



Foster Manual 2026



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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Contact Information | 2 |
| Thank You | 3 |
| A Guide to Our Foster Program | 3 |
| Foster Expectations | 4 |
| Preparing for Your Foster | 5 |
| A Guide to Our Foster Animals | 6 |
| Adoptions | 7 |
| Marketing Your Foster | 8 |
| Basic Care | 9 |
| Medical Basics | 9 |
| Common Illnesses for Foster Pets..... | 11 |
| Behavior | 12 |
| Dogs..... | 13 |
| Cats | 16 |
| Additional Resources | 18 |

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| Emergency Line | | |

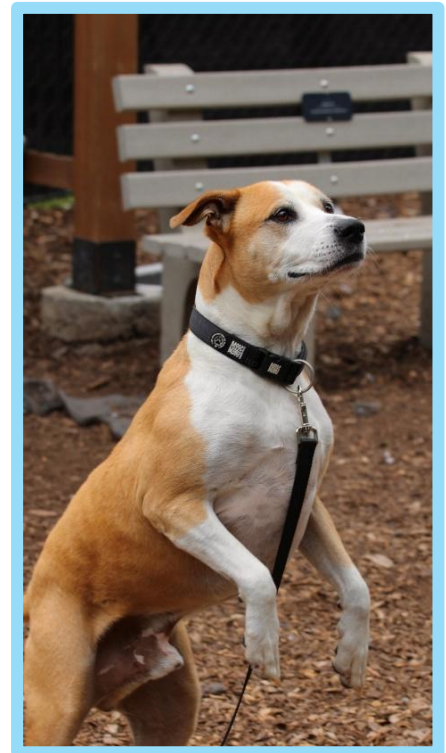
Thank You

Thank you for joining the SPCA Westchester Foster Program!

Foster caregivers are vital to our mission, helping us provide animals with care, stability, and a supportive home environment. By opening your home to a foster animal, you directly support their well-being and help them adjust, recover, and prepare for adoption into permanent homes. Every foster experience, no matter the length, makes a meaningful difference.

We truly appreciate the responsibility and commitment involved in fostering, and we're grateful for your dedication. Your support allows us to help more animals in need and improve their quality of life.

Thank you again for being part of our lifesaving work.

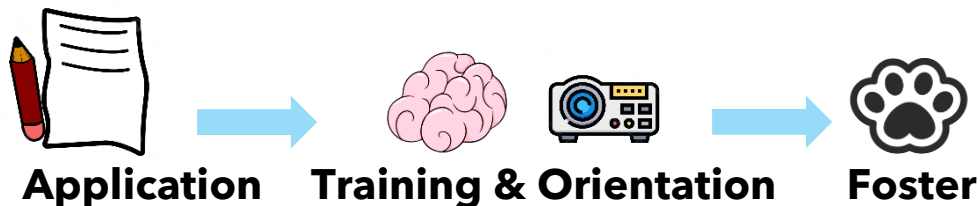


A Guide to Our Foster Program

Foster Process

SPCA Westchester is committed to a **barrier-free foster program**. Our goal is to make fostering accessible while maintaining high standards of care for every animal.

The foster process has **three simple steps**:



Application

All prospective caregivers are required to complete the foster application in full. The information provided enables our team to determine the most appropriate match based on your home environment, lifestyle, and level of experience.

References and housing permissions may be verified to ensure that all foster placements are safe, suitable, and in the best interest of both the caregiver and the animal.

Training & Orientation

To ensure consistent, high-quality care for all animals, foster caregivers are required to complete two training courses as part of the onboarding process:

1. **New York State Companion Animal Care Standards Act Training (Article 26-C Compliance)**

This training is required to comply with New York State regulations. Instructions and a completion checklist will be provided in your approval email.

2. **Foster Orientation (Hybrid Format)**

This orientation provides an overview of program expectations, foster care types, policies, procedures, and available resources to support you throughout your fostering experience.

SPCA Westchester may also offer additional in-house training opportunities throughout the year. These sessions provide valuable opportunities to expand your knowledge, strengthen your skills, and connect with fellow foster caregivers.

Fostering

Upon completion of the required training and orientation, you will be eligible to begin fostering. To remain an active foster caregiver, you are expected to adhere to the standards of care and responsibilities outlined throughout this manual and in the signed Foster Care Agreement, maintaining compliance for the duration of each foster placement.

Foster Expectations

Basic Care

Foster caregivers are responsible to meet all basic welfare needs consistently, including:

- Feeding as instructed
- Providing fresh, clean water always
- Maintaining a clean-living environment
- Providing regular bathroom breaks
- Litter box care: scooped daily and fully changed on a regular basis.



Health and Medical Care

SPCA Westchester cannot guarantee an animal's health at the time of placement. Foster caregivers serve as the primary advocates for their foster animal's well-being and are responsible for the following:

- Monitoring any changes in health or behavior
- Administering medications as directed
- Attending all scheduled veterinary appointments
- Reporting any concerns promptly to SPCA Westchester staff

Documentation and Communication

Foster caregivers are asked to provide regular and timely updates on their foster animal's progress, personality, and any changes in health or behavior. To support this, caregivers are required to complete a weekly progress report for each foster animal. The Weekly Wag/Purr

Progress Report helps track behavior, health, and personality updates, using the same system our animal care team uses for in-house animals to maintain consistent documentation and care standards.

Completed reports should be sent to the foster coordinator by email.

Preparing for Your Foster

It's important to prepare your home and gather the necessary supplies before welcoming your first foster animal. This helps ensure a smooth transition and provides a safe, comfortable environment for your new companion.

Supplies

SPCA Westchester is a not-for-profit organization with limited resources. Essential supplies are provided to foster caregivers based on availability. If caregivers choose to purchase additional items, reimbursement is not available; however, a tax-deductible donation receipt may be provided upon request.

Common supplies foster caregivers may need include:

- **Feeding items:** wet and dry food, prescription diets (if applicable), food and water dishes
- **Environmental items:** bedding, crates, playpens, pee pads, litter boxes, non-clumping litter, carriers, baby gates
- **Enrichment items:** Kongs, durable and soft toys, lick mats, puzzle toys
- **Training items:** leashes, harnesses, collars
- **Bottle baby supplies:** KMR/PMR, heating discs, scales, bottles, Miracle Nipples

Housing

Your new foster animal will likely be curious about their new environment, so it's important to prepare your home before they arrive. Housing needs may vary depending on the animal and their individual requirements.

To help ensure a safe space, foster caregivers should:

- Block off small spaces and openings (if their head fits, they fit)
- Keep doors and windows securely closed
- Keep wires, cords, ropes, and strings out of reach
- Use secure lids on trash cans and keep toilet lids closed
- Remove small choking hazards (hair ties, pins, paperclips, etc.)
- Store cleaning supplies, chemicals, medications, and supplements safely out of reach
- Remove or secure plants, as many may be toxic to animals
- **Never** leave small children or household pets unsupervised with foster animals

Different foster types may require different housing setups. For example:

- Puppies may need a crate or easy-to-clean room

- Kittens may need a kitten-proof room or playpen
- Medical or shy animals may need a quiet, low-stress space

Regardless of **outdoor space**, puppies and dogs should never be left outside unsupervised and must always be supervised in fenced yards.

A Guide to Our Foster Animals

Young Puppies & Kittens **Commitment Time:** 2 days to 4 weeks

Juvenile animals are often among those most in need of immediate foster placement. They are typically too old for bottle feeding but too young or not ready for adoption.

- Ages range from 5-16 weeks
- Able to eat and eliminate independently
- Typically require bathroom breaks every 1-3 hours
- Should not be left alone for more than 4-6 hours
- Younger animals require more frequent check-ins and supervision



Bottle Babies **Commitment Time:** 1-5 weeks

Bottle babies are orphaned animals who require round-the-clock care. They are unable to regulate their body temperature, eat, or eliminate without assistance, and foster caregivers are responsible for meeting all these needs.

These animals are typically fed milk replacers or a gruel mixture until they can eat independently. Daily weighing is essential to monitor growth and identify any early health concerns. Bottle babies are also unvaccinated and therefore more susceptible to illness.

For full care instructions, please refer to the **Expectant Moms and Bottle Baby Guide**.

Pregnant and Nursing Mothers **Commitment Time:** 4 to 13 weeks

Pregnant and nursing animals can become stressed in a shelter environment, which may impact their ability to nurse. They should be kept in a quiet, low-stress space without access from other household pets.

- Maintain a warm, draft-free nursing area
- Newborns are unable to regulate their body temperature and rely on their mother, littermates, and external heat sources for warmth
- Daily weight checks are essential to ensure healthy growth
 - If weight gain is inadequate, supplemental bottle feeding may be required
- Mothers should be separated from their litter once puppies or kittens reach 8 weeks of age
- Milk production typically ceases within 2-3 weeks following separation

For additional information, please refer to the **Expectant Moms and Bottle Baby Guide**.

Shy Animals **Commitment Time:** Varies

Shy animals benefit from time outside the shelter environment to decompress and feel safe. Placement is determined on a case-by-case basis depending on each animal's needs.

- Best suited for quiet, adult-only homes or homes with older children
- In most cases, foster animals should not interact with household pets; however, some shy animals may benefit from the presence of a calm, confident resident animal. This will be discussed during the meet-and-greet process



Medical Animals **Commitment Time:** 2 to 8 weeks

Animals recovering from illness or surgery often heal more effectively in a home environment. Medical instructions will be provided at the time of pickup.

- May require medication administration or physical therapy multiple times per day
- Sick or recovering animals must be kept separate from household pets

Permanent Foster Animals **Commitment Time:** Long-Term Permanence

Some animals with chronic medical or behavioral needs do not thrive in a shelter environment and may be overlooked by potential adopters. Permanent foster caregivers provide a long-term home for these animals, while SPCA Westchester typically covers most medical expenses related to the animal's condition. Foster caregivers are responsible for routine daily care.

Fospice

Commitment Time: *Varies - Permanent*

Unfortunately, some animals in our care are diagnosed with terminal illnesses but may still maintain a good quality of life. These animals are often overlooked by potential adopters due to their limited life expectancy.

As a *fospice* caregiver, you provide a compassionate, end-of-life foster home where the animal can remain comfortable and loved. SPCA Westchester covers all medical care related to the animal's condition.

These cases are, fortunately, rare and are managed individually. The foster coordinator will reach out directly to caregivers when a *fospice* placement is needed.

Adoptions

Understanding the adoption process helps foster caregivers guide potential adopters and support informed decisions. Some foster animals may not be available for adoption while in foster care, including those who are:

- Under 8 weeks of age
- On hold for community placement, events, or other reasons
- Recovering from medical care or receiving specialized treatment

Unless otherwise noted, foster animals should be considered **not available for adoption**. Questions about status should be directed to the foster coordinator.

For animals that are not on hold and are eligible for adoption, foster caregivers are encouraged to help promote them and identify potential adopters. Interest in longer-term foster animals and adult animals is especially encouraged.

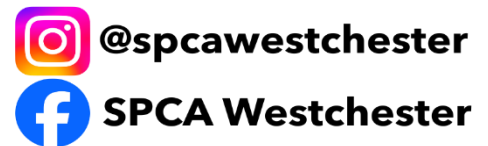
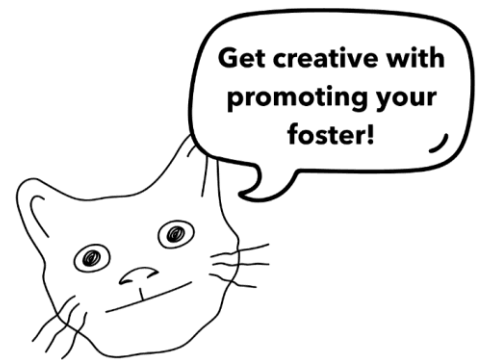
All adopters must complete the standard process, including an application, speaking with an adoption counselor, and meeting the animal. All adoption paperwork and fees must be finalized before the animal leaves the foster home.

Marketing Your Foster

When a foster animal is available for adoption, foster caregivers can help support their placement through thoughtful promotion.

Foster caregivers are encouraged to use the following methods:

- **Adoption events** - When notified, caregivers may attend events to share information, speak with potential adopters, and distribute flyers. Some animals (e.g., shy, timid, or reactive animals) may not be suited for these environments but can still be promoted through other channels.
- **Community events** - Local events can help introduce foster animals to a wider audience and increase adoption awareness.
- **Flyers** - With permission, posting flyers in local businesses, community spaces, or at SPCA Westchester can help increase visibility.
- **Social media** - Sharing approved posts, joining relevant groups, and tagging SPCA Westchester on platforms like Instagram and Facebook helps expand reach.
- **Sponsorship** - Covering part or all an adoption fee may encourage interest from potential adopters.
 - **Starter gifts** - Providing familiar items like toys, treats, or bedding may help ease transition and boost adoption interest.



Basic Care

Feeding

Providing the correct amount of food at appropriate intervals is essential to maintaining your foster pet's health. Accompanying infographics outline proper feeding guidelines for your foster animal.

Fresh, clean water should **always** be available to your foster pet.

SPCA Westchester uses Hill's Science Diet for all animals in its care. Some foster pets may also be placed on special prescription diets based on their individual needs.

House Training

House training a foster companion can be challenging at first, especially for dogs. Most cats will use a litter box when provided with a clean, accessible setup. If a cat is having difficulty, foster caregivers should contact the foster coordinator for guidance.

Dogs, especially puppies, require house training:

- Take dogs outside every **2-3 hours** to help prevent accidents
- Use **positive** reinforcement when they eliminate outdoors
- Adult dogs typically learn faster than puppies

For more guidance, refer to the houstraining booklet provided by the foster coordinator.

Medical Basics

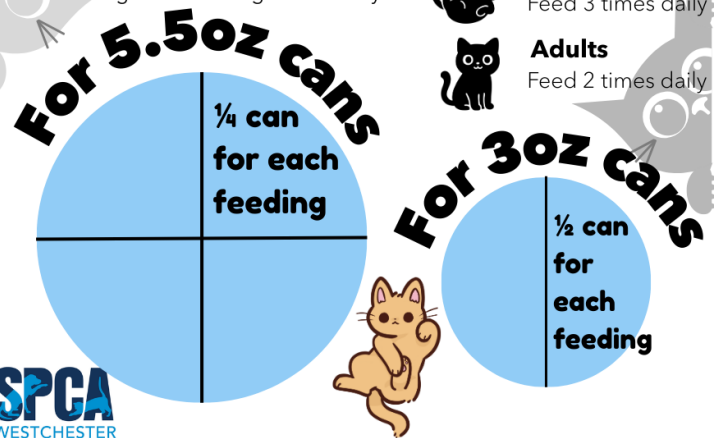
Understanding common medical needs, symptoms, and misconceptions helps foster caregivers provide appropriate care for their foster animal. If there are any concerns, contact the foster coordinator or Cody's Clinic.

Foster caregivers are expected to return for veterinary examinations every **2-3 weeks** and schedule the next appointment **before** leaving the clinic.

Feeding the Feline

Dry food should be left out for your feline friend to graze on throughout the day.

- Kittens**
Feed 3 times daily
- Adults**
Feed 2 times daily



Canine Cravings Chart

| Dog Size | Dry Amount |
|-------------|------------|
| Extra-Small | 1/4 cup |
| Small | 1/2 cup |
| Medium | 3/4 cup |
| Large | 1 cup |
| Extra-Large | 1 1/2 cup |

Dry Amount + 1-2 tblsp wet + 1 tblsp H2O = Happy Dog

After...

- Every nap
- Every meal
- Every playtime **they gotta go!**

Symptoms to Monitor

Foster caregivers should watch for any changes outside of normal behavior or routine, including:

- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Dehydration
- Lethargy
- Not eating
- Behavioral changes

Caregivers are expected to observe and report any concerns. If unsure how to describe a symptom, photos or videos can be sent to the foster coordinator or clinic for guidance.

Diarrhea

Diarrhea is common following transport, environmental changes, or diet transitions. However, prolonged diarrhea can lead to dehydration and requires veterinary attention. If diarrhea persists for more than two days, please notify SPCA Westchester staff.

For dogs, small amounts of white rice, rice water, or 100% pumpkin purée may be temporarily added to help firm stool until veterinary evaluation.

For animals under *10 weeks of age*, staff should be contacted after more than one episode.

Bloody stool:

If a small amount of blood is present in stool due to straining or constipation, it may be related to irritation. However, if diarrhea contains a significant amount of blood, SPCA Westchester staff must be notified immediately.

Vomiting

Vomiting may occur due to overeating, eating too quickly, dietary changes, or (in cats) hairballs. The primary concern is persistent vomiting or the inability to keep food down.

If vomiting occurs repeatedly or continues for **more than 2 hours**, SPCA Westchester staff should be notified.

For animals under *10 weeks of age*, staff should be contacted after more than one episode.

Bloody vomit:

Vomiting that contains blood is not normal and must be reported to SPCA Westchester staff immediately.

Lethargy

Lethargy, particularly when combined with other symptoms, can indicate a serious concern. It is important to distinguish lethargy from normal sleepiness in young animals. Unusual or prolonged low energy that is not typical for the animal should be reported to SPCA Westchester staff.

Dehydration

Dehydration can develop quickly and may lead to serious complications, especially in animals under 10 weeks of age. A simple assessment involves gently pinching the skin between the shoulder blades; if it does not return to normal within 1-2 seconds, dehydration may be present.



If dehydration is observed, especially alongside other symptoms, SPCA Westchester staff should be notified.

Not Eating

Inappetence may result from food preference, stress, or underlying illness.

- For animals under *10 weeks of age*: notify staff if more than **two consecutive meals are missed**
- For adult animals: report inappetence if they persist for **more than 24 hours**

Common Illnesses for Foster Pets

Foster animals may arrive with or develop common illnesses. Below are the most frequent conditions.

Intestinal Parasites

Intestinal parasites are parasitic organisms that live within the intestines of their host. Many can be transmitted to humans or other animals through the ingestion of contaminated feces. It is important to always wash your hands after handling your foster pet and to promptly clean any areas contaminated by fecal matter.

Common intestinal parasites include:

- Giardia
- Roundworms
- Hookworms
- Tapeworms
- Coccidia
- Whipworms

Upper Respiratory Infections (URI)

Upper respiratory infections (URIs) are viral or bacterial infections affecting the upper respiratory system. Common symptoms include coughing, sneezing, nasal discharge, fever, and lethargy. Symptoms typically last 7-10 days. URIs are highly contagious, so foster animals should be kept separate from household pets, and proper hygiene should always be maintained.

Common URIs your foster pet may experience include:

- Kennel cough
- Canine Infectious Respiratory Disease Complex (CIRDC)
- Influenza
- Feline herpesvirus
- Feline rhinotracheitis
- Feline calicivirus

Common Medications

Some foster animals may need medication for parasites, URI's, or other conditions. This information is for general reference only and does not replace veterinary guidance or instructions from SPCA Westchester staff.

Under no circumstances should a foster animal be medicated without prior authorization from Cody's Clinic.

Supplements & Dewormer

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Strongid | Oral dewormer given once every 2 weeks |
| Panacur | Powder dewormer mixed into food |
| Fortiflora | Powder probiotic mixed into food |
| Nutral | Paste nutritional supplement that has extra calories |

Anti-Biotics

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| The Mycins! | Tobramycin Terramycin Erythromycin Eye anti-biotic, applied to one or both eyes |
| Metronidazole | Anti-biotic oral medication, provided for diarrhea and parasites |
| Doxycycline | Oral anti-biotic for common URI's |
| Clavamox & Amoxicillin | Anti-biotic oral medication, provided for URI's and skin infections |
| Clindamycin | Oral anti-biotic, provided for dental issues |



If you have questions about dosage, frequency, or administering the medication, please contact Cody's Clinic.



Medication 101

Pain Relief

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Onsior | Pain relief medication, provided post-op, 3 day maximum |
| Meloxicam | Pain relief medication, provided post-op for neuters |
| Gabapentin | Pain relief medication, provided for chronic pain & behavior issues |

Any concerns regarding a foster animal's medication needs should be directed to both the foster coordinator and Cody's Clinic for guidance.

Medical Emergencies

For **medical emergencies only** between the hours of 4:30 PM and 8:30 AM, please contact (914) 261-6881. This is a monitored cellular phone; if there is no answer, please leave a message or send a text. During business hours, please bring the animal to SPCA Westchester.

A medical emergency is defined as any injury, illness, or condition that poses an immediate risk to an animal's life or long-term health.

Examples of medical emergencies include:

- Falling or crushing injuries
- Severe lethargy or collapse
- Hemorrhaging
- Other life-threatening conditions

Non-emergent issues such as vomiting, diarrhea (including bloody diarrhea), decreased appetite, or behavioral changes should be communicated to the foster care coordinator as early as the following business day to ensure appropriate care can be arranged.

Behavior

Behavior is an important aspect of understanding your foster pet. Dogs and cats communicate in different ways, and learning to recognize their cues will help foster caregivers support them effectively. This section outlines key concepts for interpreting behavior and providing appropriate enrichment, training, and safe, supportive environments.

Dogs

Body Language 101

Understanding body language helps foster caregivers recognize how dogs are feeling and responding to their environment. Common body language signals include tail position, ear position, facial expressions, posture, and movement. A visual chart is included.

Enrichment

Enrichment helps reduce stress and prevent boredom by providing dogs with purposeful and engaging activities.

Simple enrichment ideas include:

- Introducing new toys
- Offering meals in a rubber Kong
- Using snuffle mats or puzzle toys for scent-based activities

Kong Tip:

Mix dry kibble with wet food, peanut butter, or cream cheese. Stuff the mixture into the Kong, seal the opening with peanut butter, and freeze. This provides longer-lasting enrichment and helps keep dogs engaged and content.

Socialization

Socialization helps puppies and shy dogs build confidence and develop positive associations with new experiences.

Examples include:

- Meeting new people
- Exploring new environments
- Experiencing new sights, sounds, and surfaces

Dogs should always be allowed to approach new experiences at their own pace. Pairing new situations with treats can help create positive associations and reinforce confidence.

DOGGIE LANGUAGE

starring Boogie the Boston Terrier



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Teaching Sit

1. Using treats, gently lure your dog to sit (see video link)

2. Once the dog sits, use marker word "YES" or a clicker followed by a treat

3. Repeat until dog understands that sitting = food

4. Once they begin to sit every time, we can add the word "sit" so that they associate word with cue

Practicing every day helps new skills stick!

This same method can be applied when training stay, down, wait, etc.



Training Cues

Training

Training provides mental enrichment and helps dogs develop good manners while strengthening the bond between dogs and caregivers. Common foundational cues include sit, down, stay, and wait.

Training should always use positive reinforcement, rewarding desired behaviors with treats, praise, or a positive marker such as "yes." Dogs should never be forced into a behavior.

Teaching Sit, Down, and Stay

A guide for teaching "sit," along with a video demonstrating luring techniques, is [included](#).

Safe Spaces

Crates and safe spaces help dogs feel secure and provide a place to rest and decompress. In some cases, a dog's safe space and crate may be the same. A safe space should be a dedicated, quiet, and comfortable area where the dog can retreat to reduce stress and anxiety.

Safe spaces should be associated only with positive experiences and should never be used for punishment. They should include familiar scents and comforting items to help the dog feel secure.



A safe space should be...

- A room that's easy to clean (kitchen/bathroom)
- Can access when you're not home
- Can go to when not behaving appropriately in the home (mouthy, etc.)
- A place to play and entertain themselves

In the space should be...

- Bed or left open crate
- Food & water bowls
- Age appropriate toys



THE SPECTRUM OF FEAR, ANXIETY & STRESS

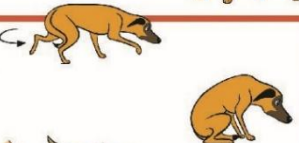
RED: SEVERE SIGNS - FIGHT/AGGRESSION (FAS 5)

- Offensive aggression: lunging forward, ears forward, tail up, hair may be up on the shoulders, rump, and tail, showing only the front teeth, lip pucker - lips pulled forward, tongue tight and thin, pupils possibly dilated or constricted.
- Defensive aggression: hair may be up on the back and rump, dilated pupils, direct eye contact, showing all teeth including molars, body crouched and retreating, tail tucked, ears back.



RED: SEVERE SIGNS - FLIGHT/FREEZE/FRET (FAS 4)

- Flight: ears back, tail tucked, actively trying to escape - slinking away or running, mouth closed or excessive panting - tongue tight instead of loose out of mouth, showing whites of eyes, brow furrowed, pupils dilated.
- Freeze/Fret: tonic immobility, pupils dilated, increased respiratory rate, trembling, tense closed mouth, ears back, tail tucked, body hunched.



YELLOW: MODERATE SIGNS (FAS 3)

- Similar to FAS 2 but turning head away, may refuse treats for brief moments or take treats roughly, may be hesitant to interact but not completely avoiding interaction.



YELLOW: MODERATE SIGNS (FAS 2)

- Ears slightly back or to the side, tail down but not necessarily completely tucked, furrowed brow, slow movements or unable to settle, fidgeting, attention seeking to owner, panting with a tighter mouth, moderate pupil dilation.



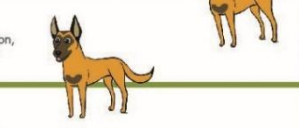
GREEN: MILD/SUBTLE SIGNS (FAS 1)

- Lip licking, avoids eye contact, turns head away without moving away, lifts paw, partially dilated pupils, slight panting but commissures of lips are relaxed.



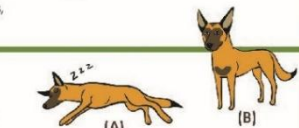
GREEN: ALERT/EXCITED/ANXIOUS? (FAS 0-1)

- Tail up higher, looking directly, mouth closed, eyes more intense, more pupil dilation, brow tense, hair may be just slightly up on the back and tail, may be expectant and excited or highly aroused.



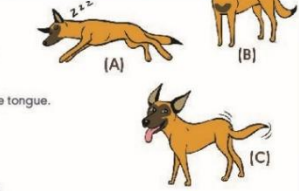
GREEN: PERKED/INTERESTED/ANXIOUS? (FAS 0-1)

- Looking directly but not intensely, tail up slightly, mouth open slightly but loose lips, ears perked forward, slight pupil dilation.



GREEN: RELAXED (FAS 0)

- A: Sleeping.
- B: Neutral - ears in neutral position, not perked forward, brow soft, eyes soft, mouth closed but lips relaxed, body loose, tail carriage neutral, pupils normal dilation.
- C: Friendly greeting - slow back and forth tail and butt wag, ears just slightly back, relaxed brow and eyes, may have mouth slightly open with relaxed lips and loose tongue.



**FEAR FREE
HAPPY
HOMES**



www.fearfreehappyhomes.com

Fear, Anxiety, and Stress (FAS) Score

Understanding fear, anxiety, and stress (FAS) scores helps foster caregivers recognize how animals are responding to different situations and environments. See the Fear Free® Ladder for Dogs/Cats.

Crate Training

Many dogs entering foster homes are not yet crate-trained. Crate training is a valuable skill that supports house training and helps prepare dogs for successful adoption.

Choosing a crate size:

For house training: the crate should be just large enough for the dog to stand, turn around, and lie down comfortably.

After house training: a larger, comfortable size may be used.

Dogs with negative past experiences in crates may respond better to an exercise pen or a dog-proofed room.

Crate Training



- Sit down in front of the crate with your dog and some treats they really like. Show him a treat and toss it just inside the crate.

- The dog should step toward the crate and get the treat. Repeat several times, each time tossing the treat a little further inside the crate. Let him run back out; don't shut the door just yet.

- Show the dog a treat and move as though you are tossing it inside the crate. When the dog looks in the crate, say "yes!" and toss the treat inside. After a few repetitions, wait for the dog to actually take a step toward the crate before tossing the treat inside.



- Your dog should be happily running in and out of the crate. At this point you can introduce a cue to tell the dog to go inside the crate, such as "go to your bed", "kennel up", etc. Say this just before your dog moves toward the crate.

- Show the dog a treat and move as though you are tossing it inside the crate. When the dog looks in the crate, say "yes!" and toss the treat inside. After a few repetitions, wait for the dog to actually take a step toward the crate before tossing the treat inside.



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Crate Training



- You can ask your dog to sit or lie down at this point, if your dog knows these words.

- Once the dog is happily running into the crate and staying there for 10 seconds, start closing the door. Give a treat through the door and then let the dog out immediately.

- Next, close the door and give two treats, waiting longer and longer before giving the second one.

- Continue to increase the time the dog is inside the crate, with the door latched shut. If the dog stands up or scratches at the door, say "uh uh" and ask him to lie down again.

- Once the dog is happy running into the crate and lying down, give him something nice to eat or chew while in the crate, such as a stuffed Kong or Goodie Ship, a Dentabone, or a chew bone.

- Congratulations!**
At this point, you can now have your dog sleep in their crate at night!



Mouthiness

Puppies explore the world using their mouths. Chewing, biting, and mouthing are normal behaviors; however, they should be appropriately redirected.

Bite inhibition refers to a dog's ability to control the force of their mouthing. A puppy that has not developed bite inhibition may bite too hard during play. Teaching a dog that teeth do not belong on human skin helps prevent unwanted mouthy behavior.

General guidelines include:

- Avoid waving fingers or toes in front of a puppy, as this may encourage biting
- Avoid jerking hands or feet away quickly, as this can encourage chasing and grabbing behavior
- Encourage gentle play and avoid rough hand-based play

Helpful strategies include:

- Redirect biting of hands or feet to appropriate toys or chew items
- Encourage non-contact forms of play such as fetch or tug-of-war
- Provide a variety of engaging toys to redirect chewing away from people and clothing

If mouthy behavior continues or becomes difficult to manage, please contact the foster coordinator for further guidance.

Cats

Body Language 101

Understanding body language helps foster caregivers recognize how cats are feeling and responding to their environment. Common body language signals include tail position, ear position, facial expressions, posture, vocalizations, and movement. A visual chart is included.

Enrichment and Socialization

Enrichment helps cats remain mentally stimulated and reduce stress. Socialization is especially important for kittens and shy adult cats. Identifying effective enrichment methods may require trying different types of play. Wand toys and toys with strings should always be picked up after use to prevent choking hazards. Laser pointers may be useful for initial engagement, but they can lead to frustration if used long-term, as the cat is unable to physically catch the target.

CAT LANGUAGE



Additional enrichment options include:

- Scratching posts and cardboard scratchers
- Puzzle feeders or treat-dispensing toys
- Vertical spaces such as cat trees or wall shelves

To help prevent boredom and frustration, rotating toys regularly can provide novelty and continued interest for foster cats.

For cats that are not yet engaging in interactive play, tools such as Churu-style treats on extended feeders or toys that create physical distance can be helpful for building initial interaction.

Socialization tips:

- Allow cats to approach at their own pace
- Use treats to create positive associations
- Keep interactions short and calm
- Avoid overwhelming them with excessive attention

Consistent, positive experiences help cats build confidence and prepare for successful adoption

Fear, Anxiety, Stress (FAS) Score

Understanding fear, anxiety, and stress (FAS) score can help assess how animals respond to different situations and environments. See Fear Free® Ladder for Dogs/Cats:

Bringing a New Cat Home

Introducing a foster cat to your home should be done slowly and intentionally.

Key steps:

1. Start with a single safe room:

Provide food, water, litter,



THE SPECTRUM OF FEAR, ANXIETY & STRESS

RED: SEVERE SIGNS - FIGHT/AGGRESSION (FAS 5)

- Offensive aggression: pupils constricted or dilated, cat leaning forward, ears forward, moving forward, whiskers forward, tail is an inverted L (first inch of tail is horizontal with ground then the tail drops down), rump raised higher than front (on tip toes), staring, may be growling.
- Defensive aggression: ears back, pupils dilated, hunkered down, tail tight or tucked or tail thrashing, whiskers back, hissing, lips pulled back, staring, furrowed brow, could be swatting.



RED: SEVERE SIGNS - FLIGHT/FREEZE/FRET (FAS 4)

- Flight: actively trying to escape, pupils dilated, ears back, whiskers back, tail down and bottle brushed, fleeing, turning to look at stimulus.
- Freeze/Fret: tonic immobility, dilated pupils, body flattened and tense, tail tucked, increased respiratory rate, ears back, staring, whiskers back.



YELLOW: MODERATE SIGNS (FAS 2-3)

- Ears further to the side, more pupil dilation but not completely dilated, increase in respiratory rate, brow furrowed, looking at stimulus instead of looking away, tail tight to body, possible tip of tail moving some, whiskers back, body crouched and leaning away.



GREEN: MILD/SUBTLE SIGNS (FAS 1)

- Avoids eye contact, turns head away without moving away, partially dilated pupils, head held just slightly down, slight brow furrowing, whiskers slightly back, ears partially to the side, body shifted slightly away, tail closer to body with possibly some slight flicking.



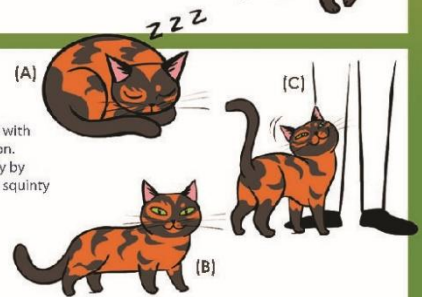
GREEN: PERKED/INTERESTED/ANXIOUS? (FAS 0-1)

- Looking directly but not intensely, tail up and winding, mouth closed with loose lips, ears perked forward, whiskers forward, slight pupil dilation.



GREEN: RELAXED (FAS 0)

- A: Sleeping.
- B: Neutral - ears in neutral position, brow soft, eyes soft, mouth closed with relaxed lips, body loose, tail carriage U-shaped, pupils normal dilation.
- C: Friendly greeting - tail up and winding, may elevate rear end slightly by standing on toes, ears neutral, forward, or slightly back, might have squinty eyes, brow relaxed, might cheek mark or rub on person or object.



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bedding, and appropriate hiding spaces.

- 2. Allow time to decompress:** Give the cat time to adjust before introducing new spaces or people. It is normal for cats to take time to acclimate to a new environment and, in some cases, to not eat or use the litter box for the first few days. If a cat continues to refuse food or litter box use beyond the initial adjustment period, please contact the foster coordinator for guidance.
- 3. Gradually expand their space:** Only expand access once the cat is comfortable, eating regularly, and using the litter box consistently.
- 4. Supervise all interactions:** This is especially important with children or other animals.

A gradual introduction helps reduce stress and supports long-term success in the foster home.

For foster placements, it is generally recommended that household pets do not interact directly with the foster cat due to potentially unknown behaviors or medical conditions that may not yet have been identified. Introductions should only occur if directed by the foster coordinator.

Additional Resources

Maddie's University

*These are clickable training courses that will take you to the selected self-paced courses.
Anytime you complete a course with a certificate, please email the foster coordinator.*

| Category | Training Link |
|-------------|---|
| Dogs | Assessing Dog Behavior Through Everyday Interactions |
| | Introducing a Foster Dog to New Dogs |
| | Helping a New Dog Adjust |
| | Bringing a New Dog Home |
| | Recognizing and De-escalating Big Feelings in Dogs |
| | Introduction to Cooperative Care for Dogs |
| | Fundamentals of Canine Communication and Safe Dog Handling |
| Cats | Socializing Puppies |
| | Camp Maddie: Kitten Edition - Pawsitive Beginnings: Socializing Kittens for a Lifetime of Success |
| | Lost Cat Prevention |
| | Feline Communication: How to Speak Cat |
| | Taking the Fear Out of Bottle Feeding and Basic Kitten Care |
| | Cracking the Cat Code: Recognizing Feline Signals for Better Care |
| | Making the First Move: Approaching Cats with Care |
| Both | Turning Fear into Friendship: Building Trust with Shelter Cats |
| | Marketing a Foster Pet |
| | Flash Classes for Foster Care |

