

FOSTER CARE HANDBOOK

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Introduction to Foster Care

Welcome to Our Foster Care Team!

If you have never cared for a foster animal before, you are about to experience the joys of helping to **save lives!** The rewards of fostering are innumerable. You will be taking part in changing the world for the animals in our care and it will likely change you as well.

In becoming an active part of our foster care program, you are expanding our capacity. In doing this, you are offering the homeless animals of the Coastal Bend a new chance at healthy, happy lives in forever homes. You are about to become part of an amazing team! We thank you from the bottom of our hearts - and so do the animals!

GCHS Foster Care Mission

The Foster Program at GCHS exists to engage the people of the community to actively help in the direct care of animals that are taken in by GCHS by bringing them into their own home and caring for them for any length of time. By having an active foster care program, GCHS is expanding in capacity by opening up holding kennels each time animals go into foster care.

Getting Started with Fostering

GCHS offers three different types of foster opportunities: short-term, long-term, and special needs.

Short-Term Fostering:

Short-term fosters care for animals for up to one month. The following are the types of short-term foster arrangements that we offer:

- **Field Trips:** Up to 6 hours away from the shelter. Popular field trip ideas include trips to the park, pet-friendly stores and restaurants, and the beach.
- **Sleep Overs:** 24 hours away from the shelter. Animal will stay in your home overnight. This is a popular foster option for families or individuals interested in adoption.
- **Nursery:** Puppies and Kittens 4 weeks and older who are no longer being bottle-fed but are not yet ready for sterilization and adoption.
- **General:** For those interested in foster or adoption, we can arrange for short-term fostering of most animals in our care. Contact the Volunteer & Foster Coordinator to discuss an arrangement that you may be interested in.

Long-Term Fostering:

Long-term fosters care for animals for one month or longer. The purpose of long-term fostering is to allow an animal to remain in a home environment while looking for their forever home. The shelter environment is highly stressful for animals. By remaining in a home, animals are less likely to develop behavioral issues; have the opportunity for better socialization; and remain happier and healthier during their time with GCHS. When hosting a long-term foster, your goal is to provide care for the animal, as well as advocating on their behalf in order to help them find the perfect permanent home.

Special Needs Fostering:

Special needs fosters care for animals with medical issues, behavioral issues, or animals that require specialized training to care for. The following are examples of special needs foster arrangements that we see, however, special needs animals are all unique and could have issues not presented here:

- **Standby:** Animals awaiting major treatment or surgery (pre-op)
- **Recovery:** Animals recovering from major treatment or surgery (post-op)
- **Heartworm Positive:** Animals who are Heartworm Positive and need more specialized care than can be given in the shelter environment.
- **Bucket List:** Also known as hospice, these animals may be terminally ill or elderly.
- **Bottle Babies:** Puppies and kittens who are separated from their mother and must be bottle fed.
- **Mom and Babies:** Litters of puppies and kittens who are with their mother and not yet weaned.
- **Behavioral:** Animals who are in need of training in order to correct behaviors such as excessive chewing, jumping, escaping, dog reactivity, or other identifiable behaviors.
- **Disabled:** Animals who are in some way disabled. Including but not limited to blindness, deafness, paralysis, or on multiple prescriptions for health concerns.

Foster Program Application, Acceptance, and Training: GCHS makes efforts to make fostering accessible to all individuals and families who are interested in hosting an animal in need. However, we do require the following in order to become a foster:

1. Complete the Foster Application (A copy can be found in the back of this handbook)
2. Review the Foster Handbook and sign the Foster Agreement
3. Watch for an email from our Volunteer & Foster Coordinator regarding your approval and next steps
4. Discuss your foster goals and interests with the Volunteer & Foster Coordinator in person, via email, or by phone.
5. You're ready to bring a pet home! For animals that do not require additional foster training, you can begin fostering as soon as you would like. Need a minute? Let us know when you're ready and we will work with you individually to match you with a pet in need.
6. If you are interested in a foster opportunity that requires additional training, please be sure to communicate your interests and our Volunteer & Foster Coordinator will contact you as training opportunities arise.

Preparations & Emotional Considerations: Before taking on the responsibility and commitment of taking on a foster animal, please consider your time availability, your ability to provide adequate facilities, and your emotional involvement in a foster animal.

Time: The time commitment for foster care will be either the same as if you adopted an animal – or possibly more! Bringing any new animal into the home will require time dedicated to general daily care, training, and socializing. Animals with special needs and some short-term fosters will require more specialized care in addition to the basics of animal care. Fosters will also need to bring their fosters to GCHS for medical appointments and potential adopter meet & greets.

We ask that you only take on the number of animals that you can house comfortably. If you find that you are in 'over your head' please contact your Volunteer & Foster Coordinator to discuss the situation and, if necessary, arrange a return appointment. We are always here to support you.

Adequate Support System: Please have the approval of everyone in the household prior to taking home a foster pet. If you will require help from any family members or roommates, please be sure the family members or roommates are appropriately informed and educated about the required care.

Emotional Considerations: Fostering can be fun and rewarding, but it is also a lot of work and can be emotionally taxing. The intensive care required for some fosters may be emotionally as well as physically demanding.

You will develop an emotional attachment to your foster animals, and you must face the reality that, in spite of our best efforts, not all foster animals will thrive. We do everything in our power to treat health and behavior problems that may befall all the animals in our care, but you must be prepared for the fact that some issues are not within our ability or in the best interest of the animal to treat. We never euthanize due to time or space.

In addition, you may find that even a happy ending can be bittersweet. Consider returning a litter of kittens that you bottle-fed since birth: they are all adopted within days, but you do *need* to say goodbye. Some fosters find this too difficult and opt to adopt their foster pets: before you make this sort of decision, be sure to read the section of this handbook entitled "Foster to Adopt." You may also discuss if this is the right decision for you with the Volunteer & Foster Coordinator. **If you ever need help either physically or emotionally, please do not hesitate to contact the Volunteer & Foster Coordinator. We are always here for you.**

Medical and Appointments

Animals can carry diseases that can be transmitted across species boundaries (zoonotic) and diseases that are only transmitted between members of the same species (non-zoonotic). All animals placed in foster care have been seen by a veterinarian or clinic staff before being placed. We try our best not to place any transmittable diseases in your home without your consent, but sometimes it does happen if the animal is not showing signs when being evaluated. *Please abide by our health and safety protocols to protect yourselves and your resident pets.*

Protecting resident pets: When bringing any new animal home, we strongly recommend that you keep your fosters and your resident pets separate at all times at a minimum of 5-7 days. This should help to provide the opportunity for many common infectious diseases to surface. You should *never* leave your resident pets and fosters alone together for any amount of time, unless approved by GCHS staff. We also require that fosters do not take their foster pets to any public areas like dog parks, etc. unless approved by GCHS staff.

All resident pets should be fully vaccinated and on flea prevention before a foster animal enters the home. If you have an immune-compromised animal, you need to be extra-cautious in your decisions to foster certain animals.

Protecting yourself: Zoonotic diseases are always of concern to those who handle or work with animals on a regular basis. You need not come into direct contact with an infected animal to contract a disease. Many zoonoses are transmitted via bodily fluids, and they can travel on skin, shoes, clothing, tools, litter boxes, and dishes (*i.e.*, fomites). Here are some guidelines to help prevent the spread of contagious diseases (if you have children, please be sure they follow these guidelines as well):

1. All fosters should **wash hands frequently** when handling animals.
2. Please use protection when cleaning feces and other animal-related messes.
3. One of the most effective and efficient methods to disinfect is with a 10% (10:1 dilution rate) fresh bleach-and-water solution. All areas (floors, walls, furniture, etc.) and materials (bedding, toys, litter boxes, food and water dishes, etc.) that have come into contact with foster animal(s) must be bleached before you expose new foster animals.
4. If possible use ceramic, glass or stainless-steel water and food dishes. These are easier to disinfect.
5. When you use a plastic litter box, it must be disinfected in a bleach solution as described above before use by the next foster animal.
6. Be familiar with the disease information provided on the tables (pages 18-20), and be sure to let your physician know that you work with shelter animals.

The vaccinations to protect against diseases are included in each description.

GCHS will provide needed vaccinations, deworming, and parasite tests for your foster animals. Please contact the Volunteer & Foster Coordinator if you suspect that your foster animal has parasites; an appointment will be set to assess and/or treat the animal.

Appointments: Once foster animals have been placed in your care you will be contacted regularly by our Volunteer & Foster Coordinator. Frequency of communication will be determined on an individual basis depending on the type of foster you have, your experience level, and your personal preferences and needs. Our contact methods are via text message, phone call, and email. During this time, your Volunteer & Foster Coordinator will help you schedule an appointment, get your supply refills, and answer general questions.

Please be familiar with the following appointment guidelines:

1. Supply pick-ups are during shelter hours unless otherwise arranged. Please notify GCHS of your supply needs approximately 3 days in advance so we can ensure we have the supplies you need when you come in.
2. When you arrive for a clinic appointment, please arrive on time. Our clinic has many patients to see, if you will be more than 10 minutes late we may have to reschedule or you may have a longer wait.
3. **Only staff are allowed to enter the Clinic area.** Foster parents may only enter the Clinic if requested by a staff member.
4. If you are a foster parent that is deemed “on call” you can be contacted at any time to provide a foster home. An appointment will be set to pick up your new foster animal(s) and supplies. You can contact the Volunteer & Foster Coordinator to place yourself “on call.”

Death of a Foster Animal: It is a sad fact that young puppies and kittens, through no fault of your own, and despite our best efforts, sometimes pass away. We call this “failure to thrive”. If you are a foster parent to newborn puppies and kittens this is more common.

Certain very sick adult fosters may also be at risk of dying. If an animal in your care should happen to die, please be sure to contact GCHS or the Volunteer & Foster Coordinator immediately. It is imperative we have the opportunity to examine the animal to determine the cause of death. We will handle disposal of the animal’s remains for you. **Please do not bury, cremate, or otherwise dispose of the animal.**

Please be aware that the GCHS foster program is made up of wonderful people who, just like you, have dedicated their time and efforts to care for unwanted cats and dogs. They, along with the Volunteer & Foster Coordinator are there to help you face the loss of a foster animal. Please do not be afraid to reach out. The loss of an animal is never easy, but please remember your participation is vital to the foster care program. This program saves the lives of thousands of animals.

Table 1: Known Zoonotic Diseases

Disease	Description	Treatment/Prognosis	Vaccination/Prevention
Rabies¹	Rabies is a fatal infection caused by a virus that infects the nervous system of mammals, including humans. The disease is found worldwide in wildlife populations of feral dogs, raccoons, bats, foxes, and skunks. Rabies occurs when infected saliva contacts the bloodstream through an animal bite or an open wound. If you are bitten by a mammal, contact your doctor immediately.	Rabies can be treated through an intensive program of vaccine shots during its incubation period; once symptoms present, it is nearly 100% fatal.	Rabies Vaccines for Dogs/Cats begins at 3 months old. The initial revax is in 1 year; revax thereafter is every 3 years. Dogs cannot be licensed in Pima County without proof of a rabies vaccination.
Roundworms²	Roundworms are parasitic nematodes particularly common in puppies. In the initial stages of infection, they may produce no symptoms other than diarrhea. Children are particularly susceptible to roundworms because they often play in the dirt and sand where the larvae reside. Once ingested, the roundworms will migrate to the lungs, liver, heart, brain and eyes—causing severe damage.	Deworming treatments are used for infection in pets as well as humans. Medication depends upon the species of worm. Without treatment, infections can cause severe medical complications for humans and canines.	Deworming treatments are given to all shelter dogs. Puppies receive a series of deworming treatments. Practicing good personal hygiene can help to prevent roundworm infection. Avoid areas where animals frequently defecate and clean up animal waste promptly. Wash your hands often.
Giardia³	Giardia is an intestinal infection that causes abdominal cramps, bloating, nausea, watery diarrhea, and weight loss. It is caused by a microscopic parasite found worldwide, and it travels via the fecal-oral route. This intestinal disease is common in cats and dogs.	Giardia infections usually clear up within six weeks. But you may have intestinal problems long after the parasites are gone. Testing & drugs are available. Several drugs are generally effective against giardia parasites, but not everyone responds to them.	Giardia can be prevented through proper and thorough hand washing. There is no drug to prevent giardia infection at this time.
Toxoplasmosis*	Toxoplasmosis is caused by a common parasite called <i>Toxoplasma gondii</i> . Symptoms vary from none at all to potentially life-threatening for those with underdeveloped immune systems. Cats are common carriers.	Many infected people and pets require no treatment. In cases requiring medication, antibiotics or anti-malarials are commonly prescribed.	Practice safe hygiene, wear gloves when cleaning feces & dirt, and avoid raw or uncooked meats. There is no vaccine to prevent toxoplasmosis at this time.
Ringworm	Ringworm is a fungus that is transmitted through spores. Physical contact with an infected animal is a common way to catch ringworm. Dry, scaly rings will appear after one to two weeks; these are usually reddish and confined to the hairier regions of the scalp, forearms and face. Hair will break off at the roots, creating bald spots.	Anti-fungal ointments are most commonly used to treat ringworm. Ringworm in humans is, generally speaking, easily treated and cured. More intensive treatment for cats may cure ringworm, however it can be fatal to very young kittens.	Ringworm can be prevented through proper and thorough hand washing and sterilizing infected areas with a 10% fresh bleach/water solution. Gloves should be worn when handling animals with known ringworm.
Sarcoptic Mange	The parasite that causes Sarcoptic Mange is transmitted through physical contact. Ask your medical doctor for more updated information.	Infected animals suffer blisters, scabs and hair loss and may require oral and possibly topical medication to treat. Animals should receive immediate attention by a veterinarian.	To help prevent Sarcoptic Mange, physical contact with infected animals and their bedding should be avoided.

¹Mayo Clinic. (Jan 2009) Rabies. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/rabies/DS00484>

²National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases. (Sept 2007) Parasitic Roundworm Diseases. *NIAID Fact Sheet*.

³Mayo Clinic. (May 2010) Giardia Infection (Giardiasis). <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/giardia-infection/DS00739>.

*Mayo Clinic. (June 2009) Toxoplasmosis. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/toxoplasmosis/DS00510>

Table 2: Common Diseases of Cats

Disease	Description	Treatment/Prognosis	Vaccination
Feline Panleukopenia (Distemper) ¹	<p>Cat distemper, or panleukopenia, is caused by a virus that compromises the cat's immune system and causes diarrhea and vomiting.</p> <p>The disease is thought to be non-zoonotic.</p>	<p>Treatment of secondary infections can be done with antibiotics, fluids, and medications to prevent serious symptoms; direct treatment of the virus is extremely difficult.</p>	<p>Part of the basic annual vaccination (FVRCP) for cats</p>
Feline URI: Upper Respiratory Infection	<p>Feline URI is caused by many viruses and/or bacteria, most often Feline Herpesvirus-1, Feline Calciivirus, <i>Chlamydophila felis</i>, <i>Mycoplasma</i>, and <i>Bordetella bronchiiseptica</i>. Symptoms include sneezing, running eyes, nasal discharge, red eyes and fever. It is very common in shelter cats.</p> <p>The disease is thought to be non-zoonotic, however humans with compromised immune systems, or those around a large cat population, may be able to catch a kitty cold.</p>	<p>Although cat colds can resolve untreated, they can also make a cat susceptible to pneumonia and other diseases in a shelter environment. Treatment with antibiotics and IV fluids is common. Eye ointment is sometimes used as well.</p>	<p>Part of the basic annual vaccination (FVRCP) for cats</p>
Feline Leukemia ²	<p>Feline leukemia virus (FeLV) is a retrovirus transmitted through saliva and nasal secretions. The disease can lead to cancer, blood disorders, and immune deficiency in cats.</p> <p>The disease is thought to be non-zoonotic.</p>	<p>There is no known treatment for FeLV; cats can live for years with FeLV if secondary infections are treated and a healthy lifestyle is prescribed.</p> <p>Foster cats and kittens will be tested. Since kittens under 3 months of age may show a "false" negative when tested, it is a good idea to keep them completely separate from your own cats.</p>	<p>The FeLV vaccine is required for cats that spend any time outdoors. It is an annual vaccine.</p> <p>If you foster kittens or cats, it is extremely important to be sure that your own pets are fully vaccinated at all times.</p>
Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) and Feline AIDS ³	<p>FIV is a retrovirus that is most commonly transmitted through biting. It leads to a compromised immune system and resulting secondary infection along with other, serious medical problems.</p> <p>The disease is thought to be non-zoonotic.</p>	<p>There is no known treatment for FIV; cats can live for years with FIV if secondary infections are treated and a healthy lifestyle is prescribed.</p> <p>The FIV test is valid for cats older than 6 months. This test is usually given in conjunction with the Feline Leukemia test.</p>	

¹Pawprints and Purrs, Inc. (2010) Cat Health Care: Feline Panleukopenia (Distemper). <http://www.sniksnak.com/cathealth/distemper.html>

²Cornell Feline Health Center (2004) Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV). Cornell University, College of Veterinary Medicine. <http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/resources/brochure/felv.html>

³Cornell Feline Health Center (2003) Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV). Cornell University, College of Veterinary Medicine. <http://www.vet.cornell.edu/FHC/resources/brochure/fiv.html>

Table 3: Common Diseases of Dogs

Disease	Description	Treatment/Prognosis	Vaccination
Canine Distemper ¹	<p>Canine distemper is caused by a paramyxovirus and can affect dogs of all ages. It can spread through bodily secretions as well as through the air. It is, therefore, highly contagious.</p> <p>Canine distemper can lead to a plethora of respiratory, gastrointestinal, and neurological symptoms. It can also lead to death.</p> <p>The disease is not thought to be transmittable to humans.</p>	<p>There is no direct treatment for canine distemper. Treatment of secondary illness and special care may lead to a complete or partial recovery, however the disease can still be fatal.</p>	<p>GCHS vaccinates our dogs with DAPP. The “D” is the distemper vaccine.</p> <p>Annual vaccinations protect against these serious and often fatal canine diseases. Your own dogs must be kept currently vaccinated at all times.</p>
Canine Parvovirus ²	<p>Parvovirus is a small virus that tends to prefer a single species as host. Canine parvo is not known to be transmissible to humans, though a strain isolated in 2000 has been found to transmit to cats.</p> <p>Researchers have shown that parvovirus is present in almost all environments, however puppies tend to be at the highest risk because of their underdeveloped immune system. Unvaccinated puppies can easily catch parvo by licking themselves or other infected surfaces. Once infected, a puppy can die from dehydration due to vomiting/diarrhea or from septic death.</p>	<p>Active canine parvo is generally treated with a combination IV fluids, antibiotics, nausea control medication, and frequent testing to evaluate treatment regime.</p> <p>Parvo is a serious and potentially deadly canine disease.</p>	<p>GCHS vaccinates our dogs with DAPP. Part of this vaccination combo is the parvo virus vaccine.</p> <p>Annual vaccinations protect against these serious and often fatal canine diseases. Your own dogs must be kept currently vaccinated at all times.</p>
Kennel Cough ³	<p>Kennel cough (or canine URI, or canine infectious tracheobronchitis) is caused by many viruses and/or bacteria, most often parainfluenza, mycoplasma, and <i>Bordetella bronchiseptica</i>. Canine herpes virus and canine adenovirus type 2 may also infect dogs. Symptoms include dry cough, nasal discharge, and fever. It is very common in shelter dogs.</p> <p>The disease is thought to be non-zoonotic, however humans with compromised immune systems, or those around a large dog population, may be able to catch a doggie cold.</p>	<p>Left untreated, kennel cough usually resolves on its own, however it can lead to pneumonia and can be lethal to animals with underdeveloped or suppressed immune systems.</p> <p>For this reason, shelter dogs with kennel cough are immediately isolated and treated with antibiotics.</p>	<p>Intranasal Bordetella (INB) is given to all dogs and puppies at time of intake at the shelter. Your own dogs should be kept up to date on their Bordetella vaccinations.</p> <p>The DAPP also includes an adenovirus component and a parainfluenza component.</p>
Canine Coccidia (Coccidiosis)*	<p>Coccidia are parasitic protozoa. The primary sign of an animal suffering with coccidiosis is diarrhea. Blood and mucous may be present, especially in advanced cases. Severely affected animals may also vomit, lose their appetite, become dehydrated, and in some instances, die from the disease. Most infected puppies encountered are in the four to twelve week age group.</p> <p>The type of coccidia (<i>Isospora</i>) that affects dogs and cats is not thought to be transmissible to humans.</p>	<p>Drugs to inhibit coccidian reproduction can successfully treat infected dogs.</p>	<p>Since coccidian are spread through feces, strict adherence to sanitary practices is recommended. This includes disinfecting, swift removal of feces, and separation of food/water area from area of defecation.</p>

¹ (2009) Canine Distemper. [CanineDistemper.org](http://www.CanineDistemper.org)

² Mar Vista Animal Medical Center. (2009) Canine Parvovirus. http://www.marvistavet.com/html/body_canine_parvovirus.html

³ Foster and Smith (2010) Kennel Cough (Infectious Tracheobronchitis) in Dogs. <http://www.peteducation.com/article.cfm?c=2+2102&aid=452>

- Foster and Smith (2010) Coccidia (Coccidiosis): A Cause of Diarrhea. <http://www.peteducation.com/article.cfm?c=2+2090&aid=727>

Emergency Protocol

Medical Symptoms and Conditions:

When to call for URGENT help and when to WAIT until open hours of operation

Emergency/Urgent Medical Issues:

- Fading kitten: cold, lethargic, unable to stand
- Mouth Breathing
- Aspirating (for bottle babies: milk coming out of the nose) AND choking/unable to breathe
- Head slumped in food or water bowl
- Unable to swallow
- Seizures
- Intense Pain
- Bleeding profusely
- Vomits multiple times in a row and cannot hold down food
- Behavior that seems extremely out of the ordinary

Non-Urgent Medical Issues:

- Aspirates (for bottle babies: milk comes out of nose) but can breathe normally afterward
- Vomits but is able to hold food down
- Diarrhea
- Sneezing
- Coughing
- Eye infection
- Straining to urinate or defecate
- Losing weight
- Decreased/no appetite
- Twitching
- Unsteady walking or walking in circles
- Hair loss
- Bloated belly
- Worms in feces
- Skin lesions
- Fleas, ear mites, other external parasites

Please follow the following protocol if you feel like your foster pet is sick:

1. Contact the Volunteer & Foster Coordinator. Please leave a message if you get voice mail and/or send a text message.
2. If you do not receive a response in a timely manner please contact the GCHS office during open hours and ask to speak with our Clinic Manager. The GCHS phone number is (361) 225-0845. Shelter hours are Mon-Sat 11am – 6pm and Sun 12pm – 5pm.
3. Please be prepared to give the staff member information including your name, the animal's name or ID number, age of the animal, the symptoms of illness and information regarding elimination, food and water consumption.

4. **Please do not drop in without calling first!** If you are asked to bring the animal in, the Volunteer & Foster Coordinator or clinic staff member will arrange a specific time to see the animal. Please keep in mind that if you “drop in” you will be asked to schedule an appointment. **Emergencies do not need an appointment but we do need to know you are coming so please call first!**
5. If an animal is not eating much, vomiting, or has diarrhea, but is still active, alert, eating, and drinking, you can probably wait until the next day to receive help, which the Volunteer & Foster Coordinator can help you determine. If the animal is lethargic and shows no interest in food or water, please contact as soon as possible. For kittens under five weeks, not eating, vomiting, and diarrhea may constitute an emergency.

After Business Hours: If you find yourself in an after-hours emergency situation (refer to emergency and non-emergency list above) and you cannot get a hold of the Volunteer & Foster Coordinator, please take your foster pet to VCA Oso Creek, 7721 S Staples Street in Corpus Christi. This is a 24-hour emergency vet clinic.

When speaking to the staff at VCA, please make it clear that this animal is owned by Gulf Coast Humane Society and that you are a foster parent for GCHS. Billing for your visit will go directly to GCHS. If you take your foster animal to another clinic or veterinarian, please be aware that you may be asked to pay for treatment by that clinic up front. GCHS can later reimburse you for expenses incurred.

Important: If you choose to take the animal to a private veterinarian for a non-emergency issue, GCHS cannot guarantee reimbursement for expenses incurred.

Kitten & Puppy Growth & Development Timeline

7-10 days: Eyes open (kittens)

2 weeks: Begin walking (kittens); eyes open (puppies)

3 weeks: Animal can now see and regulate body temperature; puppies can now walk; kittens begin litter box training

4 weeks: Animal can run

5 weeks: Kittens start to climb readily; encourage wet & dry food eating for puppies and kittens

6 weeks: Kittens climb well (well-coordinated movements); force wet & dry food eating for puppies and kittens

8 weeks: Kittens and puppies approaching healthy weights for sterilization surgery

IMPORTANT: Under-vaccinated puppies and kittens are never to be taken outside for any reason other than transport to and from the shelter. It is a risk to their health!

Vaccinations: For kitten and puppy vaccinations, appointments will be made through the Volunteer & Foster Coordinator every 2 weeks starting at 6 weeks of age. Adult cats and dogs may also need a booster vaccination or checkup. Please follow instructions given for your specific foster animal.

Emergencies: For kitten and puppy emergencies, first call the Volunteer & Foster Coordinator. They will direct you to bring the animal(s) either to GCHS or to VCA Oso Creek for an after-hours emergency. If you cannot reach the Volunteer & Foster Coordinator, please refer to the guide of emergencies vs. non-emergencies and use your best judgement when deciding if the animal needs emergency medical care.

Cleanliness: Puppies and kittens without a mother can get pretty messy. It is important that you do your best to keep them as clean as possible. One way to accomplish this is to stroke each puppy or kitten with a warm, damp cloth, using short strokes to mimic the mother's tongue or use the baby wipes you are provided with at room temperature. A flea comb may be used to remove dried feces or food from the fur.

Be sure to dry the puppy or kitten well so it won't get a chill. Check each puppy or kitten frequently and thoroughly from one end to the other—sometimes dried feces can become caked on the underside of the tail or between their toes. Dried feces may be softened and removed by dipping the puppy's or kitten's back end into a basin of warm water and carefully combing through the coat with the flea comb. Many puppies or 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.

General Pet Care

Your foster animals will have varied needs, according to which animal(s) you take into your home. Here are some tips for the general care of all foster dogs and cats:

Feeding and Grooming: We ask that you feed only the foods we provide to you. No table scraps, please. Food will be provided by GCHS. For drinking, fresh water should be available at all times. We never offer cow's milks, as dogs and cats cannot properly digest it.

Grooming for your foster animal(s) will change depending on the animal type, hair or fur type, and temperament of the animal. Not all animals respond to grooming the same – but every animal deserves to be clean! Please consult the Volunteer & Foster Coordinator if you are struggling with grooming such as bathing, brushing, nail trims, ear cleaning, gland expression, or other grooming and sanitation concerns. We may recommend bringing the animal to GCHS for grooming or that you see a professional private groomer. Please arrange this with the Volunteer & Foster Coordinator before making any grooming appointments.

Traveling: GCHS will provide an animal transport carrier to foster homes. Not only is this a safe way to transport your foster animals to and from the shelter, the plastic carrier may also serve as a familiar home and crate-training tool for your fosters.

Please keep in mind that we discourage traveling on vacation or other extended trip with foster animals that have special needs such as bottle babies or recovering animals. In case of an emergency, it is best to ensure the animal remains close to GCHS and our approved emergency clinic, VCA Oso Creek. If you need to travel or leave your foster animal, please contact GCHS to arrange for boarding or return of your foster animal.

Confinement Area: Be sure to house your foster(s) in an appropriate area. Try to use a space that is easy to sanitize (ex., tile flooring). If you are fostering a litter of puppies or kittens, a safe enclosure such as a Large kennel, playpen, or folding exercise pen might be desirable. This type of enclosure will allow you to make observations while providing plenty of room for a mother and her growing litter. **Please do not leave very young kittens or puppies in an area with couches, tables, etc. unattended. They can easily fall & sustain injury.**

Toys: We all love toys, but do keep in mind that the wrong toy can kill your foster animal. Please be sure to keep any toys that can be easily dismantled and swallowed out of reach of your foster animal. Remove any small, loose parts or button eyes, just as you would for a human baby. Discard any toys that become excessively worn. For kittens/cats, toy mice and balls make them happy and can be reused if washed in a bleach solution between litters. Safe puppy/dog toys include sterilized Kong-type toys, nylon toys (such as Nylabones), hard rubber balls, and tugs.

As with human children, puppies and kittens will play with anything they can find. Drapes, lampshades, table doilies, electrical cords and crystal ornaments may look like as much fun as the safe toys listed above. Take special care to puppy-proof and/or kitten-proof all areas in your home where fosters will have access. As your foster animal(s) grow, their climbing abilities will improve, so anything irreplaceable should be kept well out of reach.

Socializing Your Foster Animals with People: Remember: you are the best toys our foster animals have. One of the most important parts of your job as a foster parent is to convince your foster animal(s) that humans are kind and loving. Some animals will adjust quickly to you and their new environment, but to some, you may seem like a strange and frightening giant! Be patient and allow your foster(s) time to acclimate to new surroundings. This may mean extra physical attention, or simply allowing the animal to explore on its own. We are always here to lend advice. Invite friends and family over to help socialize! Just remember to make sure everyone is clean and sanitized before interacting, including clothes and shoes.

Socializing Your Foster Animals with Other Animals: Socializing with other animals is extremely beneficial to the growth and development of both kittens and puppies. This can also be true for adult animals!

All animals have their own personalities, likes, and dislikes. GCHS will do its best to inform you of any known likes or dislikes in regards to other animals. However, it is the foster's responsibility to make sure all animal introductions happen safely. Dogs should be introduced on-leash initially. Cats should be introduced slowly over time. The Volunteer & Foster Coordinator will be able to give you more specialized advice and recommendations as far as introductions depending on the animal in your care.

IMPORTANT: Nursery puppies and kittens, as well as any other under-vaccinated animal is not permitted to socialize with other animals until their vaccines are up to date. This is for the safety of your foster animal! We do not want an under-vaccinated animal to accidentally get sick.

Foster Supply Checklists

When you are taking home a foster animal, our Outreach Manager will use the appropriate checklist to ensure that you have all the supplies you will need to get started, please be aware that most of these items are donated. If we don't have donations we may not be able to provide every item on the list:

Adult Cats

- Appropriately-sized bowls
- Litter box
- Litter (clay, scoopable, or pine)
- Blanket and approved toys
- Brush, if applicable
- Approved food

Adult Dogs

- Appropriately-sized bowls
- Puppy pads or newspaper for small dogs (optional)
- Blanket and approved toys
- Kennel for kennel training
- Approved food
- Heart worm prevention

Puppies

- Appropriately-sized bowls
 - Heavy bowls or puppy troughs are best for active puppies
- Puppy pads, newspapers, or towels
- Travel Kennel or live in kennel
- Enclosed gate ("X-pen") if available and needed
 - Helps with sanitation for the un-potty-trained puppies
- Lots of blankets and approved toys
- Approved food

Kittens

- Appropriately-sized ceramic or stainless steel bowls
 - Very shallow bowls for very young kittens
- Litter box
- Litter
- Blanket and approved toys
- Approved food

Bottle Babies/Very Young Puppies & Kittens: Additional Supplies

- Bottle or syringe
- Heating pad
- Approved formula

Be aware that you will need to bring foster puppies and kittens to the shelter about every two weeks for vaccinations, weigh-ins, and deworming. Supplies will only be delivered under emergency circumstances as well as any pick up or drop off of your foster animal(s). Please make sure you have reliable transportation.

GCHS will supply crates, food/formula, bottles, litter, collars, leashes, harness, and other items as needed. GCHS will always provide any medications your foster animal(s) need. All supplies will be distributed to volunteers by a GCHS staff member. Please do not pick up the supplies from GCHS stock on your own unless instructed. We will provide you with everything we can to care for your foster animals.

Adoption Ready!

Depending on the type of foster you have, your next steps may look different.

Puppies and Kittens: When your puppies or kittens are at a healthy weight, are free of illnesses, and ready for sterilization surgery, your Volunteer & Foster Coordinator will reach out to you for your return appointment. Please note, if your puppies or kittens do not make their goal weight at this appointment, you will be asked to continue fostering until their goal weight is made. If this isn't possible, please let us know right away so we can prepare additional arrangements.

Field Trip and Sleepover Returns: When returning an animal from a field trip or sleepover, your return time will be determined before you leave the building with the animal. This is an appointment, so we please ask that you arrive on time. If you arrive more than 10 minutes late, we may need to reschedule you or you may have a longer wait time. If you're not ready to say goodbye – that's ok! Talk to a staff member about fostering or adopting your animal.

Adults Returning to GCHS for Adoption: Similar to puppies and kittens, you will need to schedule an appointment for the return of your foster animal to GCHS. This process is much simpler than puppies and kittens as they should be ready to go when you bring them in. Animals with medical conditions who are pre-op or post-op may require clinic approval to come back into the shelter.

Please note: The front lobby can be quite chaotic at times, and animals will be present that may be sick or aggressive. Please do not remove any cats, kittens, or puppies from their carriers in the receiving lobby. Keep adult dogs on a short leash and do not allow them to interact with other dogs. Likewise, please refrain from visiting different areas of the shelter or petting stray or shelter animals.

The third step is to let the Outreach Manager know whether you are available to foster again, or if you are ready for a break. If you have difficulty parting with your foster, you may feel like taking another group of foster animals home right away. If you would rather take a break before the next assignment, that's okay too. Please be sure to let us know when you'll be ready for more, so the Outreach Manager can contact you the next time we have a bundle of love in need.

The final step is to remember to pat yourself on the back for having done a great job. Your hard work and loving care have paid off, and you've quite literally been a life-saver! We sincerely thank you for giving the gift of life to those animals that might not have been so lucky without your efforts!

Available for Adoption While in Foster: For all fosters (but specifically long-term fosters) you are an Animal Advocate! The best thing you can do when fostering is to advocate for your fosters' adoption. We highly encourage participation when it comes to sharing photos or videos of your foster pet on social media, taking to friends and family about your foster animal, and taking your foster animal out and about to talk about their availability.

The best-case scenario for any animal in foster is for the foster family to find that pet a new home. We call this re-homing. Re-homing is great for pets because it keeps them out of the shelter and in homes where they belong. If you find a forever family for your foster, let us know! We will facilitate the adoption paperwork with the new family and ensure a smooth transition. Keep in mind, that you may (and likely will) be asked to schedule meet & greet times with potential adopters if you do not re-home the animal yourself. These will be scheduled with both you and the potential adopter's schedules in mind.

Here are some fun ways you can become an Animal Advocate:

- Create an Instagram or Facebook page to showcase photos and videos.
- Take your foster pet to the park or a pet friendly store – be open with others regarding the animal's availability. Now's the time to talk about how great this animal is! (Bonus points for "Adopt Me" harnesses, leashes, and bandanas).
- Talk to friends and family who may be interested in adoption and why this is the pet for them.
- Post on local social media pages and websites for re-homing animals. Make sure you say that you're a GCHS foster.

IMPORTANT: Please do not "give away" your foster pet. All adoptions must go through GCHS. Once you've found a new home – your work is done! We'll handle the particulars. Thank you for finding their forever family!

Even if you don't have a foster right now – you can still be an Animal Advocate! Maybe you have a favorite cat or dog at the shelter who seems to go overlooked. You can still share pictures, videos, and fun stories with friends, family, coworkers, and more! Spreading awareness will always help more animals get adopted. Become a voice for the voiceless!

Adopting Your Foster Pet: Yes, we want all of our foster animals to find loving, forever homes. But before you do decide to adopt your foster pet, please ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this my first foster pet? If so, is it a puppy or kitten? Please keep in mind that puppies and kittens are highly adoptable once they return to the shelter. In the case of puppies and kittens, we strongly suggest fostering a few different litters over time before deciding to adopt.
- Did I take in a single animal or a litter? If you take home a single puppy or kitten, you are much more likely to get attached than if you try a small litter.
- Can I continue to provide foster care if I adopt this foster? **If we lose you as a foster home, we lose the ability to give many other animals a new chance at life.** Please remember this in making your decision.
- Is there something that may prohibit this animal from being adoptable? Does it have behavioral or health issues that decrease adoptability? If so, then maybe your foster is indeed in need of your forever home!

If you do decide to adopt, please be contact the Volunteer & Foster Coordinator so that we may send you the adoption paperwork your animal. Please note that any unaltered (not spayed or neutered) animal is required to be altered before your adoption is finalized.

Foster Application

Please Print Clearly:

Name: _____ Today's Date: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

Primary Phone: _____ Secondary Phone: _____

Birthday: _____ E-mail Address: _____

Emergency Contact:

Name: _____ Relationship: _____

Primary Phone: _____ Secondary Phone: _____

E-mail address: _____

Questionnaire:

How did you hear about fostering with us? _____

What Parts of our Volunteer program most interest you? *Please circle all that apply:*

Feline Canine Short-Term Long-Term Special Needs

Bottle Babies Moms with Babies Nursery Babies (not bottle fed)

Bucket List (seniors and terminally ill) Medical (pre-op, post-op, permanently disabled)

Heartworm Positive Field Trips Sleep Overs Behavioral

Please list any prior foster or animal experience you have:

Please describe why you are interested in fostering with GCHS:

Please list all other pets in the home including species, breed, age, spay/neuter and vaccination status:

Veterinarian Name and Phone Number:

Please describe where the animal will be kept and how many hours the animal will be left alone daily. Please include any other relevant information as you see fit:

Number of people in your household: _____ Number of Children: _____

Do all members of your household agree to bring a foster animal into the home: _____

I certify that the above information is true and correct. I understand that any falsification of the above information may be grounds for denial of this application or my foster status.

Printed Name:

Signature:

Date:

The Foster Care Agreement

I, _____ agree to act as temporary Foster Home for the Gulf Coast Humane Society (herein known as GCHS.) I agree to abide by the following conditions whenever fostering animals for GCHS.

All animals entering foster care must have gone through GCHS protocols prior to leaving GCHS.

1. Any animal(s) fostered by me will be kept in an approved GCHS facility. I understand that any animal(s) I foster are the property of GCHS, and I agree to turn it/them over to GCHS immediately upon request. I agree to bring any animal(s) fostered by me to the shelter for exams, vaccinations, weight checks, or other reason deemed necessary by GCHS at a mutually agreed upon date and/or time.
2. I agree to inform GCHS if I will be away and/or unable to care for the animal(s) fostered by me. This includes, but is not limited to, illness, hospital stays, vacations, and business trips. GCHS will find a temporary foster home for the animal(s) or may house the animal(s) in the clinic during this time.
3. I agree to a premises check upon the request of GCHS which can include a visual inspection of the living quarters of all GCHS foster animals in that environment and testing for transmissible disease.
4. I understand that I am responsible for adhering to all GCHS standards of care and applicable local and state laws dealing with animal welfare. Any animal(s) fostered by me will be fed, watered and exercised appropriately. I agree to provide an adequate and nutritious diet, as approved by GCHS, and will not feed anything that is not approved by GCHS to my foster animal(s). Although GCHS will make every attempt to furnish food and/or litter for foster care volunteers, I understand that the availability of these supplies is based on donations from the public and limited to stock on hand. *I agree to give proper notice of supply needs.*
5. I will not allow any dogs or puppies to have any unsupervised off-leash time. I will keep them in a kennel, crate, secure room, and/or play pin when I am gone from home for their safety. I will not allow foster cats, kittens, or puppies to go outside at anytime except to transport them to and from the shelter or to a veterinarian, if needed. I agree to transport any foster cats, kittens, puppies and small dogs in a sturdy carrier. I agree to transport any foster animal(s) in an enclosed vehicle only, and I will not allow them to ride in the bed of a pickup or a convertible.
6. I agree that dogs and puppies will not be kept outside unless otherwise discussed and approved by the Foster Care Administrator.
7. I understand that GCHS will take every precaution to ensure that any animal(s) I foster are reasonably healthy and that any known health problems will be disclosed to me prior to my taking the animal into my home, but GCHS cannot be held responsible for any unforeseen health problem that may develop after the animal(s) is/are in my care. I agree to inform GCHS immediately of any health problems with any foster animal in my care. I understand that GCHS may require me to return my foster animal(s) to the shelter to assess or treat any health problem, at its discretion.

8. I agree to provide adequate, positive socialization for any animal(s) fostered by me to help ensure their temperament will be as sound as possible. I also agree, when requested, to give a progress report to GCHS. I agree to bring my foster animal(s) in to the shelter for any required vaccinations, de-worming, or other medication prescribed and provided by GCHS at no cost to me. When the foster period is over, I will return the animal(s), and will do so at the agreed upon time.
9. I agree to keep my foster animal(s) separate from my own pets (unless approved), and that the possibility of foster animals fighting, injuring, or spreading illness to my own pets does exist. I agree that I will keep my own pet up to date on vaccines and de-wormers according to my own veterinarian, while I am fostering any animal(s) for GCHS. I understand that if I choose to allow my foster animal(s) and my own pet(s) to have access to each other, I do so at my own risk, and will not hold GCHS liable for any illness or injury that may occur to my own pet(s).
10. I agree to keep GCHS animals safe from harm and illness as a result of contact with resident pets.
11. I understand the potential for contagious illness is high in animals. Therefore, I agree I will not foster more than one litter at one time. I agree not to mix animals from more than one litter unless approved by GCHS. I also agree not to foster animals from any other organization while I am fostering for GCHS, unless granted specific approval by GCHS.
12. I assume responsibility for any events that occur in connection with my fostering of an animal for GCHS. I understand the possibility of my children or others being bitten, scratched, or contracting disease does exist. I agree to be responsible for my children and anyone else handling any animal(s) fostered by me in a safe and hygienic manner, and will not hold GCHS responsible for any injuries that may result from my failure to do so. ***I agree to notify a GCHS representative immediately of any bites that break the skin*** that occurs to any person or animal while any foster animal is in my care.
13. Any animal fostered by me is to be **adopted to a permanent home only under the supervision of GCHS, to an adopter approved by GCHS.** All foster animals must be returned to GCHS for sterilization if not already sterilized. Completion of adoption paperwork prior to permanent adoption is required. I understand that if I find a suitable home for any animal that I am fostering, all of the above conditions must apply, and that the adopter must pay the adoption fee.
14. If I or any member of my immediate household chooses to adopt an animal(s) fostered by me, I agree to abide by all conditions of adoptions. I also understand that said animal(s) must first be returned to the shelter for sterilization surgery (if not yet sterilized), adoption paperwork must be completed, and any applicable fees paid.

I have read and agree to the above terms:

Signed _____ **Date** _____