Page as well as the shelter's website.

Email is the preferred method of communication to all non-urgent questions.

Foster Team: fostermcasac@montgomerycountymd.gov

Veterinary Team: FosterVet@mcgov.onmicrosoft.com

All emails are generally answered within 24-hours (48-hours at most). If you do not receive a response, please resubmit your email as it may not have reached us. We appreciate your patience!

Never hesitate to email us should you have any questions or concerns. Please be sure to notify us immediately should your foster(s) display any medical or behavioral issues. The earlier we learn of an issue, the better we can work on resolving it.

Please include the following in your email correspondence:

- Your full name
- Your foster's MCASAC name (please do not use any names you may have given the animal(s)) and Animal Identification number (A#)

Emergency Information

What Constitutes an Emergency?

- Labored/open-mouth breathing that is not associated with an upper respiratory infection (URI)
- Animal is unable to walk
- Reopening of spay/neuter/surgical incisions
- Profound lethargy (i.e., animal cannot lift head, unable to move/keeling over)
- Attempting to urinate but unable to (could indicate a blockage)
- Fever exceeding 104° F
- Animal appears to be in severe pain
- Profuse bleeding
- Possible fracture/sudden injury/trauma
- An animal getting into a potentially toxic substance

Non-Emergency:

- URI signs (sneezing, coughing, watery eyes/nose)
- Mild redness/irritation of spay/neuter/surgery incision (place an e-collar on the animal immediately, if you have one)
- General vomiting/bowel or bladder movements
- Partial anorexia (animal is still eating some)
- Complete anorexia (not eating anything) for two consecutive meals

For these and other non-emergencies requiring your foster(s) receive a veterinary examination, please schedule a veterinary appointment via our online appointment scheduler as soon as possible.

Emergencies between the hours of 9:00am and 6:00pm

If you experience an emergency between these hours, please call our Intake Desk at 240-773-5665 or 240-773-5666, and ask to speak to the Foster and Rescue Coordinator or an Animal Care Supervisor. Explain the situation so that staff can direct you to the correct person.

After Hours (6:00pm until 9:00am) Emergencies

After hours emergency vet visits to MEAC are very costly. ***Emergency vet care must be approved by the on-call veterinarian prior to any visit to MEAC.*** If you experience an emergency before 9:00 am or after 6:00 pm, please contact the on-call veterinarian at 240-383-5900. You must take the animal(s) to the following emergency clinic:

Metropolitan Emergency Animal Clinic (MEAC)
11503 Rockville Pike, Suite A
Rockville, MD 20852

General Medical and Vaccination Schedule

Foster's Responsibilities

If you have veterinary questions or concerns and are unsure if you need to schedule an appointment, please email FosterVet@mcgov.onmicrosoft.com

You are responsible for bringing your foster animal(s) to MCASAC, by appointment, for vaccinations, spay/neuter, and to treat any illness symptoms you may see. You will receive medical records following each visit to the shelter listing due dates for routine follow-up visits. Spay/neuter surgeries are scheduled via email, directly between the Foster and Foster and Rescue Coordinator. Spay/neuter surgeries are scheduled once the animal reaches 1.75 lbs. It is the foster's responsibility to let the Foster and Rescue Coordinator know that their animal has reached the 1.75 mark so that the animal can be added to the surgery schedule on the next available date.

Routinely check your fosters from head to toe to ensure that nothing is visibly wrong with them. You should be keeping a close eye on your foster animal(s) and immediately make an appointment if you notice any symptoms of illness.

If you do not bring your animal(s) back for follow-up care, MCASAC reserves the right to terminate the Foster Contract and have the foster return the animal(s) to the shelter.

Do not use non-prescribed medications or attempt to treat any illness on your own. MCASAC veterinary staff will need to see and treat any medical issues.

Common Symptoms

You should be keeping a close eye on your foster animal(s) and immediately make an appointment or email FosterVet@mcgov.onmicrosoft.com if you notice any of the following symptoms:

- Diarrhea
- Constipation
- Vomiting (more than once)
- Sneezing, runny eyes or nose, coughing (potential signs of upper respirator infections)
- Fever
- Spots of missing hair (a potential sign of ringworm or mange)
- Excessive scratching
- Lethargy
- Lack of appetite
- Major behavioral change
- Change in coat (greasy, clumping hair)
- Bloating belly

- Mothers abandoning/avoiding/separating themselves from offspring
- Offspring separating self from mom or siblings
- Ear discharge
- Increased/decreased thirst and/or urination
- Any obvious signs of discomfort
- Dehydration

Vaccinations

Vaccinations at MCASAC begin when the animal is 4 weeks old and weighs at least one pound. All adult animals are vaccinated upon intake, but additional vaccines may be required. The vaccination schedule for any animal may be delayed due to a medical reason (e.g. fever, is on some type of medication, etc.). You will receive automated emails reminding you of vaccination due dates.

Of note:

- Boosters vaccines cannot be given even one day early.
- Not all parasites are treated with the basic de-wormer. Please schedule a vet visit if you see anything suspicious such as worms or soft stool.
- Do not permit more than 3 weeks to lapse from the due date of a vaccination as it will render the vaccine less effective.
- Litters of kittens/puppies may NOT be combined without the consent of MCASAC veterinary staff.

Keeping Track

It is good to have all your documents in one place for each animal you are fostering. Keeping track of vet visits, vaccinations, and medications can seem like a lot but organization is key!

Keep track of due dates for vaccines needed by reviewing the copy of medical records you received at pick up. Although you will receive automated vaccine reminders, it is always a good idea to keep track in the case of an error.

It is also expected that you keep an accurate record of their weights. Healthy kittens should gain an average of ½ ounce per day or 3-4 ounces per week. By 8 weeks, most kittens will weigh 2lbs. If your foster kitten(s) are not gaining weight, or are losing weight, please schedule a veterinary examination immediately.

Foster Vaccination/Treatment Schedule

Age	Treatment	Frequency
2-4 weeks	De-worm: Pyrantel Pamoate	Repeat every 2 weeks until 2lbs
4-16 weeks	Feline Distemper Combo (FVRCP)	Booster every 2-3 weeks until 16 weeks old.
16+ weeks	FVRCP	Booster 2-3 weeks and then again in 1 year
8+ weeks (must weigh 2lbs)	Advantage Multi	Monthly
8+ weeks (can be done earlier at staff discretion or upon foster request)	FIV/FelV Combo Test	Re-Test Annually
12+ weeks (must weigh 3lbs)	Rabies Vaccine	Repeat in 1 year, then booster every 1-3 years

You will receive automated emails when your foster is due for vaccines. Please make sure to sign up for a vaccine appointment in Acuity. If you think you have received the email in error, please contact FosterMCASAC@montgomerycountymd.gov

Spay/Neuter Information

Spay and neuters should be scheduled as soon as the animal is of age and weight and in good health.

Kittens: 8 weeks, 1.75+ pounds (must be both)

Nursing Cats: shortly after their offspring have been weaned.

****Make sure animals just reaching 1.75 pounds are of weight at the time of surgery, as their weights can fluctuate around the 6-week mark. ****

For instructions on scheduling your foster animal(s) spay or neuter, please review the Foster Policy Manual.

Post-Surgery Information and Protocols

For the safety and well-being of your foster pet(s), please abide by the following post-operative care instructions:

Anesthesia and Surgery

Your foster may still be under the effects of anesthesia when you pick them up. You may notice dilated pupils, decreased energy and appetite, an unsteady gait, and/or moodiness. These are all normal reactions for an animal coming out of anesthesia and up to 24 hours post-surgery. If any of these signs last longer than 24 hours, please schedule a veterinary exam or email FosterVet@mcgov.onmicrosoft.com

Be sure to monitor your foster(s) for any of the following signs of abnormal recovery from anesthesia/surgery:

- Bleeding
- Lethargy, weakness, and/or wobbly gait lasting greater than 24 hours
- Decreased appetite/water intake lasting greater than 24 hours
- Shivering
- Increased or decreased body temperature (cool or warm to the touch)
- Pale gums
- Rapid breathing
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

Food and Water

It is considered normal for your foster animal to have a decreased appetite/water intake for up to 24 hours following surgery. Please feed your foster(s) half of their normal serving of food and water when you return home with them the evening of the surgery. If your foster is under 16

weeks old and will not eat, rub maple or Karo syrup on their upper gums using a cotton-tipped applicator. You can resume their normal feeding regimen the day following surgery.

If your foster vomits after eating on the night of surgery, remove their food and only permit them access to a small amount of water overnight. Return to offering a small amount of food the following morning. If the vomiting continues, schedule a veterinary appointment.

Pain Medication

Your foster may have been given a long-acting pain medication in conjunction with the spay/neuter surgery. Do not give human medication to your foster. It is dangerous and can be fatal. If you were given medication to administer to the animal at home, please give as directed.

Surgery Site

MCASAC generally uses dissolvable sutures, which do not require follow-up suture removal (unless otherwise stated). Keep the incision clean and dry for at least 7 days. Keep your foster from licking the incision and avoid swimming, bathing, or cleaning the incision during this time. If any post-surgical licking of the incision is observed while the animal is still at the shelter, an e-collar may be placed and sent home with the animal(s). This is uncommon, so your foster will most likely go home without an e-collar. If you notice your foster licking the incision, immediately place an e-collar on the animal, if available, and continue to monitor for signs of infection. If you do not have an e-collar, please come to the shelter and a staff member will provide you with one. For cats and kittens, a paper plate may be used in a pinch by cutting a hole in the center, wrapping it around the head, and stapling or taping up the side. Be sure to check the incision site daily. What you see when you pick up the animal is considered normal. Mild redness and swelling of the incision site is normal and may last for up to 2 weeks. In female animals, some bubbling under the skin is normal.

Jumping and Playing

Try to keep your foster's activity to a minimum for 7-14 days by discouraging running, jumping, and rough play. Too much activity can cause the incision to open or become swollen.

Litter

Litter dust can get into the surgery site and engender infection. Paper litter (which is provided by the shelter) is recommended for at least 7 days after surgery.

Housing

Keep your kittens and cats in a quiet, confined area such as a bathroom, laundry room, bedroom, or kitchen the evening following surgery. Cats may hide after surgery and it is prudent to block off access to those places in which your cat may opt to hide. This will make it easier for you to monitor your foster cat throughout the recovery process.

Nutrition

When you come to pick up your foster(s), a shelter staff member will provide you with food for your new house guest! Unless you are told otherwise, foster cats old enough to consume solid food should be fed Purina Pro Plan brand food- the same brand fed to our in-house population. Bottle-fed kittens will go home with KMR (Kitten Milk Replacer). Special dietary requirements will be communicated to foster parents ahead of time and/or at the time of pickup.

It is important to know if the animal(s) are eating adequately, especially with litters of kittens. Watch after food is given to make sure each animal is eating enough and not being pushed aside by littermates. If this does happen, try feeding them separately to ensure each kitten eats a sufficient amount.

Create a consistent feeding schedule. Feed at the same times each day and provide a comfortable space for your foster(s) to eat. Make sure to avoid overfeeding your foster(s); just like humans, it is easy to put the pounds on, but not take them off! For emaciated animals, it is recommended to feed 3+ small meals per day of the allotted amount. This allows their body to become re-accustomed to the nutrients being provided. Overfeeding can cause bloat and other serious medical issues.

Adult cats are fed dry food twice daily, unless otherwise noted. Canned food is supplemented as treats/kennel enrichment, as needed. Kittens are free-fed dry food and fed canned food two to three times daily, unless otherwise noted. Very young kittens coming off of the bottle and learning to eat on their own should be fed slurry (canned food mixed with formula) 3-4 times a day.

Feeding Charts

Feeding charts are provided to ensure cats are getting the appropriate amount of food based on size. Instructions for cats with special dietary requirements (prescription food, feeding regimens, etc.) will be provided before sending the cat into foster.

Wet food should be provided to adult cats who are not eating, or in small amounts for shy cats to encourage social behavior.

When providing food in PM, only give if bowl is empty or close to empty.

Please monitor your foster(s) to ensure they are eating and notify a foster staff member with any concerns.

Adult Cats Dry Food (Regular Diet)

Weight	Quantity AM	Quantity PM
5 lbs.	½ cup	¼ cup
10 lbs.	½ cup	¼ cup
15 lbs.	½ cup	¼ cup
20 lbs. +	½ cup	¼ cup

Kittens

Dry food should be available at all times in addition to fresh water. The following measurements may need to be adjusted based on how much the kitten wants to eat during the meal and weight gain.

4-6 weeks old (under 1.5lbs)	1/3-1/2 small can 3-4 times a day mixed into "slurry" with KMR
6-8 weeks old (1.5lbs-2lbs)	1/2 small can 2-3 times a day
8 weeks old and up (2lbs+)	1/2- 2/3 small can twice daily

Adult Cats Prescription Diets

Dry Food AM

	C/D	D/D	I/D	K/D	M/D	S/D	W/D	Y/D	Z/D
6lbs	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	1/8 cup	¼ cup	½ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup
8lbs	½ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	¼ cup	½ cup
10lbs	½ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	¼ cup	½ cup
12lbs	½ cup	½ cup	½ cup	½ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	¾ cup	½ cup	½ cup
14lbs	½ cup	½ cup	½ cup	½ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	¾ cup	½ cup	½ cup
16lbs	½ cup	½ cup	½ cup	½ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	1 cup	½ cup	½ cup
18lbs	½ cup	½ cup	½ cup	½ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	1 cup	½ cup	½ cup
+									

Dry Food PM

	C/D	D/D	I/D	K/D	M/D	S/D	W/D	Y/D	Z/D
6lbs	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	1/8 cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup
8lbs	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup
10lbs	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup
12lbs	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup
14lbs	½ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	¼ cup	½ cup
16lbs	½ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	¼ cup	½ cup
18lbs	½ cup	½ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	¼ cup	¼ cup	½ cup	¼ cup	½ cup
+									

- ¼ can of canned food (except I/D and W/D) should be supplemented in the AM only.
- **Do not use this chart for kittens.**

Neonatal Through Weaned Kitten Care

The term “neonatal” refers to animals ranging in age from newborn to three weeks old. Kittens are particularly fragile during their first few weeks of life and are completely dependent on their mother for protection, warmth, and sustenance.

Healthy newborn kittens being cared for by their mother spend 90% of their time sleeping against her for warmth and 10% of their time nursing. Most queens (unspayed female cat) take excellent care of their kittens. They meticulously clean their kittens and protect them from external harm, moving them to a new location when in harm’s way.

Orphaned neonatal kittens are another story. They do not have a mother to keep them warm, fed, and clean. Without immediate human intervention, these kittens will not survive. Although human intervention is by no means ideal or an exact replica of the care that the queen provides to her young, it is sometimes the only chance that these kittens have.

Birth Weight

A healthy newborn kitten will weigh 3-4 ounces and should begin to gain weight rapidly a few days after birth. Their weight should double by the time they are one-week old. Healthy kittens should gain about ½ ounce/day, or 3-4 ounces a week until they are eight weeks old. Any weight loss during a kitten’s first months of life is considered abnormal and the kitten should be closely monitored.

Average Kitten Weight

Age in Days	Weight
1	2 ½ - 4 ¾ oz.
5	3-7 oz.
10	4 ½ - 9 ¾ oz.
15	6-11 ¾ oz.
20	7 ½- 14 ½ oz.
25	8-16 ¾ oz.

Colostrum

The first milk that a kitten receives from its mother is rich in protective antibodies known as colostrum. These protective antibodies protect kittens from illness during its first few weeks of life. The kitten absorbs the colostrum during the first 24 – 36 hours after birth. The amount of immunity that a kitten receives from the colostrum is directly correlated to the antibody level in

the queen's blood. Kittens who do not receive colostrum during this critical time frame become immunocompromised and very vulnerable.

Temperature

The average temperature of newborn kitten is between 92 and 97 degrees F. A kittens' temperature will increase to about 96-100 degrees F at 2-21 days old.

Neonatal kittens are unable to thermoregulate and depend on the queen or another heating source (e.g., heating disc wrapped in a towel, etc.) to maintain homeostasis. Make sure that the kitten has a way to move away from the external heating source being used to avoid overheating.

Eyes and Ears

All kittens are born with their eyes and ears closed and cannot see or hear during their first few days of life. They find their way to their mother by sensing her body heat and use smell and touch to find their way to her nipple.

Their ears begin to open between 5 and 8 days old. Eyes will begin to open at around 7 days old and should be completely open by the time the kitten is 14 days old. Kittens should have a fully developed sense of sight and hearing by the time they are 3 weeks old.

It is essential that you keep detailed records when caring for neonatal kittens so that health and/or developmental concerns are noticed and addressed immediately. It is imperative that you weigh them daily, making note of their general appearance and demeanor, and accurately chart their feeding schedule with the time and amount of formula fed. Feel free to use the feeding and weight charts found in the Files section on the Foster Facebook page or create your own.

Nutrition for Neonatal Kittens

Neonatal kittens have very little body fat and frequent feeding are required to maintain healthy blood sugar levels. A sufficient intake of formula needs to also offset the large amount of dilute urine and water loss that results from immature kidneys. Frequent feedings spread out over the course of a day will help prevent overloading the kidneys and digestive system.

Cow's milk and baby formula are inadequate substitutes for the milk the kitten receives from its mother and can be fatal to a kitten. There are a number of commercial feline formulas on the market that more closely match the nutritional content of the queen's milk. MCASAC uses Kitten Milk Replacer (KMR) which is provided to fosters of neonatal kittens.

Mixing the Formula

If you use the MCASAC powder KMR, it must be mixed for feedings. The ratio is one part powder to two parts water. You can dilute the formula a little more for the first few feedings to help your

kitten get accustomed to the food and minimize the chance of diarrhea. Any reconstituted powder formula can be refrigerated for up to 24 hours. After that point it must be discarded.

Computing the Formula

The kitten's energy level requirements dictate the amount of formula that is to be fed. Kittens require 380 kilocalories per kilogram at birth. To calculate the daily amount of KMR:

Weight in kg X 1000 = weight in grams

Weight in grams X .20 = amount of formula/day

Amount of formula/day divided by # of feedings per day= X mL per feeding

Kitten Bottle Feeding and Stomach Capacity Chart (From Maddie's Fund)

Estimated Kitten Age (weeks)	Kitten Weight (lbs, oz)	Kitten Weight (grams)	Daily Caloric Requirement	Amount of Formula Per Day (mL)	Amount per Feeding (mL)	Approximate # of Feedings/Day
< 1 week	2 oz	57 g	11 kcal	15 mL	2 mL	7
	3 oz	85 g	17 kcal	23 mL	3 mL	7
	4 oz	113 g	23 kcal	31 mL	5 mL	7
1 week	5 oz	142 g	28 kcal	38 mL	6 mL	7
	6 oz	170 g	34 kcal	46 mL	7 mL	7
	7 oz	198 g	40 kcal	54 mL	8 mL	7
	8 oz	227 g	45 kcal	61 mL	9 mL	7
2 weeks	9 oz	255 g	51 kcal	69 mL	10 mL	7
	10 oz	283 g	57 kcal	77 mL	11 mL	7
	11 oz	312 g	62 kcal	84 mL	12 mL	6-7
3 weeks	12 oz	340 g	68 kcal	92 mL	14 mL	6-7
	13 oz	369 g	74 kcal	100 mL	15 mL	6
	14 oz	397 g	79 kcal	107 mL	16 mL	5
	15 oz	425 g	85 kcal	115 mL	17 mL	5
4 weeks	16 oz (1 lb)	454 g	91 kcal	123 mL	18 mL	5
	1 lb, 1 oz	482 g	96 kcal	130 mL	19 mL	4
	1 lb, 2 oz	510 g	102 kcal	138 mL	20 mL	4
	1 lb, 3 oz	539 g	108 kcal	146 mL	22 mL	4
5 weeks	1 lb, 4 oz	567 g	113 kcal	153 mL	23 mL	4

Bottle Feeding Etiquette

- Only use clean nipples and bottles
- Feed kittens one at a time.
- Place kittens on a countertop and allow them to feed with four paws on the counter and with a level head. This simulates how they would nurse from a mom.
- Do not feed a kitten while she is on her back. This can cause formula to go down into the lungs
- Gently open the kitten's mouth with your finger and place the nipple on the tongue. Stroking kittens can help them to eat
- Pull lightly on the bottle. This promotes strong sucking.
- Tilt the bottle of slightly. This prevents the kitten from inhaling too much air.
- Do not squeeze the bottle to force formula into the kitten's mouth. This can cause formula to move into the kitten's lungs.
- When the kitten is full, bubbles will generally form around its mouth. Make sure to burp your kitten by gently massaging its back after each feeding as kittens can die from too much gas in their stomachs.
- After feeding, stimulate the kittens to urinate and/or defecate
- Fill out a daily weight and feeding chart

The following videos serve as an excellent resource for fosters new to bottle feeding:

www.maddiesfund.org/orphaned-kitten-care-how-to.html

www.kittenlady.org/bottlefeeding

Bottle feeding takes practice to master and feel comfortable doing on your own. Do not be discouraged at any point along the way- your foster team is here to help!

Elimination

Kittens lack a void reflex and are unable to urinate and defecate on their own during their first few weeks of life. Regardless of the feeding method you use, neonatal kittens must be stimulated after each meal. Using a warm, damp gauze pad or cotton ball, gently massage the kitten's genital area to stimulate urination and/or defecation. Continue this routine until the kitten is about 3 weeks old and able to eliminate on its own.

Litterbox Training

Once the kittens are approximately 3 weeks old, they are ready to begin learning how to use the litterbox. Start with a low box, such as a cake pan or low sided cardboard box, with one inch of non-clumping litter (clumping litter can be dangerous if it is ingested). After feeding, place the kitten in the litterbox. Take its paw and gently scratch the litter. Remember to be patient and to give them lots of praise when they are successful! The litterbox should be kept clean and away from food dishes.

Transitioning to Solid Foods (Weaning)

Weaning generally begins at around the 4-week mark and should be a gradual process. You will want to start the transition to solid foods by offering your kitten(s) a “slurry” which is a mix of KMR formula and canned kitten food.

The following tutorial by the Kitten Lady will walk you through the weaning process in depth:

www.Kittenlady.org/weaning

Fostering Nursing Mother Cats

Fostering a mom and her litter of kittens is an incredibly rewarding experience. You have the opportunity to see firsthand how momma cat cares for her babies during each stage of their development. The foster caregiver's primary responsibility is to offer a quiet, safe, nurturing environment for mom to raise her young. A mother cat's instinct tells her to keep her babies safe, and for her to feel safe, she and kittens need privacy and minimal activity. Stress can cause mom to become irritable towards her caretaker and/or kitten(s), and to not take proper care of her young.

Foster homes intended to care for mom and babies should have a separate room away from personal pets and the hub of daily activity. The room should be set up before releasing mom and babies from the carrier. The room should have 1-2 "safe spaces" for mom to nest such as cardboard boxes on their sides, a litter box lined with towels, pee pads, etc. A large dog kennel with the lid and door removed will also make a nice cubby for mom and babies. After letting mom out of the carrier, do not try to pet her right away or make any advances. Allow her to be alone with her kittens, with the door to the room closed, to explore her new environment. Adult cats generally require a few days to weeks to acclimate to new surroundings.

Feeding

Mom should have access to plenty of wet and dry food. The daily caloric intake requirements are doubled in nursing cats. Offer high quality canned kitten food several times/day and provide her with unlimited access to dry food and fresh water.

Socialization

Always proceed slowly in your initial interactions with any adult cat. Allow her to solicit attention from you and only pet her if/when she appears comfortable. Stop petting at the first signs of discomfort.

Have an array of cat toys available for mom and kittens as they will likely start to show more interest in play once the kittens reach 2-3 weeks of age.

Mom's care of the kittens

Mom bears all kitten care responsibilities for the first few weeks of life. The foster shares these responsibilities once the kittens are 3-4 weeks old, as long as the mother cat is amenable to this. Not all cats are the same and some moms are more attentive than others. Please notify the shelter if the mother cat fails to provide her kittens with grooming or nursing.

Nursing

Kittens begin to nurse 1-2 hours after birth. Though born with their eyes closed, they can find their mother by her warmth, and she should make this easier by lying near them on her side. The nursing/suckling relationship occurs over 3 stages. In the beginning, mom initiates each nursing

episode, waking the kittens by licking them and then encircling them with her body. After a little searching, kittens quickly latch on. The second stage occurs after the second or third week, when the kitten's eyes and ears are functioning and they can interact with the mother both inside and outside the nest. At this stage, kittens also initiate some of the nursing episodes. The mother generally cooperates by lying down and taking up the nursing position. In the third stage, starting at about 5 weeks postpartum, the kittens initiate virtually all nursing. The mother becomes gradually more evasive and uncooperative. Near the end of this stage, the mother begins to wean her kittens by becoming less and less available. You can help in the weaning process by encouraging the babies to eat canned, and later, dry food.

Grooming

Kittens receive a lot of grooming and licking from their mothers for the first 2-4 weeks. This anogenital grooming stimulates elimination, and the fecal matter and urine are consumed by the mom. This is effective in keeping the nest and babies clean. Later, as the young are able to leave the nest area, the anogenital licking subsides, and the young deposit feces and urine nearby. At this point, providing cardboard litterboxes nearby will teach them to use the litter box. You generally do not need to intervene at this point, though there is more cleaning as things get messier!

Potential Problem Behaviors in Mother Cats

Maternal Aggression Towards People

Occasionally, mother cats have strong protective instincts against their human caretakers. They may hiss, growl, or strike out if you approach the kittens. If faced with this situation, move very slowly around the mother cat and the nest. Wear long sleeved clothing to protect you as you clean around her. Try to bribe her with tasty treats such as chicken baby food. Speak in a soft, reassuring voice, and try not to react if mom cat hisses or growls. DO NOT “correct” the cat by spraying her with water or other types of correction. Remember, she is acting out of a natural instinct to protect her young, and if you act in a threatening manner, she will escalate her behavior.

Maternal Aggression Towards Other Animals

Aggressive behavior towards cats or dogs is very common in mom cats, as they are trying to protect their young. Please do not try to introduce your foster cats to other animals. This can be very stressful and offers no advantages. Please block any avenues they may have for seeing other cats or dogs, and strictly enforce separation from your resident pets. If for some reason, the mom cat sees another animal and is upset, quickly remove the source of anxiety and leave the room. Do not attempt to comfort or reassure the mom cat or babies. Come back in 20 minutes or so to check on them.

Maternal Neglect

About 8% of kittens die from inadequate maternal care. The deaths are usually due to hypothermia if the kitten strays away and is not retrieved, or improper/inadequate nursing after birth. Maternal neglect has several causes. Some cats seem to lack maternal instincts. In some cases, it is nature’s way: if kittens have birth defects or are otherwise weak at birth, the mom may ignore them, or as discussed below, cannibalize them. In many cases it seems that environmental stress plays a role, and thus it is very important that the environment be kept quiet, calm, and with view visits. Except to feed, clean, and check in on the babies a few brief times a day, cats should primarily be left alone the first 2 weeks after giving birth. You will need to watch daily for signs that a mother is neglecting her young, especially in the first few weeks. Please inform the shelter if the mother spends all of her time away from the kittens, does not groom or nurse them frequently, and/or if the kittens cry and no response from her is elicited.

Cannibalism

Some queens may cannibalize one or more of their kittens. This does not appear to be a reflection of inexperience in mother cats. It may be a result of anxiety brought on by too much human interference, or the stresses of other cats or dogs in the immediate environment. There can also be evolutionary causes for cannibalism, such as if the kitten has some (sometimes not obvious) defect). If a mom cat is aggressive towards her kittens, you should separate them from her and

call the shelter for further advice. Fortunately, maternal neglect and cannibalism are quite rare, and often occur in the first few days after birth and most fosters will not observe these behaviors.

[Working with Under Socialized Cats and Kittens](#)

Cats and kittens that have missed out on socialization at a young age, or are overwhelmed in the shelter environment, benefit greatly from foster. These cats and kittens are “projects”, but the changes you see in them can be very rewarding! Adult cats often need a lot of time to acclimate to a new environment, especially those who are very shy. It is important to have lots of safe hiding spots for these cats, however, make sure the room the cat has as a safe space, still allows for you to work with the cat. If possible, a shy cat will avoid all interaction, so the cat must be in an area that will allow you to make progress. Food is often a great motivator- high value foods such as tuna, baby chicken food, lunch meat in small pieces may bring more success if canned food isn't motivator enough. An in depth step by step resource for working with shy cats can be found here: <https://resources.bestfriends.org/article/how-socialize-very-shy-or-fearful-cats>

The Kitten Burrito

For young kittens who are just a little bit hissy, sometimes a good burrito cuddle is all it takes.

Step 1: Lay flat a hand towel (or bath towel for bigger kitties)

Step 2: Place kitten about 3-6 inches from one side of the towel

Step 3: Take the short end of the towel and wrap it around one side of your kitten (width-wise)

Step 4: Fold the part of the towel by the kitten's rump, up over the rump (be mindful of where the tail is). This is so the kitten doesn't back out of the burrito.

Step 5: Take the other side of the towel and wrap it around the kitten's side. Make sure the front paws are inside of the towel

Step 6: Continue wrapping the towel around the kitten- then snuggle away! Keeping the kitten in your lap like this while doing other activities such as watching TV or typing at the computer can help with their initial fear- next thing you know they will be purring away.

Over-Stimulated Cats

You're having a sweet, cuddly moment with your foster cat, and next thing you know, your foster cat has bitten or scratched. Cats are extremely sensitive animals, and some cats can only take so much stimulation before it's too much. There may be some areas on the cat that are just “off limits”- it may be a pain issue or a bad memory. Very few cats attack without warning, so becoming familiar with cat body language is an important part of working with different cats. Twitching tails, dilating pupils, ears turned or laid back, and whiskers flattening against the face are all signs that you need to back off! The trick is to stop before the cat escalates. Should you notice signs that a cat is becoming overstimulated, gently remove all your vulnerable body parts from the vicinity and try to shift the cat's attention to something like a toy, rolled up socks, etc. Check out Jackson Galaxy's “Play Therapy”. <https://www.jacksongalaxy.com/blog/resolutions-for-a-healthy-cat-play-therapy/>

Teaching Tricks

Teaching tricks to your foster kitty is sure to turn heads and increase adoptability in addition to being fun for both you and the cat!

<https://greatergood.org/CatPawsitiveTrainingAtHome.pdf>

Remember to take lots of pictures and provide us with information or a bio so we can showcase your cat's personality!

Email photos to:

OutrachMCASAC@montgomerycountymd.gov

FosterMCASAC@montgomerycountymd.gov

Thank you for fostering!