



# **Angels With Paws Foster Care Manual**

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# **ANGELS WITH PAWS FOSTER CARE MANUAL**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your decision to join Angels with Paws to foster cats and kittens. The need is certainly overwhelming and you are much appreciated. This manual is provided to make your task run smoothly. We are excited to team up with you for this wonderful experience and we'd like to make it as stress-free as possible.

Animals are selected for foster care for many reasons. The majority of foster cases are litters of kittens that are too young to be placed for adoption. Sometimes these kittens will have a mother and other times they have been separated. Often these animals will need some level of socialization to help them become successful family members. Occasionally, an animal will have an injury or an illness that will respond well to a few weeks of foster home care.

The duties of an animal foster parent are quite similar to those of being an actual parent. These responsibilities may require anywhere from one to several hours a day of your time and effort. You have to prepare a safe and suitable environment in your home for the foster animal(s). You have to provide the appropriate food at the appropriate times and administer prescribed medications and/or other treatments as necessary. Additionally, you must set aside adequate time each day for socialization and interactive play as well as exercise. Finally, during the course of each foster experience, you will need to bring the foster animals in your care back to the shelter at the scheduled times for worming, vaccinations or health checks.

The length of time required for a foster situation will vary with each case depending on the needs and well being of the animals. Young kittens do not have developed immune systems and an illness can alter the expected foster time dramatically. On average however, most foster situations will last 3 to 6 weeks.

Also please be aware that fostering may affect your own animals. If you own animals they may be exposed to disease if the foster kittens become ill which is one reason why we recommend keeping the fosters and your own animals separated. AWP provides medication and/or treatments for the foster animals as needed; you are responsible for any treatments and costs related to your own pets. Therefore, before you begin fostering shelter animals you should ensure that your own animals are current on their vaccinations. It is advised that you discuss the situation with your own veterinarian to see if they might suggest any additional vaccinations. Your pets may also feel threatened by new animals in the house or by receiving less attention. Watching for changes in habits and behavior will help minimize these potential problems. Do not forget to give extra attention to your own animals during these times. These things are not the norm, but it's better to be prepared just in case!

Thank you again for your time and effort involved in providing a foster home.

## 2. PREPARING YOUR HOME

Your first task is to prepare a suitable environment for your new guest(s). You will need to designate an enclosed space for the foster animals inside your home. You may choose to set aside a small room or acquire a few adequately sized cages for fostering. This approach not only makes it easier to handle the foster animals, but it also protects your home from unnecessary damage and controls unwanted contact between foster animals and your own pets.

Their environment will need to be controlled. When cats are stressed they often find very inaccessible places to hide so you will want to limit their access to open closets and basements with exposed ceilings. This can be particularly challenging with kittens because they can squeeze into smaller spaces. They may also rip the lining under padded furniture/beds and crawl between the lining and padding to feel secure. Kittens will take advantage of their living space to run, jump and climb so you will want to remove any valuable or breakable items from their reach.

While cats are generally willing to use a litter box, kittens are still developing coordination skills. They may play and dig in their litter, but they don't always have the best aim, so lining the litter pan area with newspaper is a good idea.

Once you have chosen an area where you will care for your foster guests, you should take time to "pet-proof" the area. Small or dangerous objects such as pins, needles, paper clips, nails, staples, thread, string, rubber bands, caustic/toxic chemicals, moth balls and plants should be removed from the area. Animals are also attracted to electrical cords, TV cords, telephone cords and curtains. These items should be covered or blocked so kittens can't get to them.

A variety of supplies are needed to insure a successful foster experience. The following is a list of recommended items:

- Cage/crate
- Food-based on age & health
- Thermometer
- Toys-based on age & health
- Towels
- Food & water bowls
- Nail clippers
- Sanitizer (bleach and detergent)
- Brush and comb
- Litter box, newspaper
- Carrier (for transport)
- Baby gates / scale (optional)
- Patience

Some items can be borrowed from the shelter if they are available, but there is no guarantee we will have all of the items on hand each time you foster so we recommend

you develop your own supply at home. All medications and medicated food are supplied by AWP.

Kittens have teeth and claws that are fine and dagger-sharp. They sometimes don't know how to retract their claws or keep their teeth away from your hands or ankles. You may wish to keep on hand some hydrogen peroxide and antiseptic cream or spray for any scratches or punctures. AWP, a non-profit organization, cannot be held responsible for injuries to yourself or your animals.

We also recommend keeping some hand sanitizer nearby to prevent spreading germs between your foster animals and your own pets.

### **3. BRINGING THE FOSTER HOME**

An AWP representative will call and offer you a foster opportunity. You should be notified of the number of animals, the expected duration of foster case and which (if any) special needs the animals have. Because of the limited space available at the shelter we try to keep foster animals no longer than 24 hours, so AWP requests as prompt a response as possible.

If you decide to accept, you must arrange with AWP for a pick-up from the shelter. You will be given a copy of the medical chart, which will describe the animal's physical condition, what procedures and medications have been administered and directions regarding how to apply or administer any medication, if appropriate. Please confer with the person on staff regarding when the kittens should be brought to the shelter for vaccination, check-up, etc. Please keep in mind that you must set up an appointment for this in advance rather than just dropping by the shelter.

When transporting cats or kittens you should always keep them in carriers for both their safety and yours. When arriving home give the foster(s) 15 minutes or so to calm down and get accustomed to their new environment, then give them a bowl of fresh cool water. After they have further settled you may give them a small portion of food (unless directed otherwise) or wait until the next scheduled feeding time. Giving them food or water too soon may cause them to become ill if they are still upset about the travel or transition.

After offering food and water, bring them to their enclosure and release them carefully. If the kittens are walking place them in their (13"x 9"x 2" cake pan) litter box so they can begin to recognize its location. Show the adult or mother cat where the larger litter is located as well to get them orientated. Again, the initial feeding and watering should wait until the cats seem comfortable in their new surroundings.

A note of caution: If you are fostering a mother cat and her babies she should not be introduced to any of your animals at this time. She will be protective of her babies

and may perceive other animals as a direct threat. No matter how friendly you know your own pet to be, you don't know how this new mother handles stress or fear.

If you have children they need to be advised about how to interact with the new visitor(s). Adult cats should not be approached quickly or loudly. A change in environment can be very stressful on a cat and they need time to adjust to their new surroundings. You should let them observe you and your family from their enclosure for a while before interacting. It is also important to remember that kittens spend a great deal of their time sleeping. They should be allowed to rest undisturbed at these times and can be played with when they awaken on their own. Older children should be taught the proper manner to pick up and hold a kitten. Always place one hand under the animal's hindquarters and the other hand under their chest. Very young children should always be supervised when they are with an animal.

Finally, don't forget your own pets. They should never be forced to meet the foster animals. You will want to give your pets some extra attention so they don't become jealous of the foster animal(s). Some extra treats and quality time will mitigate this potential problem.

#### **4. WHAT'S IN A NAME?**

Naming your foster animals has many benefits the most obvious is the ability to distinguish them from each other. We recommend making a list of their names and any distinguishing marks to keep a record of their progress. This will aid greatly in administering medications (if needed) as well.

When trying to place animals for adoption or putting them on the website and picture boards, names become very important. Names provide a potential adopter with a distinct and personal way to identify a particular animal. They can reflect the animal's personality or appearance or just be one of your favorite "people or places" names. If you are fostering an adult cat, it is often best to keep the name the animal is familiar with. Occasionally, however, cats will come into the shelter with negative or offensive names (i.e. Destructo, Stupid, Shredder to name a few that we can print). Please change these and let the AWP staff know about the change to facilitate accurate, up-to-date records.

Please keep in mind while choosing names that it helps if names are unique. We have had many cats named "Fluffy," "Tiger," "Midnight," "Smokey," etc., which can cause confusion at the shelter, so please try to come up with more distinctive names for new fosters. The internet is a good place to look up names if you are stumped.

## 5. FEEDING

Age, weight and health are the biggest factors in determining how much and how often to feed. It is very important that both cats and kittens consume adequate amounts of food to ensure their general health.

Kitten 4-6 weeks of age should be fed a mixture of KMR and canned kitten food 3-4 times per day. Kittens that are roughly 4 weeks should be fed a ratio of approximately 75% KMR to 25% canned food. As kitten approach 6 weeks in age, to facilitate weaning, the KMR should be reduced gradually until the kitten is eating only canned food. Dry kitten food and water should be available at all times though they may show little interest in the dry food.

Kittens 6-8 weeks in age should be encouraged to eat dry food. The dry food may need to be moistened or mixed with canned kitten food to make it more palatable for the kitten. As the kitten eats more and more dry food, the wet canned feedings should be reduced to twice a day. Do not leave the dry/canned mixture out for more than about 2 hours, because bacteria can begin forming on the food after that time.

The KMR formula can be obtained through Angels with Paws. It is important to refrigerate open KMR and only mix what is necessary.

Contrary to popular belief, cats and kittens should never be given milk, as they cannot digest it properly. The result may be diarrhea that could be confused with a symptom of illness. In fact, it is best to not give them any human food, as it may disrupt their digestion.

It is very important to monitor how well *each* kitten is eating. Make sure that each animal is eating a sufficient amount of food and is not being pushed aside by their littermates. If this does happen, try feeding them separately so you can better monitor their consumption.

Any special dietary needs are provided to you by AWP. Foster families are expected to provide their own food, but if this causes financial hardship we may be able to pass along food that has been donated to the shelter. In selecting food, "name brand" foods tend to have fewer by-products than "store brands." Whiskas, Friskies and Purina are good choices for cats. Pro-Plan and Authority (available at PetSmart) do not use by-products and are highly recommended. Changing animals from one diet to another must be done gradually over a period of several days. Begin by mixing a small amount of new food while decreasing the old food over a period of 3-7 days. Animals may become ill if their food is abruptly switched to a new variety. If possible, try to feed one brand of food for the duration of the time you have them.

## **6. SOCIALIZING THE KITTENS**

One of the easiest methods for interacting with kittens is to sit down on the floor and let them come explore you. This is also a good time to observe the social dynamics of the litter as a whole. Try to identify and make note of which kittens are outgoing, shy, affectionate or reserved. This information will be helpful to the future adoptive parents.

When kitten play begins to slow down, it is a good time to work with the kittens individually. Hold the animal with one hand under their chest and use your other hand to run up and down each leg. Gently squeeze the pads of each foot. Run your hands gently over the kitten's face and mouth. Handle the ears by gently stroking them. This gentle and thorough touching at a young age will acclimate the animal to human contact. It will also reduce aggression that is sometimes linked to the animal being petted in certain spots they don't like.

If you have children in your home you will want to supervise their interaction with the animals. Children should be advised to move slowly as they walk around the young animals and to avoid wearing shoes with laces if possible. A careless step can injure an animal very easily. They should also be cautioned not to wave their hands in front of the animal's faces since they will tempt the animal to play-bite or scratch the child's hand. Since young kittens sleep a good deal of the time, they should be allowed to do so without interruption and playtime should be coordinated with their schedule.

Finally, it is important to use appropriate toys for your foster animal. You should never allow your kittens to play with something that they could choke on. This includes playing with larger toys that they could tear up and try to eat while you aren't watching. Kittens should be gently but firmly shown what is and isn't appropriate to play with. For example, if the kitten begins playing with your curtains, pick her up, say "no" firmly and direct her towards one of her toys that is okay for her to play with. You may also try sprinkling that area with catnip to turn her on to that toy and get her mind off the curtains.

## **7. VACCINATION SCHEDULE AND TESTING**

Foster animals receive the appropriate preventive medical treatment and vaccines necessary to protect them from a variety of viral and bacterial infections. Depending on the age and health of the animal, this program includes one or more vaccinations and tests.

Kittens must be 6 weeks or older to receive their first vaccinations. Kittens need a series of 3 upper respiratory/distemper vaccinations (FCRV) approximately 4 weeks apart. For example;

6 weeks – 1<sup>st</sup> vaccinations

10 weeks – 2<sup>nd</sup> vaccinations

14 weeks – 3<sup>rd</sup> vaccinations

This schedule may need to be adjusted depending on the age of each kitten when the 1<sup>st</sup> vaccination is given. Shelter staff will give you a card with the due date of the next

vaccination to avoid any confusion. Any delay over 10 weeks will require 2 additional shots.

The vaccination schedule may be delayed if the animal is sick, becomes sick or is nursing or pregnant. Cats and kittens may also receive a de-worming formula with their vaccination.

All cats and kittens are tested for Feline Leukemia Virus (FELV) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) upon arriving at the shelter. If either of these tests are positive, the animal may no longer be considered for foster care and adoption is delayed pending medical evaluation and treatment.

## **8. ILLNESS & TREATMENT**

PLEASE NOTE: IF YOUR FOSTER IS SICK AND NEEDS IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION, PLEASE CONTACT THE SHELTER IMMEDIATELY. IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO REACH SOMEONE AT THE SHELTER, CALL THE EMERGENCY CONTACTS IN ORDER. WE CANNOT BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BILL IF YOU DO NOT USE THE VETERINARY CLINICS TO WHICH WE ARE CONTRACTED WITH.

The most common clinical signs of any illness are coughing, sneezing, congested breath sounds, vomiting, diarrhea, discharge from the eyes or nose, lack of appetite, lethargy, depression, fever, excessive thirst or dehydration. Animals may also show signs of abdominal tenderness by “flinching” when you touch them there or by having difficulty lying down on their belly. If any of these symptoms occur, you should notify the shelter immediately. Do not wait a few days to see if the problem resolves itself. Kittens usually do not have strong enough immune systems to fight most infections. A delay in treatment may cause serious health issues or even death for the cat.

The most common illness is an upper respiratory infection (URI). The signs and symptoms of a URI include sneezing, eye/nose discharge (can be clear or cloudy), labored breathing or wheezing. If any of these symptoms occur, contact the shelter immediately. If no one is available at the shelter begin the emergency contact list.

Dehydration is probably one of the biggest causes of death in kittens. If a kitten is not eating or drinking, it can become dehydrated in a matter of hours. Each kitten’s hydration should be checked daily. This is done by grabbing the skin over the rib cage, pulling it out and releasing. The skin should snap back quickly. If the skin goes down slowly or does not return to a flat position, some level of dehydration is present. If you are unsure of how to perform this test, please call or come in to AWP for assistance.

Diarrhea or loose stools are not normal. If any foster shows signs of diarrhea, please contact AWP as soon as possible. We will need a stool sample, placed in any disposable container, to test for parasites and/or bacteria. This sample needs to be less

than 12 hours old and kept refrigerated until it is brought in. Diarrhea present for any amount of time can directly result in dehydration. Make sure to wash hands to prevent exposure to parasites and bacteria.

Vomiting can be caused by dehydration, upset stomach, hairballs or eating something inappropriate. If vomiting is present, try to determine which kitten is sick and if this is a one-time occurrence or if it is ongoing. Please note whether vomit is partially digested food or bile, which is a yellowish, frothy fluid. As with any other health concern, please contact AWP as soon as possible to see if a health checkup is needed.

Ringworm is a fungal infection of the skin. It is *not* a worm or parasite. It can be transferred to humans or other household pets. Signs of ringworm usually include circular bald patches and scaly, raised lesions. Typical sites for ringworm are ears, both inside and out, forehead, nose, mouth, chin areas, paws (both top and pads), belly area and the tail. If lesions are visible, contact AWP as soon as possible and quarantine all animals and separate the infected animals from those that are not. After coming into contact with infected animals, wash hands and all exposed skin, change clothes as this can be transferred to others.

Scratches to the eyes can be the result of rough play. Signs of eyes scratches include squinting, watering, rapid blinking and colored discharge. Fosters with these signs will need to be brought to the shelter so a fluorescent stain test can be performed. These signs are usually only present in one eye however, if both eyes are showing signs this can be an indication of a URI and will be treated accordingly.

Treatments and medications vary by cat and afflictions. AWP will educate fosters as to what medications will be given and how to administer them on a per cat basis. If you have any questions, please contact the shelter staff for assistance.

A final word: kittens have very weak immune systems, and have a lot of difficulty fighting infections. Occasionally, despite our efforts, a kitten will not survive. It is important should this happen that you do not despair, and that we look at the situation to learn what could have been done differently. If a kitten passes, please contact AWP as soon as possible for further instructions.

## **9. PARASITES**

Roundworms can cause a potbellied appearance and may show up in the animal's stool. They look like long spaghetti strands. Roundworms are very common in young animals and AWP routinely administers a worming medicine to animal's arrival to the shelter.

Tapeworms are not as common as roundworms but are still seen. They can be seen in the stools or on/around the anal area of the cat. They look like grains of white

rice. We do not routinely give a preventative for tapeworms unless sign are seen, so if you suspect an infestation, please contact AWP as soon as possible for further testing.

Fleas are not common to Colorado but can be “imported” on animals arriving to the state. Common signs include itching and scratching. If fleas are suspected, part the animal’s fur and look for small black dots on the skin. The can usually be seen moving or jumping. Again, contact AWP for further evaluation.

Ear mites are another parasite common to cats. The signs of mites include head shaking, scratching and “coffee grounds” which can be seen inside the ears. If you suspect mites, *do not* clean the ears, as we will use the debris to determine if mites are present. Contact AWP as soon as possible for further evaluation and treatment.

The main way to control the spread of parasites is through proper hygiene. Since many of them can be transmitted to humans it is especially important that you always wash your hands after handling your kittens. If they have any fecal matter on their coats this can become a source of contamination. Be sure that children who handle the animals also wash their hands immediately afterwards. Fecal matter on the floor or in the litter box should be removed as soon as possible. The floors, cages/crates and litter boxes should be cleaned with a sanitizing solution of 1 part bleach to 10 parts water. This solution should be allowed to remain on the surface several minutes before being wiped off. These surfaces should then be rinsed thoroughly before the animals are returned.

## **10. SPAYING & NEUTERING**

All kittens and cats must be spayed or neutered before AWP will place them up for adoption. Kittens are spayed or neutered when they reach 2.5 lbs. This roughly coincides with 2.5 months of age. Fosters can contact either AWP or the veterinary clinic list provided at the end of this manual to set up an appointment. Please allow 3-4 days after any vaccinations before making an appointment. Fosters may take the kitten’s home for 24-48 hrs. after surgery or they may bring them back to AWP. If you wish to bring them back to AWP after surgery, please call ahead to make sure there is room available. Failure to make these arrangements may result in AWP inability to take the kittens back immediately due to lack of space.

AWP screens prospective adopters very carefully and if we don’t feel right about the adoption we reserve the right to refuse it. All adopters fill out an application and sign an agreement before the animal is released. Under no circumstances will we adopt a cat if it will be de-clawed or kept outdoors. If the adopter rents his/her home, we require proof that they are allowed to have cats. We do not adopt out black cats during certain times of the year. We also watch interaction between children and the prospective cat to determine whether they will be both compatible as well as age appropriate.

## **11. AWP EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST**

1. Lisa Faust c) 303-521-1536 h) 303-274-4930
2. Patti VanderMiller c) 303-888-5945
3. Jean Ausenbaugh h) 303-273-5767 w) 303-439-7975

**Our consulting veterinarian is:**

**Janet Taylor, DVM  
At  
Aspen Ridge Animal Hospital  
106 North Rubey Drive Suite B  
Golden, CO 80403  
303-216-1313**

**All appointments for fosters need to be made through AWP, but we encourage you to take your own pets to see Dr. Taylor!**

## **12. CONTRACTED VETS FOR SPAY/NEUTER**

Please use the following list to get your kittens spayed/ neutered when they are ready. Use of any other vet clinic is prohibited as we have a contract with these doctors for services. If you have a vet you would like to use that is not on this list and they have indicated willingness to review our contract, call AWP for approval.

Francis Vet Hospital  
16119 S. Golden Road  
Golden, CO 80401  
303-279-5952

Front Range Vet Clinic  
207 S. Garland  
Lakewood, CO 80226  
303-233-6322

Golden View  
885 Lupine St.  
Golden, CO 80401  
303-279-9182

Harrison Memorial Hospital  
Call AWP to set appointment

Jefferson Animal Clinic  
8790 Ralston Rd.  
Arvada, CO 80002  
303-423-3370

Mesa Vet Hospital  
2525 Youngfield St  
Golden, CO 80401  
303-237-9542

Table Mountain Vet Hospital  
15555 W. 44<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Golden, CO 80403  
303-279-1701