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**For any questions please contact your Foster Coordinator, Kerri. She can be reached by email at [kerrib@halorescuefl.org](mailto:kerrib@halorescuefl.org) or 772-589-7297 ext. 7. For emergencies outside of business hours, she can be reached at 352-408-0182.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Thank you so much for your interest in fostering kittens for H.A.L.O. No-Kill Rescue. By opening up your home to foster pets, you're not only helping to save lives, you're providing the individual attention and care these kittens desperately need.

Kittens are some of the most at-risk pets in shelters because they require intensive around-the-clock care. Not only does fostering help kittens find forever families, it saves their lives.

Foster homes are asked to provide care for the kittens and provide transportation to and from foster checks and veterinary appointments as needed. Once the kittens are old enough and weigh enough to be spayed or neutered (typically two pounds), you'll bring them to their vet appointment on the day and time given to you by the Foster Coordinator, Kerri.

Care for foster kittens includes a strict feeding schedule, cleaning, and lots of snuggling and play time. Although fostering kittens is a lot of work, it is a very rewarding experience. By participating in this program, you are saving lives and helping kittens find families.

## **Foster Placement**

At H.A.L.O., we will start off your fostering experience with kittens 6 weeks and up that are eating on their own. This age of kittens do not need constant monitoring and care as younger kittens do so are great for first time fosters! If you are interested in fostering younger kittens, please reach out to your Foster Coordinator and we would be happy to teach you the care involved.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### What do foster families need to provide?

Foster families need to provide:

- A healthy and safe environment for their foster kittens
- Transportation to and from the main shelter in Sebastian for foster checks and vet appointments as needed
- Socialization and cuddle time to help teach the kittens about positive family relationships

### How much time do I need to spend with the kittens?

As much time as you can. The more time you spend with your foster kittens, the more socialized they will be to people. The amount of time required for feeding will vary depending on the age of the kittens you are fostering. Very young kittens need to be bottle-fed every two to three hours, while older ones may be eating on their own and needing to be fed just a couple times a day.

### How long will the kittens need to be in foster care?

Once a kitten weighs two pounds, he/she can be spayed or neutered and then put up for adoption.

### Will I need to give medicine to the foster kittens?

While we do our best to ensure that we are sending out healthy kittens to foster care, most illnesses have incubation periods, meaning that if the kittens picked up something at the shelter, symptoms can arise after you take them home. So, some kittens will need their regular dewormer administered daily, while others may need more. If your foster kittens need medication, we can show you how to administer it before you take the animals home.

### Can I let my foster kittens play with my personal pets?

Kittens are very susceptible to illness and can carry or catch dangerous ailments easily. For this reason, we require that foster parents isolate foster kittens from their personal pets for the duration of the foster period.

### Will any of my foster kittens die?

Sadly, kittens are fragile, so it is always possible for them to become ill and pass away while in a foster home. This may be the hardest thing about fostering kittens. If it's something you don't want to encounter, then fostering kittens may not be the best fit for you. But please keep in mind that without foster homes, most of these kittens would not stand a chance of survival in a shelter. You're helping to save lives.

### Who will take care of my foster kittens if I need to go out of town?

If you have travel plans while you are fostering kittens for H.A.L.O., you will need to contact the shelter or Kerri and make arrangements to return your foster group to the

main shelter for the duration of the time that you are gone. Please provide at least one week's notice to ensure that we have space for your kittens.

You cannot leave your foster cat with an unauthorized person or pet sitter. We have specific training for foster parents, and pet sitters have not undergone that training or signed the release waivers for the foster program.

#### What if I want to adopt one of my foster kittens?

If you want to adopt a foster kitten, you will need to complete an adoption application and follow the full adoption process. Please let front staff/foster coordinator know that you are interested in adopting your foster(s) as soon as you make your decision so we can make the note in the kittens' file(s).

#### What if I know someone who's interested in adopting one of my foster kittens?

If someone you know is interested in adopting one of your foster kittens, please let the front staff or the foster coordinator know as soon as possible. We will put the name and number of the interested party in the kitten's file and will notify them once the kitten has completed our vetting process. They will have to follow our full adoption process and be approved adopters.

## **PREPARING FOR YOUR FOSTER KITTENS**

Your foster kittens should be separated from all other animals in your household and kept in a small area, such as a spare room or bathroom, where they have access to their food, water, and litter box. Because kittens cannot regulate their body temperature, this area should also be in a warm, draft-free area. Kittens younger than 6 weeks must have access to a heating pad to help them remain warm. It may be a good idea to consider an area that is easy to clean up in terms of spills and litter box accidents, which will happen since the kittens are learning. Please don't put the kittens in a garage or place that has outdoor access; those locations are not safe.

### **Supplies You Will Need**

H.A.L.O. will provide you with any supplies that you may need. However, we greatly appreciate any help that you can provide in supplying items for your foster kittens.

Here's what you'll need to care for your foster kittens:

- At least one bowl for dry food and one for water: If you have a large litter, you will need to provide more than one bowl each for water and food.
- A supply of wet and dry kitten food. Both wet and dry food is important for kitten's nutrition.
- New bottle for each bottle-fed litter and formula for bottle-feeding: PetAg Kitten Milk Replacer is the only formula that should be used.

- Litter box with low sides: More than one may be needed for larger litters.
- Non-clumping litter: Pine pellets or clay litter.
- Heat source: Kittens can't keep themselves warm, so you have to provide a heat source.
- A soft place to sleep: Old towels or blankets work well.
- Toys: Use kitten-safe toys that are easy to sanitize and clean. Kittens can play with them when you're not home.

### **Kitten-Proofing Your Home**

Foster kittens are tiny and cute, but just like children, they are also very curious. They will try to get into everything to explore, so you will need to kitten-proof your home. Here are some tips:

- Put away any small items that a kitten can swallow.
- Hide any breakable items, block electrical outlets and remove toxic plants.
- If your kittens are staying in a bathroom, make sure that the toilet lid is closed at all times.
- Block off any spaces that the kittens could crawl into and hide in.
- When setting up your kitten room, be sure to place the litter boxes as far away from food and water as possible.
- Make sure wires that curious kittens may chew on are put away.

## **FOSTER APPOINTMENT SCHEDULING**

During the time that you foster kittens, you will need to bring your kittens to our main shelter in Sebastian for regular checkups and to their spay/neuter appointment at a partnering veterinarian practice.

### **Picking Up and Returning Your Foster Kittens**

After you respond to an email request for a foster, we will reach out to you schedule a time to pick up the kitten(s) if they would be a good fit for you. Please let us know at this time what supplies you will need to foster. Once your foster(s) have been spayed/neutered, our Mall Adoption Center in Vero Beach will reach out to you to schedule a day and time for you to bring them there.

### **Scheduling Foster Checks for Your Kittens**

We will schedule your initial foster appointment upon pickup of the kittens and every two weeks after. Foster checkups for your kitten(s) may include vaccinations, FIV/FeLeuk testing, and weight checks. If you notice any issues with your kittens, please notify staff

at this time. If you need to reschedule your foster checkup appointment, please notify the foster coordinator as soon as possible.

### **Scheduling Vet Appointments**

Once your foster(s) have weighed in at 2 pounds, our Foster Coordinator will work on scheduling their vet appointment to be spayed/neutered. If you have any scheduling conflicts please notify them as soon as possible.

### **Picking Up Supplies**

If you run out of supplies while you are fostering, feel free to come by our main shelter to pick up what you need. If you are running low on medication or dewormer for your foster(s), please reach out to our Foster Coordinator.

## **CARING FOR YOUR KITTENS**

Because kittens are fragile, it is important for you to watch the behavior of your foster kittens closely and monitor their health daily. To keep track of their health, please monitor their eating habits and overall health.

Watch for signs of illness, including frequent crying, restlessness, weakness, coldness (hypothermia), diarrhea, dehydration, shallow or labored breathing, paleness of the gums or blueness in color. Notify our Foster Coordinator immediately if a kitten is losing weight, is cold to the touch, or is having trouble breathing (either shallow or heavy breathing).

Kittens are susceptible to illness, so foster kittens must be kept indoors. Use a carrier at all times to transport kittens to and from appointments.

### **Caring for Independent Eaters**

By six to seven weeks old, your kittens should be independent eaters. Dry food should be their primary source of food, but offer wet food frequently as well to encourage eating and maximize growth. Replace the water in their water dish twice a day and wipe out the dish if needed.

During this stage, your daily responsibilities include socializing the kittens and exposing them to new situations and environments. It's important to try and keep all experiences positive for the kittens, so give them lots of treats and toys as they learn about new sounds, smells, places and faces.

As always, watch the behavior of your kittens and monitor their health daily. Look over each kitten every day for physical changes or potential medical problems.

The kittens should be of age to be using a litter box, be sure to scoop the box at least two times daily. Every other day, dump the litter, clean the box with a mild detergent (such as dishwashing liquid) and put in fresh litter. You'll want to monitor the kittens for diarrhea, and clean the litter box more frequently if diarrhea is apparent.

At this stage, play with the kittens several times a day with interactive toys. Play time provides stimulation, encourages socialization and releases excess energy. Try a variety of toys (balls, squeaky toys, feather toys, etc.) to see which ones your foster kittens like. Cat toys don't have to be fancy or expensive. Cats often enjoy playing with something as simple as a paper bag (remove the handles for safety) or a box with holes cut in the sides.

Don't leave your foster kittens alone with any toys that could be easily ingested or cause harm to them. Examples are string toys and yarn. Toys such as ping-pong balls and toilet paper tubes are safe.

### **Cleaning Up Between Litters**

Once you've returned your group of kittens to H.A.L.O. for adoption, please sanitize your fostering room or area before fostering another litter of kittens. Remove anything the kittens touched and clean it with a weak bleach solution, consisting of one part bleach to 32 parts cold water.

If you have items that can be washed in the dishwasher, please do so since the heat will disinfect those items. Plastic or metal items that need to be sterilized, such as litter boxes or plastic toys, should be soaked in the bleach solution for 10 minutes and then rinsed off. Wash all bedding with bleach and hot water, and throw away any toys that cannot be sterilized. Being conscientious about sterilization will help ensure that your next foster group will not catch any illnesses or parasites from the previous group of kittens.

## **MEDICAL AND EMERGENCY PROTOCOLS**

When you pick up your foster kittens, you will receive your next foster check appointment sheet and a med sheet(s) with any medications that the kitten(s) are currently on.

If you are fostering a group of kittens on medications, please ensure that your kittens get all prescribed doses. Do not end medication early for any reason. Please contact the foster coordinator if you have any concerns.

## **Veterinary Care**

H.A.L.O. provides all approved medical care for our foster animals at our main shelter or an approved veterinary clinic. Because we are ultimately responsible for your foster animals' well-being, our staff must authorize any and all treatment for foster animals. Please contact the Foster Coordinator for any issues and the proper protocol will be taken to determine next steps.

Foster parents will be responsible for payment of any medical care if they take their foster animal to a veterinarian without authorization from the Foster Coordinator.

## **Signs of Illness and What to do Next**

Kittens do a good job of masking when they don't feel well, so determining if a foster kitten is under the weather will require diligent observation of the kittens' daily activity and appetite levels. Be aware that kittens act differently at different ages. For example, a healthy two-week-old kitten will sleep often and get up only to nurse, whereas a healthy six-week-old kitten should have a lot of energy. If you have any questions about the health of your foster kittens, please contact the Foster Coordinator, who will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Eye discharge. It is normal for kittens to have some discharge from their eyes when they wake up. But if a kitten has yellow or green discharge, or swelling around the eyes (making it hard for him to open his eyes), or the third eyelid is showing, please contact the Foster Coordinator.

Sneezing and nasal discharge. Occasional sneezing is common in kittens. If the discharge from the nose is clear and/or if the kitten is just sneezing, but is still active, eating, and there is no fever, contact your Foster Coordinator for Lysine and NutriCal supplements to add to the food. Monitor the kitten and make sure that it continues to eat, be active, and playful. If the discharge is yellowish or greenish or if there is fever, contact your Foster Coordinator immediately and start treatment with Clavamox, nebulize/steam shower 3x/day and supplement feed with AD diet. H.A.L.O. will provide all supplies necessary. Be sure to monitor your kittens weight daily, eating, and bowel movements. It may be necessary to separate from the litter to do so.

If the condition worsens, contact your Foster Coordinator to discuss a treatment plan. Should your Foster Coordinator feel your kitten is declining rapidly, they may remove them from your care until stabilized. Antibiotics can trigger diarrhea in some kittens. If your kitten develops diarrhea immediately after you initiate an antibiotic, contact your Foster Coordinator to discuss changing to a different antibiotic.

If the kitten has a fever of over 102 degrees, place rubbing alcohol on pads of feet and tips of ears and contact your Foster Coordinator immediately. This kitten should be monitored closely.

Loss of appetite. Your foster kittens may be stressed after arriving in your home, and stress can cause lack of appetite. Unwillingness to eat in kittens can be very serious, so pay close attention to whether the kittens are eating. Kittens should eat on a four- to eight-hour schedule, depending on their age. If a kitten under four weeks old misses two meals or a kitten over four weeks of age goes more than 12 hours without eating, the foster coordinator should be called. Also, if a kitten less than eight weeks old does not urinate for over 12 hours, call the coordinator. With a kitten who is not eating, please do not change the kitten's diet without contacting the foster department. An abrupt change in diet can cause diarrhea, which will lead to dehydration. If you are fostering a litter of kittens, monitor each kitten individually to make sure all are eating.

Lethargy. The activity level of your kittens will vary with each kitten in your litter and with age. Sick kittens may have lower energy levels and just want to sit in your lap or on the floor and not move much or play. If you notice a drop in your foster kittens' energy level, please contact the Foster Coordinator to make a medical appointment. If a kitten cannot be roused or seems weak and unable to stand, this is an emergency, so you'll need to start the emergency contact protocol. Note: Some undersocialized kittens will move less because they are frightened. If you have a fearful group of kittens, it can be more difficult to determine if their energy levels are low. But tracking all behaviors in will help you decide whether you should call the Foster Coordinator

Dehydration. Dehydration is usually associated with diarrhea, vomiting and/or loss of appetite. To test for dehydration, gently pinch the kitten's skin around the scruff area. If the skin stays taut, the kitten is dehydrated. Please call the Foster Coordinator immediately and start the emergency contact protocol, as dehydration can be fatal in kittens.

Vomiting. There are many reasons that a kitten may vomit. Remember, if the kitten is lethargic, contact your Foster Coordinator immediately. If the kitten is alert and active and vomits more than once, the first thing that you need to do is to determine what is being vomited. In some cases, you should contact your Foster Coordinator immediately because the kitten may need to be seen by a vet. In other cases, it will be appropriate to rest the stomach and then introduce bland food. Remove food for 6-8 hours and leave water down. If the kitten vomits water, contact your Foster Coordinator as the kitten may be dehydrated. After 6-8 hours, give the kitten a small amount of bland food (e.g., meat based baby food with some white rice for carbohydrates). Make sure that the baby food does NOT contain onion. If the kitten does not keep the food down, contact your Foster Coordinator as the kitten may need to see a vet. If the vomit is one of the following: - Bile (greenish or yellowish liquid) - Digested food - Old blood (brown) - More than a very small amount of fresh



blood (red) - Foreign bodies that could become entangled in the kitten's intestine (e.g., thread), contact your Foster Coordinator immediately.

Diarrhea. The most common causes of diarrhea in kittens are coccidia, giardia, or bacterial overgrowth. Some kittens will develop diarrhea as a side effect of some antibiotics. To determine the cause, please contact the Foster Coordinator and bring a fresh stool sample to H.A.L.O. during the week so we can test it. If the kitten is not eating OR if the kitten is lethargic, contact your Foster Coordinator immediately and evaluate the kitten for dehydration. The kitten may need fluids. If the kitten has a fever of over 102 degrees, place rubbing alcohol on pads of feet and tips of ears and contact your Foster Coordinator immediately. This kitten should be monitored closely. When a kitten has diarrhea, the litter box should be completely changed and bleached AT LEAST daily to decrease the chance for reinfection.

Frequent ear scratching. A foster kitten may have ear mites if he/she scratches his/her ears often and/or shakes his/her head frequently, or if you see a dark discharge that resembles coffee grounds when you look in his/her ears. Ear mites are treated with medication, so please call or email the Foster Coordinator for a foster check.

Hair loss. Please contact the foster department if you notice any hair loss on your foster kittens. It is normal for cats to have thin fur around the lips, eyelids and in front of the ears, but clumpy patches of hair loss or thinning hair can indicate ringworm or dermatitis. It is important to check your foster kittens' coats every day.

#### Serious kitten ailments

Kittens are susceptible to these illnesses:

- Fading kitten syndrome: Symptoms include unwillingness to eat, dehydration, lethargy, weight loss, coldness to the touch, and difficulty with breathing or labored breathing.
- Panleukopenia (feline distemper): Symptoms include unwillingness to eat, vomiting, diarrhea and/or dehydration. The diarrhea often has a mucoid texture and/or is bloody.

If a kitten is displaying any combination of the symptoms listed above, please contact the Foster Coordinator immediately. These ailments can be fatal if left untreated.

## Criteria for Emergencies

What constitutes a medical emergency in a kitten? A good rule of thumb is any situation in which you would call 911 for a person. Here are some specific symptoms that could indicate an emergency:

- Not breathing or labored breathing
- Symptoms of fading kitten syndrome or distemper (see “Serious Kitten Ailments” above)
- Signs of extreme dehydration: dry gums, weakness, vomiting, not urinating, skin tenting (when the skin is pulled up, it stays there)
- Abnormal lethargy or unable to stand
- Unconsciousness or unable to wake up
- Cold to the touch
- Broken bones
- Any trauma: hit by a car, dropped, stepped on
- A large wound or profuse bleeding that doesn’t stop when pressure is applied
- Loss of appetite for more than 12 hours

If a foster kitten displays any of these symptoms, please contact your Foster Coordinator immediately.

If you cannot reach your Foster Coordinator and you feel it is a life and death emergency, contact Highlands Animal Hospital at 772-388-1883 before 10PM. Please ensure you have texted and called your Foster Coordinator prior.

## KITTEN WEIGHT AND FEEDING CHART

AGE	WEIGHT	AMOUNT PER FEEDING	SCHEDULE
▶ 0-1 WEEK	50-150 grams	2-6 ml	Every 2 Hours
▶ 1-2 WEEKS	150-250 grams	6-10 ml	Every 2-3 Hours
▶ 2-3 WEEKS	250-350 grams	10-14 ml	Every 3-4 Hours
▶ 3-4 WEEKS	350-450 grams	14-18 ml	Every 4-5 Hours
▶ 4-5 WEEKS	450-550 grams	18-22 ml	Every 5-6 Hours
▶ 5-8 WEEKS	550-850 grams	(weaning; offer ample wet food)	Every 6 Hours

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